

## Curating Conflict: Wes Anderson and the art of dissonance

This paper examines the films of Wes Anderson, in particular, the way in which meaning is constructed through the organisation - or curation - of dissonant elements to produce innovative, emotionally engaging, aesthetically satisfying, and often very funny results. It offers interpretative readings of multilayered texts, in particular, *Rushmore* (1998) and *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), with additional reference to *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), and *Hotel Chevalier* (2007).

That Anderson's authorship involves the novel rearrangement and incongruous juxtaposition of familiar cinematic tropes is hardly worthy of comment in itself. The same applies to the work of many of his Hollywood contemporaries; take the Coen Brothers, for example, and the way 'the Dude' (Jeff Bridges) in *The Big Lebowski* (1998) plays with and subverts the audience's genre expectations. Bear in mind also that regulation and variety is the governing principle behind the Hollywood genre system. Rather, it is the peculiar nature of the way in which this principle is enacted - which I refer to as 'the art of dissonance' - which forms the basis of this study.

One of the major determinants of Anderson's work is its self-reflexivity, which, broadly speaking, involves the interaction between narrative and formal elements on the one hand; and on the other, intertextual connections with a wide variety of cultural sources, including literary as well as cinematic antecedents, and extending to Anderson's own oeuvre. In terms of the former, the narratives tend to involve conflicts within communities, or 'families', whether literally or metaphorically, out of which new groupings emerge. However, Anderson's formal method is also seen to involve the curation of conflicting elements into a meaningful and aesthetically pleasing grouping or collection. One hesitates to say that the end product is strictly 'harmonious', however. The paper proposes that Anderson's films are characterised by a lack of resolution, lingering conflict, and a residual dissonance, reminiscent of the French New Wave, which adds to their aesthetic appeal, and which breaks with Hollywood convention. Or, to put it another way, Anderson's films consciously break with convention, thereby enhancing

their aesthetic appeal for a target audience grown disenchanted with the Hollywood mainstream and eager for something magical.

One of the main Andersonian themes is emotional conflict and loss resulting from romantic and/or familial relationships. Where romantic relationships are concerned, Anderson's characters tend to suffer the pain caused by either lost, unrequited or 'forbidden' love. Jack Whitman (Jason Schwartzman) in *The Darjeeling Limited* is lovesick for his ex-girlfriend (Natalie Portman), to whom the audience is introduced in the accompanying short *Hotel Chevalier*. In *Rushmore*, teacher Rosemary Cross (Olivia Williams) is grieving for her deceased husband, Edward Appleby, who also taught at the Rushmore Academy. This attachment complicates her emotional involvement with wealthy industrialist Herman Blume (Bill Murray), who is involved in an unsatisfactory marriage, for whom domestic life has become burdensome, and whose wife ejects him from the family home when she discovers his relationship with Rosemary. In the same film, Max Fischer (Schwartzman) develops a schoolboy crush on Rosemary, who cannot reciprocate due to Max being a minor, Max's love being, thus, 'forbidden' rather than simply unrequited. Fellow student Margaret Yang (Sara Tanaka), however, certainly experiences the emotional anguish of unrequited love for Max. The same goes for Raleigh St. Clair (Murray) in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, who has been rejected by his wife Margot (Gwynneth Paltrow), who harbours a secret - and 'forbidden' - love for her adopted brother Richie Tenenbaum (Luke Wilson), whose life has been thrown into turmoil by his 'forbidden' love for Margot. In *The Life Aquatic*, oceanographer and documentary filmmaker Steve Zissou (Murray), who is estranged from his wife Eleanor (Anjelica Houston), falls for reporter Jane Winslett-Richardson (Cate Blanchett), who, in turn, is estranged from her unborn child's father. So, too, does airline pilot Ned Plimpton (Owen Wilson), which causes conflict between Steve and Ned, as it does between Herman and Max in *Rushmore*, who also fall for the same woman.

Turning to conflict, loss and familial relationships, the mothers of Max Fischer and Ned Plimpton are both dead, as is Rosemary Cross's husband, Edward, and the Whitman Brothers' father, Jimmy, in *The Darjeeling Limited*. Ned believes Steve Zissou is his father, due to the fact the oceanographer had a 'fling' with his mother, Katherine, although Eleanor later confides to

Jane that this could not be so as Steve is infertile. Steve is certainly an estranged husband, both at the start of the film, then once again after a brief reconciliation. Allied to this, at least where Ned is concerned, Steve is also an estranged parent; indeed, he is one amongst many in Anderson, part of a list which includes Herman Blume, Royal Tenenbaum (Gene Hackman), and Patricia Whitman (Houston) in *Darjeeling*, the only estranged (as opposed to deceased) mother on the roster. While Max Fischer's father, Bert, is neither dead nor estranged, he is in a sense 'absent' as his son keeps his real identity a secret, claiming he is a neurosurgeon, rather than the local barber. Before moving on, it is worth noting that, as well as being an absent parent, Patricia Whitman answers the description of another, recurring Andersonian character type, that is, a strong-minded independent woman, often played by Anjelica Houston (Eleanor Zissou, Etheline Tenenbaum), who, in this case, left her husband Jimmy prior to his death to do missionary work in India.

Fathers are the source of a good deal of the emotional conflict. Royal Tenenbaum, perhaps the 'baddest of all the dads' (as the Anderson-inspired group art show 'Bad Dads' has it), breaks his adopted daughter Margot's heart through neglect and insensitive criticism of her play (Margot is a dramatist), while causing further emotional damage to his son Chas (Ben Stiller), also through the withholding of parental approval. He then scandalises, and further alienates, his entire family by pretending to be suffering from stomach cancer. In fact, familial tension and the damage caused by either bad and/or absent parents, and marital infidelity, provide the main thematic focus of *The Royal Tenenbaums*. If one were to add to this the ill effects of lost, unrequited and 'forbidden' love, then these are seen to be among the major themes of Anderson's work *per se*. Even Mr Fox (George Clooney) in *The Fantastic Mr Fox* (2009) plunges his family into chaos by breaking his promise to his wife Felicity (Meryl Streep) that he will abandon a life of crime. Dissonance, the manner in which it is represented, and the effects it can be used to create, are thus central, both to the style and substance of Anderson's work.

In terms of Anderson's mode of representation, there is a consensus within the scholarly debate that this involves a delicate balance of irony and sincerity, described by Kunze as alternating between 'an ironic mode that is detached and seemingly disinterested and a sincere

mode that seeks connection, redemption, and affection' (3). Regarding the effects this mix of ironic detachment and sincere emotional engagement mode creates, James MacDowell, in his appraisal of Anderson's 'quirky sensibility', argues that these opposing and seemingly conflicted registers nonetheless enable the audience to 'simultaneously regard a film's fictional world as partly unbelievable, to laugh at its flat treatment of melodramatic situations and still be moved by characters' misadventures' (MacDowell, 9, in Wilkins, 27). While an astute observation, useful in describing both Anderson's method and his films' complex appeal, I would add that what moves us as an audience is a partial suspension of narrative closure, producing a strong emotional resonance best described as a 'bittersweet' effect, and that this is Anderson's particular contribution to comedy, the genre with which his unconventional films are most closely aligned.

