

The Grand Budapest Hotel

Wes Anderson is a genius when it comes to directing. His films have their own style, possibly a genre if you will. I wanted to take a look at “The Grand Budapest Hotel” and break down the elements within the film. It was written also by Wes Anderson & inspired by the writings of Stefan Zweig. Films Wes is known for writing & directing are Fantastic Mr. Fox, Isle of Dogs & Moonrise Kingdom to name a few. The Grand Budapest Hotel is set in the 1960s in a fictional town called Zubrowka post WWII. The narrative introduces the film with the character Mr Moustafa (also known as Zero), owner of the elegant hotel, and an author who’s unnamed. The writer’s curiosity leads to the whole narrative of the film as a large majority of it all is him Moustafa telling his story.

I’m going to play a scene from the film and discuss a few things after it’s finished. I’ve paused at this scene to point out Mise-en-scène. We can see the whole room which looks incredibly large. This is interesting to me as Wes Anderson is famous for using very elaborate sets with long tracks for camera’s and dollies. The production design reflects a dated 1930s sophisticated establishment. With a very dimly lit hall, finely crafted dress circle on the upper floor. This doesn’t just say to me it’s a simple dining hall for the guests at this hotel but a place where once it was bursting with entertainment. The props show good use of practical lighting with lots of lamps scattered around the room to light the hall. The current scene shows the past and now that in the present it’s merely a relic of the glory days. You can see in this shot as there’s very few people eating food that this hotel is not doing well making a profit. We look at Moustafa dressed very smart with his blazer and turtleneck sweater. You can see despite his hotel’s

failure to change with the times, he's still living in the past it seems. The performance itself from the actor is quite good. As he orders his food, he speaks to the waiter just as he was ordering at a 5-star hotel. I find it quite comical he orders a luxurious meal for himself and implies that the writer only wants a salad. After ordering food Moustafa says "that should provide us ample time, If I commence promptly."

That leads me to talk about some of the cinematography elements and editing. From a post-production point of view, there doesn't seem to naturally be anything visually changed in post. It seems to all be cleverly stitched in camera from all the lighting, camera movement's and placement of the set and backgrounds. The editing at times is quite fast. It's edited with a lot of its dialogue being primarily 50/50 shots in this scene alone. I like how as we see on the title card, the whole film that shows the past is displayed in a 4;3 aspect ratio. The story telling narrative of Mosutafa and the writer is in a widescreen cinema aspect ratio. This gives you the element that we're looking at the current or present day. Not modern but we're in the room with them at the time. With parallel editing, we can see with the changed aspect ratio that were in fact watching the story unfold back in time. This gives the audience a clear instruction what is past and what is present. This simplifies the viewing experience for the audience and doesn't cause any confusion with the narrative or plot. It's fairly straightforward to follow unlike some films can be heavily complex with plot and really make you think.

The scene goes on and we can see that the story telling doesn't speed up as Moustafa says. We see a short sequence of the waiter pouring drinks back and forth with not much happening. The shots themselves are fantastic. They're planned very well as you can see the reverse shots of both the writer and Moustafa are nailed and gives you the perception you're in the middle of

this conversation. The establishing two shot shows a shallow depth of field. We can see the rest of the room is out of focus and that draws our eyes to the words of both these actors. There's nothing else going on in the background that draws our eyes away from the story. The lighting is fantastic. We can see from the reverse shots some Rembrandt Key lighting. As mentioned previously, the practical lights are always visually present. The last shot as he finally starts to tell his story, we see the lighting changes dramatically along with the narrative. This gives you the feel you're watching a theatrical performance. I do think Wes Anderson intentionally does this to tell a story. He wants this film to be different, not just a modern movie blockbuster. He simply wants to tell us a story. There's a meaning to this story which I'll get onto later. We as humans love to listen and tell stories and all of these creative decisions in the cinematography all adds up to aiding Wes to tell a story. The actor directly looks into camera as he begins to tell his story. It's as if we're actually in the room and he's directly speaking to us. We the audience are in the writers' shoes. We're looking at this film from his angle as a writer. Someone who's seeking to know more about this story and wanting to write our own maybe. Writing about what experience we've seen. Humans are curious. It's in our DNA. We are motivated to know truth and find out all the facts. The writer to me feels like someone who wants to know everything about what's happened to maybe write a book on Mostafa's life experience with the history of the hotel. The once Grand Budapest Hotel.

There's lots of compliments you can give this film for how it's shot. But one element is quite extraordinary in my opinion. The camera movement. I haven't got a lot of time to show you lots of different parts of the film but it's full of quite complex camera movement. This scene alone has a few. We can see the shot before they order food. The camera pulls in very slowly. This

draws you in closer to a more intimate conversation feeling like you're directly in the middle of this narrative. We see a dolly zoom here. Infamously by the likes of Martin Scorsese and the innovator who created this technique, Alfred Hitchcock. It's often used a lot in Goodfellas and we can see both Scorsese and Hitchcock has heavily influenced Wes Anderson's films. The dolly zoom shot draws your attention to the writer's reaction comically agreeing to the salad. We also see some very sophisticated movement as Moustafa begins to tell the story of the hotels concierge. The camera pushes in very slowly and focus pulls from a medium shot to a tighter close up shot of Moustafa. This creates a bit of suspense and the scene with a cut to the title Part 1. As I've mentioned with the theatrical lighting, we can see the example of this during this shot. It changes dramatically from some warm soft lighting to some harsh dramatic shadows. With that dramatic change, it reflects maybe deep down the reality Moustafa currently lives in. Whereas we see the hotel although dimly lit, it's rich with warm colours. A palette of yellows and oranges which can signify happiness and joyfulness. But the change of lighting shows us a different picture to what we're seeing on the surface.

This brings me onto some of the symbolism the film has all over it. The narrative Moustafa narrates is one of glory. The good old days where the hotel as a business was thriving. Where jobs were available to people in the community, where guests would stay and be catered and treated like royalty. Gustave isn't featured in this shot but his character plays a big part in the symbolism of the film. His character is one of someone who portrays himself as well dressed, well groomed. There's a scene where Gustave and Moustafa escape prison after a wrongful conviction of a murder. Gustave snaps at Moustafa because he doesn't have his perfume. Despite being on the run from the authorities, he's very concerned about how he smells. This

tells us how important that means to him. This shows me that he cares very much about his image and this can relate to the society we live in today. We very much care about how we look. Not for our own good, but how we are perceived by those around us. Our peers and society itself. The plot is set in the 1930s before the second world war. The whole film's story rests on the conclusion. Moustafa explains how he acquired the hotel from being hired as a lobby boy. The end simply shows us the affects a war can have on the community. Once a thriving establishment not just for the stakeholders in the business, but to those guests who stayed, dined, cherished memories. It signifies the consequences of war and how it can change a whole community. There are many great stories of how people come back from rock bottom, this is an example of how not to do it. Mostafa fled from his family because of war. He's a refugee. This shows us that someone has experienced the consequences of a war has come into an environment where everything seems good on the surface. Yet The effects of his trauma from world surrounded by war, Mosutafa can't seem to escape. He could well have changed the hotel, but it could be the case that emotionally or mentally he can't bring himself to make that change. Mentally he sees the hotel as his stronghold from all the wrong in the world. Reminds me of French film, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* where a man has locked-in syndrome and is stuck in his own mind. His body apart from his left eye is totally paralyzed. I feel like this film depicts that of Moustafa. The hotel represents his brain, and he's stuck inside. He could change but just doesn't know how.

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