

**Redefining Wes Anderson as an Auteur: An Examination of Visual Mastery
and Interior Meanings in *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch***

Project Report

Submitted by

Parvathi Ajith (SB21CE025)

Under the guidance of

Ms. Leona Maria Renny

In partial fulfilment of requirements for the award of the degree

Of Bachelor of Arts

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam



College With the Potential for

Excellence

Accredited by NAAC with 'A++'

Grade

Affiliated to

Mahatma Gandhi University

Kottayam-686560

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Declaration

I do affirm that the project "Redefining Wes Anderson as an Auteur: An Examination of Visual Mastery and Interior Meanings in *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch*" submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Communication Studies has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Ernakulam



Parvathi Ajith

Date: 22/03/2024

SB21CE025

B.A. English Literature and Communication Studies

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Certificate

I hereby certify that this project entitled "Redefining Wes Anderson as an Auteur: An Examination of Visual Mastery and Interior Meanings in *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch*" by Parvathi Ajith is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

Ernakulam

Date: 22/03/2024



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "L. Renny".

Ms. Leona Maria Renny

Department of Communicative English

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Acknowledgement

I take this opportunity to offer my humble prayers and thanks to God Almighty for His mercy and blessings for the completion of this project.

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Parvathi Ajith

Abstract

Wes Anderson is one of the prominent directors of the current generation, heralding the American Eccentric Cinema movement with bold colours and meticulous Mise-en-scènes. With a career spanning nearly 3 decades, Anderson's oeuvre as a director speaks volumes about his directorial choices. Although recognised as a visual master owing to his technical competence and distinct personal style, Anderson's intricate interior meanings imbibed within his films gets overcast. Being an Auteur means displaying the exemplary qualities of technical competence, personal style and interior meanings. This forms the core of the authorial voice. This dissertation aims to analyse the interior meanings of selected Wes Anderson films and establish Wes Anderson as an Auteur based on all applicable criteria of the Auteur Theory. This dissertation reaches the above mentioned conclusion through the analysis of two films- *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch*.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Cinema has been and always will be an imaginative medium. It gives wings to incorporate ideas and lift them beyond the knowing and into the realm of endless possibilities. Cinema enabled mankind to dream, to go beyond what was possible - into the infinite space, the unchangeable history, the unforeseen future and much more. As years passed, cinema cultivated an identity of its own and with it came passionate storytellers and artists with stories to share that possessed the ability to capture the loyal attention of diverse audiences.

Film as a medium, like any other thing in this ever-evolving world, never remained stagnant, that is, within a definite form. Cinema, in its course run, has evolved beyond what was imaginable, crafting and weaving new, unique narratives and narrating styles and enchanting audiences around the world. But defying the age-old norms is in any way not a trivial task but the mastery of it lies in the spirit to portray one's stories in its truest form, without the distilling of its valuable essence.

The American Eccentric Cinema, a subgenre of Contemporary film, is one such style of filmmaking that came into being as a response to the traditionalist filmmaking approach of Hollywood. Characterised by deliberate distancing from the mainstream narratives, with 'indie' and 'absurd' themes, this style of filmmaking gained momentum since the early 1990s. American Eccentric Cinema can thus be considered "a contemporary type of US filmmaking that exists at the intersection of mainstream, art and independent cinema" (Perkins).

One of the flag bearers of this contemporary style of filmmaking is Wes Anderson whose roster of films boasts of unusual plots and narratives with quirky, eccentric characters that resonates and captivates the attention of the mainstream. Born Wesley Wales Anderson, Anderson's first foray into Hollywood was with 'Bottle Rocket' (1996), which was based on

his 1994 short film of the same name. Since then, nearly 3 decades and 11 feature films later, Anderson has carved a place for himself in the vast and rather non-inclusive Hollywood, acquiring a niche standard and a loyal cult following.

With a natural gift for the art of storytelling, Anderson began shooting silent films with his father's Super 8 camera at 8 years old. Since then, inspired by the likes of Satyajit Ray, Woody Allen, Roman Polanski, and Pedro Almodóvar, Anderson slowly but surely developed a filmmaking style that is distinct, poignant, and memorable.