Much has been written about Anderson's narrative themes, character types, and formal methods, as well as his auteur status, some of which is reiterated briefly here, insofar as it relates to self-reflexivity, conflict and resolution, and the 'bittersweet' Andersonian tone. Taking his auteur status first, Anderson's self-reflexive films are themselves seen to address this complex question with a characteristic mix of gravity and playfulness, of sincerity and irony. Several critics, including Orgeron and Rybin, have identified the symbiotic relationship between the 'author', for example, schoolboy dramatist Max Fischer in *Rushmore* and documentarian Steve Zissou in *The Life Aquatic*, and the community to which they are attached. Orgeron proposes that these 'flawed but ultimately redeemable auteurs' are seen to 'orchestrate their elaborate fictions in the name of a community that requires their particular intervention' (41), to the extent that Anderson's films are able to 'stand as theoretical parables for a notional collective authorship' (42). Similarly, Rybin identifies that many of the principal characters 'are themselves creators of artistic events that enable the discovery of new forms of family and community' (39). The onus in Anderson is thus upon the collective more than the individual, and upon the efficacious effects of collaboration and the way in which this contributes to the communal good, that is, by resolving familial conflict through the creation - or 'authorship' - of new family groupings in their lieu.

While such insights are illuminating, there is another aspect of Anderson's work vis-a-vis authorship, particularly apparent in *Darjeeling*, upon which I wish to shed more light. I propose that the Andersonian narrative permits two parallel readings: one focusing upon a flawed, hubristic and characteristically male 'author', and which may (or may not) lead to the resolution of familial conflict and the establishment of new communities, as detailed above; and another, explored here, which highlights the way in which the text critiques notions of authorship *per se*, and, given the prevalence of male 'auteur' types (albeit amidst diverse collectives), male authorship in particular. These characters range from working class teenage dramatist Max Fischer, known for 'telling stories' as well as writing plays, to controlling thirty-something businessman Francis Whitman (Owen Wilson) in *Darjeeling*, devising road trips across India, via ageing ex-litigator Royal Tenenbaum, disbarred for malpractice, who, through misguided intervention and willful neglect, much like Dr Frankenstein, leaves an indelible mark of authorship on his children's lives.

It is clearly apparent, then, that the male 'author' does not always contribute to the common good - sometimes quite the opposite, in fact. The authors of their own destiny, the problem arises when they attempt to engineer the fates of others. This is the Andersonian author's major flaw. Orgeron touches upon this, recognising that 'the adolescent (either real or behaviourally) creator, while handled sympathetically, is also called out for his ... destructive and exclusive behavior', concluding that the male 'author' must find a way 'both to adapt and to assimilate, at least partially' (44). This may be the case, but I give greater emphasis to the way Anderson allows unresolved conflict to percolate, thereby suggesting a world without the confines of the diegesis (and the diegetic) where disorder prevails, and which is resistant to the author's control.

Anderson's films are indeed full of 'authors' marking their creations with their own unique signature and who could therefore stand in for the auteur film director. These characters provide a focal point for all manner of activities, including but not confined to artistic endeavours, and which involve participation in Max Fischer's clubs and societies and crewing Steve Zissou's research ship the *Belafonte*, as well as appearing in and helping to produce their

plays and films. Max either forms or presides over clubs catering for such arcane, quaintly anachronistic tastes as beekeeping and calligraphy as well as editing the school magazine *The Yankee Review*, and writing his own plays, in each case ploughing his own furrow with his own specially adapted equipment. This applies literally as well as metaphorically to Steve Zissou aboard his rickety research vessel, an ex-minesweeper which the skipper and his crew have customised to their own exacting yet faintly absurd specifications, with a kitchen that contains some of the boat's most sophisticated equipment, as well as an in-house (or on-board) film production unit.

### **'I hope it has a happy ending'**

Max Fischer is an exemplar of the 'flawed auteur' who meddles in the affairs of others, but who ultimately redeems himself and who, more often than not, contributes to the common good. If *Rushmore* were a conventional Hollywood movie then one could say that the narrative comprises a cautionary tale about intervening in others' lives and attempting to engineer fate, either through vengeful conspiracy, or with noble intent. After Max makes known his attraction towards Rosemary and is, inevitably, rebuffed, he is informed by his best friend Dirk Calloway (Mason Gamble), the son of Mrs Calloway (Connie Nielsen), another older woman for whom he has developed a crush, that she is seeing Herman Blume. Initiated by Herman, the burgeoning relationship at this stage involves nothing more than holding hands. Dirk, however, tells Max that it involves 'French kissing' and 'hand jobs', the latter misrepresentation being due to school bully Magnus Buchan (Stephen McCole) having told Dirk that Max had received a 'hand job' from his mother. The 'author' of this fiction, however, is none other than Max himself, a lie blurted out after the bully had blacked his eye. This leads to a series of tit-for-tat pranks played upon one another by Max and Herman, and ultimately, to Rosemary and Herman breaking up, when the former realises that her would-be suitor is retaliating in an absurdly juvenile manner against a teenage boy.

A conventional Hollywood movie it most certainly is not, however, leave alone a sermonising text full of unequivocal moral judgements. This is seen to be due in the main to Anderson's unconventional treatment of character. The 'dominant classical Hollywood character model', as

Kim Wilkins (citing David Bordwell) points out, involves "'a discriminated individual endowed with a consistent batch of evident traits, qualities and behaviours'" (Bordwell, 157, in Wilkins, 28). This consistency, which, in the classical Hollywood model, 'aids the film's internal coherence and verisimilitude and promotes character alignment and identification' (28), is absent from the Andersonian model, resulting in the restriction of the audience's 'formulation of logical action/reaction linkages'. Rather, Anderson's treatment of character 'positions the "cinematic" character at a distance that is facilitated by, and confined to, a particular film's diegesis' (27), although it should be noted that it is also possible to read Anderson's characters in the context of the director's entire oeuvre. Furthermore, Wilkins argues that Anderson's invariably wealthy characters do not pursue their ambitions out of 'financial necessity' or due to a 'material drive', but rather, they 'perform' them 'through an ironic amalgamation of pop culture references'. This performance 'produces a simulacral form of audience identification in which a *cinematic* experience substitutes for direct recognition', which, in turn, is juxtaposed with a 'shared *lived* experience' (29).

While this does, indeed, inhibit alignment and identification, and prevents the audience from drawing any inferences from the characters' behaviour which correspond directly with their own lived experience, the text nonetheless enables a profound emotional engagement with existential issues, relatable, if at a tangent, to the human condition. As Wilkins astutely observes, rather than reflecting lived experience and opting for verisimilitude, Anderson's emotionally affecting narratives and 'purely cinematic characters' are seen to be 'a *refraction* of contemporary existential anxiety mediated through Anderson's idiosyncratic cinematic aesthetic' (27). Further to Wilkins's point, then, it can be said that the relationship between Anderson's art and human experience is that of a prism, rather than a mirror.

So what are the inferences which can be drawn from the way the characters behave during the final scene of *Rushmore*, and how can one read the text, both as an amalgam of pop-cultural references, and in relation to lived experience?

Concerning 'real' existential dilemmas, most notably, *Rushmore* pinpoints the dangers of trying to exist in the adult world before you are fully capable, due to a lack of knowledge and

experience, as articulated by the lyrics of The Faces' 'Ooh La La' which accompanies the closing sequence, especially the chorus 'I wish that I knew what I know now/When I was younger'; and of being unable to progress, either from the loss of a loved one, or a loveless marriage, that is, from an interstitial state causing one to stagnate and atrophy. Heartbreak leaves its mark on people, and to live meaningfully in the wake of the damage it causes can be a struggle. *Rushmore* appears to suggest that such struggles are less difficult with others' help, but also that they are not easily resolved. As the following close reading of the final scene shows, this is achieved by a partial suspension of closure, whereby Max's attempt to 'author' closure is undercut by subtle visual cues within the mise-en-scene, with the teenage playwright's narrative - seen to be closely aligned with mainstream Hollywood - offset by Anderson's visual 'storytelling'.

Max is the author, not only of the play *Heaven and Hell*, but also of the seating arrangements in the auditorium. Rosemary and Max thus find themselves sitting next to each other. The playwright's introductory speech includes a dedication to his deceased mother, Elouise, and to the late Edward Appleby. These are signs that he is ready to progress, and also his way of communicating to Rosemary and Herman that they must try to move on, too: Herman from the mess he is in following his double break-up, first with his wife, subsequently with Rosemary; and Rosemary from the heartbreak of losing Edward. By forming the romantic attachment which, hitherto, Max has opposed so bitterly, they will be able to achieve closure and find happiness.

If only life were that easy. Following some initial awkwardness, Rosemary does indeed seem to warm to Herman. During the intermission, the two share coffee, the heavy-calibre machine gun situated on sandbags to the rear, an ironic reference, perhaps, to the relationship conflict which Max caused and is now attempting to resolve. Rosemary brings the coffee to Herman in bespoke camouflage-patterned paper cups, with the term 'bespoke' applicable both diegetically, that is, to the catering for Max's school play, and non-diegetically, to the exquisitely detailed production design of Anderson's film. The sequence begins, however, with a medium close-up of Herman, to right of shot, gazing off into the distance, his slightly

mournful expression also conveying a sense of apprehension as the figure of Rosemary approaches, becoming visible over his right shoulder, walking gradually into focus, bearing refreshments and perhaps hope for the future, too. Interestingly, Herman still wears a gold wedding band on the ring finger of his left hand, in which he is holding a cigarette. Rosemary is also smoking. The two are clad in evening wear, Rosemary, in a black dress set off by a diamond necklace, and Herman in a dark brown pinstripe suit, with a white shirt and a pink tie, a sartorial elegance which contrasts sharply with his disheveled state in preceding scenes showing the aftermath of his break-up with Rosemary and his ejection from the family home, and which is thus intended to connote his resurgent spirits.

In terms of the 'ironic amalgam of pop cultural references' through which Anderson creates a 'cinematic experience' substituting for 'direct recognition' and producing 'simulacral audience recognition', the mise-en-scene here can be interpreted as an *hommage* to 1940s Hollywood, with the heavy rain, accentuated by a spotlight, and the wardrobe and props, most notably the dark costuming and dual cigarettes, recalling film noir. Further, the rivalry and tit-for-tat retaliations between Max and Herman, that is, between a fifteen-year-old boy, no matter how precocious, and a middle-aged man and father-of-two is not intended to correspond with shared lived experience. The cartoon-ish nature of their rivalry reminds one, for instance, of the antics of Tom and Jerry or Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. Where Max and Rosemary are concerned, viewed through the Andersonian prism, one is able to see *The Graduate* (Nichols, 1967), given that this New Hollywood landmark also involves 'a narrative about a young, alienated male protagonist who falls for an inappropriately older woman' (82), as Jason Davids Scott observes. The soundtrack, as noted, contains additional points of intertextual reference relevant to the narrative, for example, the lyrics of The Faces' 'Ooh La La'.

Turning briefly from the close reading of *Rushmore* to explore this cinematic world more fully, the self-critiquing Andersonian text provides an in-built commentary, not merely on authorship, but upon cinema itself, including its genres, its history, and its constructed, as well as performative, nature. Taking each in turn, the films tend to feature generic character types placed in incongruous settings, evidencing an innovative and playful approach to character and

genre. Royal Tenenbaum is a case in point. He is a recognisable generic character type, a tough-talking 'hustler', an urban flaneur, and yet again, a morally dubious litigator (the character's actual profession). Hackman is, effectively, cast for the right kind of part, his performance evoking memories of Buck Barrow in *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967), Popeye Doyle in *The French Connection* (Friedkin, 1971), and Harry Caul in *The Conversation* (Coppola, 1974), but in the wrong kind of film, that is, as a tough-guy from a crime drama in an Andersonian comedy.

This provides a prime example of the director's curation of conflict and the aesthetic effects to be derived from dissonance, that is, from what I would term a 'fish out of water' technique. In terms of the films' self-reflexive commentary on the history of cinema, the casting of veteran actors such as Gene Hackman, along with Anderson regular Seymour Cassel, can be seen as a nod towards the New Hollywood landmarks mentioned above as well as the independent films of John Cassavetes, adding another layer of meaning to a multidimensional text. Finally, the films are replete with formal and structural devices which draw attention, both to the constructed as well as the performative nature of cinema. In formal terms, these include a 'theatre curtain' motif in *Rushmore*, opening and closing upon a customarily symmetrical shot, creating a proscenium arch effect; similarly, a 'title page' motif in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, which 'opens' with a librarian marking the index card of an eponymously-titled book. In terms of narrative structure, the films customarily involve the use of mise-en-abyme, that is, a fiction within a fiction, such as a play, a film, or short story. Furthermore, they are episodic, which, complemented by the stylistic motifs, foregrounds the connections with theatre and literature, while also drawing attention to their constructed nature.

Returning now to *Rushmore*, the medium close-up of the couple described above is followed by a 'God's-eye view' shot of Rosemary pouring miniature cartons of milk into the coffee. This shot reveals that, like Herman, Rosemary still wears a wedding ring. How can one interpret the significance of the rings? They can be seen to connote an attachment to the past, but if it is a burden of which they wish to rid themselves then, the presence of the rings suggests a reluctance to do so. One can reasonably say, then, that they connote the difficulty of

abandoning the past, which may be a source of comfort and solace, as well as the cause of pain and regret. When Rosemary asks Herman 'So what do you think of Max's latest opus then?', he replies 'It's good. I hope it has a happy ending', the adults' double entendres an acknowledgement that they have been 'set up' by the schoolboy author, but with Herman taking the opportunity afforded by the ironic exchange to be sincere. Realising this, Rosemary immediately reaches out and strokes his temple. The gesture is full of tenderness, but her expression, like Max's at the start of the sequence, is apprehensive, and a little rueful, too. While Herman is able to express his hope for the future, albeit ironically, it is difficult to ascertain what Rosemary is thinking and feeling. She seems to be genuinely touched by Max's testimonial, his apparent acceptance of the situation between them, his efforts to reunite her with Herman, and, of course, by Herman's sincerity, too; and yet she also seems embarrassed, awkward, even slightly perturbed. As indeed one would when somebody interferes in one's affairs and attempts to orchestrate one's fate, no matter how benignly. Whatever Rosemary's inner state, it is unarguably the case that this exchange, and the scene at the aftershow party which closes the film, are ambiguous, hinting at the possibility of reconciliation, but no more.