Apart from his contemporary filmmaking style stemming from the 'New Sincerity,' Anderson is gifted in his portrayal of the seemingly unordinary, unattractive and the trivial. Portraying the raw grittiness of life and its associated hardships is a genre that is commonplace among the filmmakers of the present. But Anderson captures the very essence of human life - the good, the bad and the ugly which are then encased in his unconventional, whimsical narratives.

Anderson's stories are not about extraordinary individuals and their even extraordinary circumstances, but they are about the melancholy and bitter realities that haunt the ordinary. Anderson's films are characterised by his whimsical plotlines, impeccable attention to detail, limited colour palette, use of stop motion animation and miniatures, symmetry, and recurring ensemble casts.

A master of *mise en scène*, the genius of Wes Anderson can be realised with a mere glance at any one of his scenes from his films. His symmetrical composition, commitment to using a limited set of colour palettes and masterful inclusion of stop-motion animation makes his films recognisable and beloved- to such an extent that his filmmaking style is considered a popular aesthetic in popular media.

It can be said that Anderson's unique visual style is the major contributor to his widespread popularity. But the genius of Wes Anderson is not limited to his mastery of

distinct visual style and technical competence. It is in the valuable messages that he craftily weaves into the very interior of his films.

Most of his films portray recurring themes of dysfunctional and broken families, misfits, melancholy, and familial bonds. The beauty of a Wes Anderson film cannot merely be credited to the visual, exterior elements but also to the themes that form the backbone of a film. Without the themes, any film would be soulless visuals.

This dissertation aims to analyse two Wes Anderson Films, *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch* and to redefine Wes Anderson as an Auteur not only for his visual and technical mastery but also for the multifarious themes dealt with in his films.

The argument of the study will be proved over the course of three chapters wherein the first chapter will deal with the basis of Auteur theory, its brief history and its relevance in the modern-day film scene. The second chapter is a systemised analysis of two Wes Anderson films based on the technical competence exhibited by Wes Anderson in the direction of his films and the personal style that has manifested in his works whereas the third chapter consists of an inspection of the thematic concepts and interior meanings imbibed within the selected Wes Anderson films.

The two films chosen to prove the hypothesis of this dissertation are *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch*. Made in 1998, *Rushmore* is Anderson's second foray into filmmaking, while *The French Dispatch*, released in 2021, is one of Wes Anderson's recent films. The selection of films from the beginning of Wes Anderson's directorial journey till its current point is an effective way to summarise Wes Anderson's film career which spans nearly 3 decades. These movies help in understanding the evolution of the presentation of visual style and interior meanings. These two films act as yardsticks to study the evolution and growth of Wes Anderson as a director over the past 28 years.

Thus, this dissertation is a study of the directorial choices of Wes Anderson on the criteria of Auteur theory and whether Anderson can be considered a true 'author' of his films.

Chapter 2

Auteur Theory: Emergence and Relevance

This chapter deals with Auteur theory, its emergence, elements, and relevance in the modern film world. The importance of a director to a film and the significance of his force of control over the direction of film has always been recognised and respected years prior to the formation of the theory and even the coinage of the word Auteur. Early film critics and theorists heralded the importance of a director as an artist of filmmaking- lifting the structural body presented by the screenwriter and transforming it into a form of art, ready to be consumed by countless.

The worth of a director was always seen and recognised as a light bearer of clear vision and yielded with the power to execute the extraordinary. But the formation of a concrete concept as well as the coinage of the term Auteur was marked with the momentous emergence of the Nouvelle Vague. The revolutionary Nouvelle Vague or the French New Wave of the 1950's brought with it the spirit of experimentalism and a rejection of the traditionalist styles of filmmaking that inspired and motivated a wave of change within the French film scene and subsequently all over the world.

Nouvelle Vague resulted in the authority granted to men to question and critique the traditional approaches of the French films of that time as well as to explore beyond the pre-defined norms of French films. Thus, the era of Nouvelle Vague saw the rise of experimental films as well as film magazines and manifestos that provided platforms for film theorists and critics to ponder and argue on those aspects of film and filmmaking that were previously not a matter of concern.