The ambiguity and lack of closure, while inherent in the visual cues detailed above, are also discernible upon the surface of the narrative, for example, the presence of Rosemary's 'date', Dr Peter Flynn (Luke Wilson), in the same row of seating as Herman and Rosemary, and at the aftershow party. However, in either case, due to the foregrounding of his busy lifestyle (his personal 'bleeper' going off before the start of the play), and the fact that he is shown hovering hesitantly in the background at the party, where he is paid scant attention by Rosemary, it is doubtful that the audience is intended to view him as a threat to Herman, that is, as a rival for Rosemary's affections.

The 'real' threat, I propose, resides in the space outside of the diegesis, the 'real world' where conflict is not easily resolved, and where 'happy endings' are in much shorter supply than in mainstream Hollywood movies; particularly Hollywood comedies, of course, the generic conventions of which demand such an outcome. Not so the films of Truffaut, Godard, and the French New Wave, however; nor the American films noirs of which the French were so

enamoured; nor the New Hollywood films, which the French, in turn, inspired, or those of Wes Anderson and other contemporary American film directors whose work bears the imprint of all the foregoing influences, and where the bittersweet ending, reminiscent of Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* (1959) flourishes once more. If the films stand as 'theoretical parables for a notional collective authorship' (Orgeron), then they can also be seen to critique the conventional Hollywood narrative, and to map out the terrain beyond the mainstream by means of subtly powerful visual storytelling.

Nicole Richter proposes that *Hotel Chevalier*, the short film which accompanies *Darjeeling*, is 'intimately related to French New Wave short filmmaking, specifically the French anthology film *Paris vu par... (Six in Paris, 1965)*' (20) which features the work of six New Wave directors, including Claude Chabrol, Éric Rohmer, Jean Rouch and Jean-Luc Godard. She makes an interesting point regarding the representation of Jack's erotically charged encounter with his ex-girlfriend in relation to Anderson's use of the short-film format, which, she argues, has a liberating effect, allowing him to 'reduce the experience of a romantic relationship to a minimalist moment in time, thereby simplifying his idea to its bare necessity' (23), and that this intensifies both the eroticism of the piece and the sense of longing. While I agree unreservedly that the lack of closure reinforces this intensity by leaving the future of the couple unresolved, I propose that Anderson's feature-length films are also characterised by a partial lack of closure, a residual dissonance, which, as with *Hotel Chevalier*, creates a heightened sense of longing, an essential ingredient of the 'bittersweet' effect. Likewise, while I agree with Richter that his short films have 'elements of art cinema', due to being 'produced outside the dominant Hollywood paradigm of the feature' (23), I would add that Anderson's work *per se* contains these elements, and that his entire oeuvre explores the margins, and exposes the limitations, of contemporary Hollywood filmmaking, including his shorts and his 'paradigmatic' feature-length films.

Regarding new relationships and emergent 'family' groupings at the end of *Rushmore*, a romance between Max and the indefatigable Margaret Yang appears to be blossoming. The fact that Margaret very much takes the lead provides a further instance of the limits of Max's authorship, in fact, it is the diminishing of these powers which is seen to be for the common

good. If one relationship looks bound to prosper, it is that between Max and his father Bert. Bert guides his son through his rites of passage, realising that a teenage boy is liable to make some major mistakes, even if these involve false claims that his father is a neurosurgeon not a barber - a potentially damaging fiction as it suggests the snobbish son is ashamed of his real profession. He thus shows tolerance and understanding towards Max's 'storytelling' and appreciation for his play - precisely the kind of support which Royal Tenenbaum is unable to give Margot.

The self-reflexivity of the Andersonian narrative thus encompasses reception as well as production, for example, Bert's reaction to Max's play, and Royal's to Margot's, both of which are of key importance to our understanding of the construction of meaning. From this we can infer that art is itself a way of confronting life's pain, dealing with its struggles, and thus part of the ongoing process of maturation. To develop as an artist is, for some, a way of progressing as a human being. There is, thus, a symbiotic relationship, not merely between the auteur, the group within which he or she participates, and the community to which they belong, but also between life and art. Nonetheless, for Anderson's films to succeed as art, they must not gloss over the fact that growth involves an ongoing struggle which may or may not be successful. Thus, certain conflicts must be left unresolved, as they are in 'real life', the world without the diegesis towards which Anderson's aesthetically overdetermined constructs point.

The respective intertextual connections between two Andersonian fathers, namely Bert and Royal, and two 'authors', Max and Royal, provides an instance of the way in which the audience may read such 'purely cinematic characters' in the context of Anderson's oeuvre. The following analysis of *The Darjeeling Limited* focuses once again upon the limitations of the male author, the lack of closure and the bittersweet effect this creates, while also providing a reading of narrative and character in the context of Anderson's body of work, in particular, the intertextual relationships with *Rushmore*.

### **'Stop including me!'**

The narrative of *The Darjeeling Limited* concerns three recently bereaved brothers who take a railroad trip across India, following the death of their father. In purely diegetic terms, the trip,

which has been organised by the eldest brother, Francis, gives the brothers the chance to take a break from their busy, and by now, disparate, lives, and to get to know each other again. While Francis has gone to the trouble of printing and laminating the itinerary, omitted from the schedule is a planned excursion to see their mother, Patricia, who is working as a missionary in a remote monastery, a visit which will come as as much of a surprise to her as it will to her two younger sons, Peter (Adrien Brody) and Jack, as Francis has not informed her of his intentions, either. The way the author of the itinerary perceives it, there is also a metaphysical aspect to the trip, which, if all goes according to plan, will result in personal discovery and spiritual enlightenment. If this seems rather clichéd and hollow-sounding, then there is seen to be a 'purely cinematic' journey taking place, too, one which is determined by the generic conventions of the road movie, but which also bears similarity to the biographies of various 1960s British rock bands, such as The Beatles, or more pointedly, The Kinks, three songs of whose feature on the soundtrack.

At the start of the road trip, Francis informs Peter and Jack of their itinerary, a 'performative gesture' through which Anderson 'ironically acknowledges the audience's genre expectations of the road film' (Wilkins, 30), an interpretation endorsed by the fact that the lines are delivered to camera and, thus, directly to the audience. The three-point itinerary, which is itemised 'A-B-C', consists of brotherly bonding, the quest for self-knowledge and enlightenment, and the need to be open to every experience 'even if it's shocking and painful'. The dramatic reconciliation with their mother Patricia, as noted, forms part of a secret agenda which, until the mid-point of the narrative at least, is pursued merely in the mind of its author. When confronted by Peter and Jack much later on as to why he kept these details secret, Francis replies, lamely, that it was 'TBD' (To Be Discussed), the comically bureaucratic jargon eliciting a wry smile from his brothers who, by the end of the film, are able to give their domineering but well-intentioned elder sibling a little more leeway. Francis seems sincere enough about the journey's objectives, at least the ones he has deigned to share with his unwitting brethren. As Wilkins notes, however, the mode of representation is both ironic and self-reflexive, with Francis addressing his brothers, in one sense, and, in another, the director addressing the communal pop-cultural memory of his audience, although credit should be shared amongst all

three screenwriters, Anderson, Roman Coppola, and Jason Schwartzman, another trio of 'brothers' united in a 'real life' collaborative venture.

Francis has recently been involved in a serious motorbike accident which has left him with severe head injuries. A wealthy businessman who has installed his assistant Brendan (Wally Wolodarsky) in one of the Darjeeling's cars, he attempts, not merely to organise the trip, but to author the destinies of his two brothers, with a view to persuading his mother to abandon the life she has chosen for herself. While providing a further instance of the male author meddling in others' lives, albeit with good intention, it should also be said that the limitations of Francis's authorship are evident from the outset, met as he is by his brothers' bemusement, cynicism and reluctance, summarised by Jack's exhortation to '[s]top including me!'. The only way in which Francis's road trip rings true, and enables a genuine connection with his brothers, is when he informs them that when he regained consciousness after his accident (which, it transpires, was a suicide attempt), he wished they had been there at the bedside. Francis spends the entire journey with his head swaddled in bandages and surgical pads. These are seen to symbolise the fact that he is in need of spiritual healing, but, I would argue, also connote his diminished authority among brothers who are no longer children.

Besides Francis, Jack, and Patricia, the other main character is Peter, the middle brother, who is expecting a son with his wife, Alice (Camilla Rutherford), their first child, although Peter has fled the family home in New York without telling Alice, and is considering divorcing her. The four surviving Whitmans are, thus, familiar Andersonian characters, or subtle variations of them: a controlling father figure; two estranged parents, including an absent mother, as well as a father-to-be; a broken-hearted boyfriend grieving for a lost love; and a deceased parent, customarily a mother in Anderson, but in this case, the boys' father, Jimmy Whitman, who was knocked down by a taxi on the streets of New York City. Francis's assistant, Brendan, the 'sidekick' of the dominant male, is another recurring character type, reminiscent of Pagoda (Kumar Pallana) in *The Royal Tenenbaums* and Klaus Daimler (Willem Dafoe) in *The Life Aquatic*, the 'right-hand men' of Royal Tenenbaum and Steve Zissou.

Although Jimmy Whitman is not represented physically, his presence is alluded to throughout

the film by means of a recurring visual motif, that is, a 'God's-eye-view' shot of the initials 'J.L.W.' embossed onto hand luggage, which forms part of a collection of bespoke leather goods which the brothers have inherited. As with the camouflage coffee cups in *Rushmore*, the use of the term 'bespoke' here applies both diegetically and non-diegetically, given that the luggage was designed by Marc Jacobs and made by Louis Vuitton especially for the film. These leather goods, in particular the items of luggage, comprise an important part of the visual fabric of the film, both in diegetic terms, as discussed in further detail below, but also as a metaphor. This metaphor serves a dual purpose. It can read in terms of the 'baggage' which the brothers are carrying following their father's demise. However, it is also seen to represent the materialism which, in general terms, is associated with the western lifestyle from which they have taken a sabbatical, but which also threatens to undermine their relationships with each other and to weaken their fraternal bond. In either case it relates to the genuine existential issues engaged with in *Darjeeling*, which are represented with sincerity.

As with *Rushmore*, the film operates on two levels: one involving a purely cinematic experience, where the mode of representation is ironic; and another relatable to the human condition, which addresses existential concerns tangentially, but sincerely. Where the former is concerned, Wilkins's point that Anderson's customarily well-off, middle-class characters, rather than pursuing their ambitions for financial or material reasons, 'perform' them through an amalgam of pop-cultural references, is particularly relevant to the brothers' road trip. Regarding the latter, Francis's plan to re-bond with his brothers is not entirely unsuccessful, although his quest to 'rescue' his mother, who has made a decision to turn her back on western life and work amongst the poor, as one might expect, is a futile venture. One might certainly expect it if one were familiar with Anderson's work, which is fond of pointing out the dangers, indeed, the impossibility of living in the past. This existential dilemma is summarised succinctly in an exchange between the boys and their mother, examined in more detail below, when the latter says 'Yes, the past happened but it's over, isn't it?', to which Francis replies 'Not for us'.

As noted, the leather goods which the brothers have inherited from their father and divided up among themselves relate directly to this existential theme. We can infer from these heirlooms,

and from Jimmy's vintage Porsche, which was in for repair at Luftwaffe Automotive when he died and in the trunk of which Peter discovered one of the designer suitcases he has with him on the road trip, that the boys' father was a wealthy man, and one who valued material possessions. This also applies to Francis, who makes repeated reference to the cost of these and other luxury items, including a pair of designer shoes. As they tend to be in 'real life', these heirlooms are a source of familial tension, or, more accurately, the focal point for sibling rivalry; and as in 'real life', it is unclear whether this conflict is due to greed and materialism, or to an emotional attachment to the objects concerned, that is, a sentimental value which outweighs their material worth.

For example, during an early scene in the dining car, the brothers spend the afternoon getting reacquainted - and also 'getting high' on Indian pharmaceuticals, including an opiate-based painkiller which Francis has been prescribed following his accident. Francis takes it upon himself to order food on behalf of his brothers, and also to express his disapproval regarding Jack's ex-girlfriend with the passive-aggressive phrase 'I support this relationship not working out', thus establishing his credentials as the overbearing father figure and would-be 'author' of others' destinies. While ordering the food, Francis notices Peter wearing a pair of their father's old prescription spectacles. Although he does indeed bring this to the Peter's attention, he waits until the second eldest leaves the dining car - notably, to read a short Jack has written called 'Luftwaffe Automotive' based upon the events surrounding their father's New York funeral - to confide to his youngest brother that 'legally those glasses belong to all of us', a divisive remark, and one at odds with Francis's stated intention of group bonding. Prior to him doing so, however, Jack offers an opinion, namely, that Peter is still grieving, which, had Francis been less absorbed in his own personal issues and been able to listen, would have provided him with a perfectly good explanation as to why Peter was wearing the glasses, along with a little 'enlightenment', too.

The continuity which exists across Anderson's entire oeuvre affords the opportunity to visualise the characters, plots, and narrative themes of his current film in the context of their antecedents, which thus appear as 'ghost images'. Let us take Max Fischer from *Rushmore*, for

example. Extending our metaphor, Max 'haunts' *The Darjeeling Limited*, sharing character traits with both Francis, who has inherited Max's organisational skills (there can be little doubt that Max would have appreciated a printed and laminated itinerary); and, of course, Jack, who not only writes short stories, but who is also played by Jason Schwartzman. Max thus appears as Jack's 'ghost image'; in fact, it is easy to see Jack as a grown-up Max, nine-years older, a twenty-something version of his 'former self', still displaying the same weakness for, and compulsiveness towards, the opposite sex, still getting his heart broken, and still writing. Although the similarities between Max and Francis are less obvious on the face of things, when read in light of Anderson's oeuvre as a whole, then both characters appear as a recurring type, namely, the controlling, would-be 'author' of destiny. Concerning the limitations of male authorship, the fact that the narrative of *Darjeeling* involves a male character attempting to engineer others' fates, but finding out that the world around him and the people in it are resistant to his authorial control, comes as no surprise to those familiar with the oeuvre. There is thus a consistency of character, plot, and narrative, not merely within the diegesis of a particular text, but intertextually, across the entire body of work.

Turning briefly to other instances of intertextuality, these include, from the world of cinema, Renoir's *The River* (1951), *Black Narcissus* (Powell and Pressburger, 1947), the films of Satyajit Ray, Bollywood-inspired cinematography (mentioned below), as well as the aforementioned links with the road movie genre. In addition, Wilkins notes that the 'dated interior' of the quaintly anachronistic train was 'inspired by the 20th Century limited' (35-36), a passenger train that ran between New York and Chicago from 1902-1967, and which provided the setting for Howard Hawks's 1934 screwball comedy *Twentieth Century*. The soundtrack contains four 'set-piece' slow motion sequences, each set to vintage British rock music: three tracks from The Kinks' *Lola versus Powerman* (1970), namely, 'This Time Tomorrow', 'Strangers', and 'Powerman', and a fourth set to The Rolling Stones' 'Play With Fire' (1965).

The first sequence, which occurs at the start of the narrative, shows Peter and a businessman played by Bill Murray in a race for The Darjeeling, which Murray's character fails to catch. The action is accompanied by 'This Time Tomorrow' which sees The Kinks' principal lyricist, Ray

Davies, reflecting upon the alienating effects of intercontinental travel and the hardships of 'life on the road', with lines such as 'This time tomorrow what will we know/Will we still be here, watching an in-flight movie show'. There is, thus, an intertextual connection between the song and *Darjeeling*, which, besides its links with the road movie, also portrays the existential dilemmas of displaced westerners forced to make sense of their lives. That is not to say that the intertextual relationship involves the exposition of a shared existential concern which the lyrics of the song and the narrative of the film serve, simply, to illustrate. Returning to Wilkins's point, the narrative is seen to involve 'a *refraction* of contemporary existential anxiety mediated through Anderson's idiosyncratic cinematic aesthetic'. Both the song lyrics and the 'cinematic' characters form part of this overdetermined construct, the prism through which existential anxiety is refracted, as discussed above in relation to *Rushmore*. As Richter observes, '[t]he sound advances character development by articulating the "meta" idea of the piece' (20). Although this point is made in relation to Peter Sarstedt's 1969 song 'Where Do You Go To (My Lovely)?' in *Hotel Chevalier*, the use of sound to articulate of the 'meta' idea also applies to *Darjeeling* and *Rushmore*.

There is, however, an essential difference between *Darjeeling* and Anderson's earlier work, relating to the limitations of white middle class authorship. A theme which lingers at the margins of the earlier films, I would argue that it provides the central thematic focus for *Darjeeling*, one which is articulated by counterpointing the brothers' issues, or one might say 'first world problems', with those faced by their Indian hosts. As discussed below in relation to the death by drowning of a young boy whom the brothers attempt to rescue, the contrast can be jarring, even brutal, but certainly effective, and, in the main, invested with sincerity, the only exception being an episode at the monastery involving an escaped tiger, which is represented with ironic humour.

### **'Look at these assholes'**

Absurd though Francis's bid to 'rescue' his mother is, the brothers' behaviour, both collectively and individually, is sufficiently irresponsible and destructive to suggest that they are, indeed, still in need of parental guidance. On their way to meet their mother, who writes to say she

cannot 'receive' them, the brothers are involved in a series of misadventures. Peter buys a poisonous snake which escapes on board the train, leading to the brothers being put off the Darjeeling. Not before, however, Jack brazenly seduces cabin attendant Rita (Amara Karan), girlfriend of chief steward (Waris Ahluwalia), with the escaped snake functioning as an equally brazen sexual metaphor. Following their perfunctory exit, Francis makes a hurtful remark about Brendan's alopecia, leading to their trusty retainer's abrupt departure.

As with many male characters in Anderson, then, the boys show signs of arrested development and an inability to 'move on' with their lives; and, as with his body of work as a whole, whether they will be able to do so by ridding themselves of their own individual burdens, and, in this case, re-bonding as brothers, is only partially resolved. By the end of the film, Francis may be in a position to achieve one of his stated objectives and reconnect with his brothers. This is left open to speculation, although the siblings become more supportive of each other and cohere as a group. However, what is made clear is that he will simply have to accept that his mother now has a life of her own and is no longer able to give him the emotional support he craves. Jack, who calls his ex-girlfriend's answering service repeatedly, and who is planning to meet up with her in Italy after the Indian trip, is obviously preoccupied with his relationship break-up, to the extent that it is overshadowing his life. There is a chance that he may be able to overcome these issues. As explored further below, his ability to develop personally is intrinsically linked with his progression as an artist, with both the theme and the manner of its treatment reminiscent, once again, of *Rushmore*.

Of all the brothers, it is arguably Peter who faces the most serious existential crisis, and it is significant that his is the only dilemma which is clearly resolved. The manner in which the episode is represented is also noteworthy in relation to the limitations of male authorship. In a remarkable middle segment involving the death of a young boy, Peter's unsuccessful attempt to save him, and the brothers' exposure to Indian life as the locals prepare for the boy's funeral, Peter appears to experience a moment of genuine enlightenment, and to be able to accept his domestic responsibilities and face the prospect of being a father as a consequence. Peter's behaviour is having a damaging effect upon his wife and marriage, as it will have upon his

unborn son. This is familiar Anderson territory. We have seen the way in which both Jack and Francis correspond with other literal and figurative authors within the oeuvre. If Peter were unable to resolve his issues then he would become an 'author' too, that is, of his unborn son's fate. If Max Fischer 'haunts' the character of Jack, then, at the start of the film, Peter's Andersonian double, or 'ghost image', is Steve Zissou, who declares 'I hate fathers, and I never wanted to be one'.

Of additional significance, particularly regarding the limitations of male authorship, is the way in which Peter's dilemma is resolved. We saw in relation to *Rushmore* how the overdetermined Andersonian construct points towards a world without the diegesis, resistant to authorship, and how the diminishing of Max's 'authorial' powers led to the resolution of his relationship issues and his being able to move on. The same can be said of the middle section of the film involving the Whitman brothers' encounter, not merely with death, and, in Peter's case, his own mortality, but with the randomness of existence. If the meticulously maintained interior of the train stands in for the cinema as construct, then this unscheduled episode is seen to represent the literal and figurative 'world without': without the train, without Francis's itinerary, and without human control. We saw, also, the way in which Anderson was able to hint at this 'world without' in *Rushmore* through subtle cues within the visual storytelling. Once again, the same is seen to apply to *Darjeeling*, where, in addition, the scenes involving Peter's transformation are represented in a naturalistic way, reminiscent of Jean Renoir and Satyajit Ray.

From the outset, there are signs – several of them visual portents – that Peter's journey will, in the traditions of the road movie, be painful, chastening, but ultimately enlightening. Peter seems pleased to see his brothers again and to be embarking on a new adventure. It turns out that his initial euphoria is partly due to having freed himself of his domestic responsibilities and, what is to him, the burden of becoming a father for the first time. This happiness is short-lived, however. He soon starts to miss the life he left behind, as evidenced by his reaction to Jack's story, 'Luftwaffe Automotive'. Francis's behaviour also dampens his enthusiasm for the road trip, with tensions between them erupting in a fight where Peter lashes out at Francis with his father's belt and cuts his nose. Although this is, ostensibly, an unpleasant episode, the

wounding of Francis with the heirloom is symbolically significant in the sense that it shows Peter's refusal to submit to his elder brother's paternal authority, or to the hierarchy of former times. In fact, certain visual cues indicate that, from the moment he boards the train, Peter's journey will be a chastening but enlightening experience. Immediately after he leaps aboard, he is met by the scornful gaze of a younger Indian male who has caught him smiling smugly at the unfortunate businessman. This piece of visual storytelling foreshadows the humbling experiences Peter will face during the journey, in the wake of which he seems ready to accept his adult responsibilities and fulfill the roles of husband and father.

The narrative reaches a crisis point following the boys' ejection from The Darjeeling, a mishap which exacerbates mounting familial discord, and which leads Peter to suggest the three should go their separate ways. Reduced to walking the Indian countryside on foot, the boys notice three young Indian brothers trying to cross a fast-flowing waterway using a makeshift ferry. A Bollywood-style fast zoom on Francis is followed by another, a reverse shot showing Francis's point of view, which reveals that the youngsters are struggling to make the crossing. This prompts Francis to utter scornfully 'Look at these assholes'. Given the brothers' bad behaviour, and given also Anderson's fondness for irony, the comment could apply equally to Francis, Peter, and Jack, especially considering the party on the stricken ferry mirrors their own group of three. In any case, Francis's scorn gives way rapidly to alarm and panic as one of the ropes snaps and the ferry capsizes, jettisoning its three passengers into the raging torrent below. An over-the-shoulder, hand-held shot shows the brothers rushing to the rescue. Francis and Jack manage to rescue a boy each, but Peter is unsuccessful in his bid to save their friend, emerging bloodied from the waterway with his shattered corpse.

After arriving at the boy's village and delivering his body to his grief-stricken father, the brothers are welcomed into the local community, a gesture of hospitality to the three outsiders who at least managed to save two of the brothers. There follows a series of shots, unaccompanied by music with the only dialogue spoken in Hindi by the village elders. The shift in register is quite striking as the film depicts, with sensitivity, solemnity, and a pronounced degree of naturalism, the interaction between the Americans and their Indian hosts.

All three brothers wear clothes donated to them by the villagers - Peter and Jack clad in robes, Francis, merely a sheet, with his blue-striped boxer shorts showing. The costuming is of note as it provides an implicit and purely visual representation of the hospitality shown to the three strangers. The warmth and depth of this hospitality is highlighted when Peter, who is expecting a son, and who has just witnessed the death of a local boy whom he failed to rescue, is introduced to an infant boy in a cradle by an elderly couple, presumably the boy's grandparents, the cradle being rocked, gently and soothingly, by the woman. Here again, the locals' wardrobe is noteworthy, with the woman wearing a *sari*, while the man and infant are clad respectively in a cable knit sweater and sports shorts, the mix of traditional and modern dress conveying a sense of realism. It is at this point that Peter appears to have a moment of profound recognition and to obtain, by chance rather than design, the enlightenment that will enable him to lead a fuller and more meaningful existence. It is a brief, subtly underplayed, and naturalistic moment, conveyed through the visuals alone, with no dialogue or music to underscore Peter's realisation that he is about to gain a son while, in the next dwelling along, another father is preparing to bid farewell to his. It is all the more powerful for the pure visual storytelling and naturalistic treatment, and for the contrast this creates with the scenes focusing upon the three Americans and which are notable for their stylised cinematography, editing and mise-en-scene, fast-paced dialogue, and modishly retro soundtrack.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that for part of this medium three-shot, Peter's right index finger is pointing towards the off-screen space to right of shot. While there is no apparent reason for this, the gesture corresponds with, and is mirrored by, a medium shot of Patricia during one of the climactic scenes, set at the monastery, where the boys finally confront her in their abortive bid to persuade her to return with them to America. When Jack asks her why she didn't attend the funeral, she responds 'I didn't want to'. When Peter asks her what she is doing at the monastery, she replies, with equal candour and no small amount of disbelief, that 'This is where I live. These people need me', to which Jack replies 'What about us?'. In another piece of visual storytelling aided by Huston's striking (and possibly improvised) performance, the incredulous Andersonian matriarch spins around to look behind her, and, pointing with her left index finger to the off-screen space to left of shot, asks 'Are you talking to her? You're talking to

someone else, you're not talking to me'. As implied by the dialogue, Patricia is actually pointing towards a statue of the Virgin Mary.

However, when read in the context of Peter's hand gesture, and in relation to the visual poetics of the film overall, the 'index finger' can be interpreted as a motif. This is not the only scene in *Darjeeling* where hand gestures figure prominently. The villagers bid farewell to the brothers with a gesture known as Anjali Mudra (or Pranamasana), where the palms are placed together and the fingers point upwards, signifying the recognition of another's physical and spiritual presence. I would argue, however, that as the two scenes analysed above are absolutely pivotal to plot and character development, with both involving privileged moments, the enigmatic 'index finger' motif can be read as a form of typographical 'manicule', that is a punctuation mark consisting of an extended index finger used to indicate noteworthy passages of text.

In addition to Peter, Jack also achieves a degree of closure. As noted above, this is represented in terms of his short-story writing, which is the only way in which the youngest brother is able to be candid in his communication with his brothers, that is, by reading aloud from compositions based directly upon his lived experience. Soon after their reunion, Jack asks his brothers if they would like to read a short story called 'Luftwaffe Automotive' which he wrote while he was in France, to which Francis replies 'How long is it?', an insensitive remark worthy of Royal Tenenbaum. As Jack repeats the line disbelievingly, Peter takes the manuscript from him, as if in retaliation against Francis's insensitivity, whereupon he is engrossed by it. As noted above, this is probably due to it being set in New York during his father's funeral, although precisely why he is so enrapt is unclear. Another filmmaker might have used voiceover to convey the contents of the story, and to contextualise Peter's reaction, but not Anderson, who reveals the details - including how Peter found his father's suitcase - in a flashback halfway through the film. Regarding Peter's reception of the story, when it elicits a laugh, Jack, who is enthralled by his brother's reaction, asks him 'What part are you on?'. He replies 'Nothing, it reminded me of something not related to it'. If he seems guarded in his response, then, as is revealed later in the scene, this is due to the profound emotional response it causes, forcing him to continue reading in private.

After the brothers' abortive bid to persuade their mother to return to America, Jack reads aloud the ending of a new composition, which, as he explains, is the only part he has so far completed. The text is based upon his encounter with his ex-girlfriend at the Hotel Chevalier. Indeed, Jack's short story reprises the dialogue from the final scene of Anderson's short film *Hotel Chevalier*, to which Jack has added the line 'He would not be going to Italy'. Is Anderson suggesting here, perhaps, that *Hotel Chevalier* is based upon Jack's story and is thus a fiction within a fiction? In any case, if Jack's fictional protagonist, who, in turn, is based on Anderson's, has changed his mind about going to Italy, then there is a possibility, perhaps distinct, that he may be able to recover from his relationship break-up and avoid being marooned in the past.

Both Peter and Francis are more open, and more sensitive, in their responses to Jack's story. Jack is more honest about his work, too, and is able to stop himself from claiming, as he did about 'Luftwaffe Automotive', that the latest story is entirely fictional, a tacit admission that the characters and plot are based on lived experience. However, regarding Anderson's use of mise-en-abyme, as Jack is, of course, himself a fictional character, his narratives are twice removed from lived experience. Francis, who seems to have mellowed during the trip, first entreats Jack to 'Read us what you got' (a remark which compares favourably with his dismissive 'How long is it?'), before delivering his thoughtfully considerate verdict on the effectiveness of the piece, saying that 'It's hard for me to judge without knowing the rest of it', a remark which I would interpret as being a self-reflexive commentary upon the enigmatic and unresolved *Hotel Chevalier*. Peter, responding positively to the male protagonist's insouciance and emotional detachment, comments 'I like how mean you are'. Jack is about to correct Peter and tell him that his characters are all fictional when, as noted, he stops himself and says 'Thanks' instead. As in *Rushmore*, then, to develop as an artist is to progress as a human being, with the sensitive and considerate appraisal of one's work essential, not only to personal development, but to the establishment and cementing of ties between the groups to which the artists - and their critics - belong.

In the concluding scene the three brothers share a sweet lime on board The Bengal Lancer. When Francis offers to give back the two passports which he has taken from Peter and Jack, a

symbolic gesture indicating that he is ready to abandon his controlling ways, the two brothers decline, indicating, in turn, that they have learnt to understand and accept their elder brother for who he is. There is, therefore, a degree of narrative closure, one might even say the 'happy ending' demanded by the genre conventions of comedy, subtle though it may be. I wish to conclude this paper, however, by focusing upon the two set-piece sequences which precede the final scene, in reverse order, working backwards to the first of these, a memorable montage sequence which summarises the events of the narrative, which is distinctly 'bittersweet', and which serves to re-emphasise a number of the key points discussed here in relation to the construction of meaning in the Andersonian text.

The first of these is, in fact, the fourth segment set to vintage British rock music, and the third slow-motion sequence set to a song by The Kinks, namely 'Powerman' (the second occurring during the funeral, set to 'Strangers'). The sequence shows the brothers racing after The Bengal Lancer on the homeward leg of their journey and abandoning their designer luggage in order to make the train, accompanied by the adrenalised strains of the song's opening guitar 'hook', which bears the imprint of the Indian maestro Ravi Shankar's sitar playing. If the scene involves an obvious and intentionally corny metaphor for discarding the 'baggage' of the past in order to move on, then the relationship between the lyrics 'I know a man, he's a powerful man/He's got the people in his power/In the palm of his hand' and the 'postcolonial' theme of middle-class white men touring Indian, also involves a degree of ironic distancing, which applies in general terms to Anderson's use of intertextuality. As to the representation of the power dynamic in *Darjeeling*, if authority resides anywhere then it is not with men, but with the forthright, steadfast and selfless matriarch, Patricia; moreover, beyond the hermetically sealed world of the passenger train and the confines of male authorship.

This brings us to the final sequence under discussion. Containing no dialogue and accompanied by The Rolling Stones' 'Play With Fire' (1965), the montage consists of a series of cameos, some of which involve characters the brothers have met during the course of their journey, others which do not. Of the former kind, these include Rita, the Chief Steward, the distinguished Indian gentlemen played by Kumar Pallana who sat with them in the dining car, the nuns from

the monastery, and the two boys they saved from drowning. One of the cameos shows Peter's wife, Alice, a character encountered during a flashback set in New York, in the throes of labour, while another shows Jack's ex-girlfriend from *Hotel Chevalier*. While neither of these characters is encountered directly in the brothers' journey, they are both very much part of the unseen, or psychic, story world. This also applies to the tiger, presumably the animal who terrorised the monastery, but who exists only in the minds of the main characters, stalking the brothers' subconscious, much like an ex-girlfriend or a deserted wife, in fact.

There is also a cameo of the businessman who rushes for, but fails to catch The Darjeeling Limited during the film's opening sequence, a character of whose existence none of the brothers is aware. It should also be said that even though all three brothers sat at the same table as Kumar Pallana's character, they neither spoke to him nor acknowledged his presence, although he seemed very much aware of theirs. The point here would seem to be, then, that certain cameos within the montage exist independently of the brothers' experience of the journey, moreover, of their consciousness, whether shared or individual. Granted, Peter has been preoccupied with his marital problems and the imminent arrival of his son throughout the journey, and although he is not present at the birth, he would probably have imagined it. Likewise, Jack's journey has been overshadowed by the demise of his relationship, in which case it can be said that the cameo of his ex-girlfriend provides us with a momentary glimpse into his consciousness. However, none of the characters has encountered Bill Murray's hapless businessman, or is aware of the existence of Pallana's dapper gent. In fact, the only consciousness capable of fully comprehending the sequence is that of the viewer.

It is a deeply moving sequence, perhaps because it articulates the simple, yet disconcerting, truth that life goes on without us. As we have seen, the Andersonian narrative engages both formally and thematically with conflict, and it is the fate of most if not all principal characters to struggle along beneath the existential burden of loss, whether due to a relationship break-up, bereavement, or often both. One might say that it is hard for the Whitman brothers to deal with the fact that their own mother's life continues, indeed, with added purpose, now that she is no longer responsible for looking after them, until, that is, one considers the suffering of the

Indian villager who has lost his son and who must face the fact that life goes on without him. These, then, are the existential issues with which Anderson's narrative engages, and although the mode of representation is characteristically ironic, it is also unashamedly sincere.

In closing, it is worth recalling that the montage is preceded directly by Patricia's portentous proclamation to her sons that 'Maybe we could express ourselves more fully if we say it without words'. If, in *Rushmore*, Anderson points to a world without the diegesis through the partial suspension of narrative closure, here he goes one step further, that is, by creating an exquisite sequence of images depicting an interstice, a halfway house between the fictional space of the story world and an ineffable entity, inaccessible to language, but sayable without words. Where Anderson's representation of male authorship is concerned, it is appropriate that 'the last word' should concern the limitations of language, and that it should be spoken by a woman.