The term Auteur was coined by the renowned French director, Francois Truffaut, in his 1954 essay *Une certaine tendance du cinéma français*. This phrase was an instrument to

denote those directors who bravely strayed far from the traditionalist approach of capturing the essence of source material and timidly following the footsteps of the cinema of Hollywood without establishing a unique identity for French cinema.

Prior to the emergence of the French New Wave, the French film industry saw many directors who followed the path forged by the Hollywood industry, mimicking its style and story with no effort to create a unique identity or name for French cinema. This period saw directors like Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost who put forward faithful adaptations of literary texts without any efforts to impart any new or unique viewpoint to enrich the films beyond measure. Truffaut vehemently criticised these directors, who were mere executioners of a text, and who lacked the gift to enhance and polish a film by imparting their expertise and style. Truffaut wished the French film industry to be the grounds of a new wave of change, for the industry to foster the growth of films that communicate uniqueness.

The popular French film magazine, *Cahiers du Cinema*, a platform engaged by notable film theorists and critics, took upon Truffaut's concepts in Truffaut's 1954 essay, *Une certaine tendance du cinema francais* to criticise distasteful films of those times and to build momentum to the concept of Auteur. This can be seen as the era of transformation of the concept of Auteur as put forward by Truffaut into a theoretical approach to viewing cinema and directors, with a greater body of people aware of its practicality and significance.

However, the theoretical approach of auteurism being transformed into a full-fledged film theory was the work of the American Film critic Andrew Sarris. Sarris delved deep into Auteurism, what it meant and what it had to offer in the world of cinema in his 1962 essay titled *Notes on Auteur Theory*. Sarris facilitated the transfer and application of a rather detached, otherworldly French concept of Auteur to the more easily accessible and grounded Auteur theory. Sarris gave meaning to Auteur theory, wherein a director lends his personal visual and stylistic choices to craft a movie that he is truly and in every sense an

author of. A director of auteurist tendencies was like a music conductor, harmonising the symphonies of the cameraman, the scriptwriter and other crucial technical elements with absolute dexterity while adding his unique flair to his creation. It can be said that an Auteur embodies his films in all senses.

Sarris's development of the theory and its subsequent widespread popularity resulted in the manifestation of the new Hollywood movement, prompting directors to be curious and yield experimentation as a potent tool to fashion films that are an absolute testimony to the director's legacy and vision.

Andrew Sarris, in his 1962 essay, *Notes on Auteur Theory* expanded on Truffaut's concepts on authors of films and gave a brief on three crucial elements that are present in an auteur's film.

In his essay, Sarris provided three separate premises on the Auteur theory, with the first being the "technical competence of a director as a criterion of value" (Sarris). The technical competence of a director comprises both the technical skills as well as the knowledge of technical elements necessary for the art of filmmaking.

A director must actively take on the various roles of photography, costuming, acting, editing and much more. Even though the meaning and the role of a director can only be interpreted through abstract terms, a director must oversee all areas of a film with the quality of an all-rounder. A director, who lacks the technical competence required for the art of filmmaking, is, by default, never a true director in the first place.

The second premise that Sarris puts forward is "the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value." (Sarris). A director's body of work must reveal a stylistic consistency, with the choices and decisions that are reflected in a film being a testament to the internal psyche of the director. A director's films are equivalent to his canvas, wherein he reveals his signature to the world.

The third and most important premise of the auteur theory is the “interior meaning” (Sarris). The interior meaning of a film constitutes its soul, the ultimate glory of the film. It is an ambiguous concept as it is not something that can be rendered into non-cinematic terms. Interior meaning is something that is embedded within the core of a film, but it cannot be limited to mise-en-scene or the vision of the director. The interior meaning goes beyond trite ideas and has profundity attached to it.

In the essay, Sarris explains that these elements may be “Visualised as three concentric circles: the outer circle as technique; the middle circle, personal style; the inner circle, interior meaning” (Sarris). These elements form a criterion of value meant to identify an auteur and his exceptional storytelling and viewpoint.

These elements would be present in any director’s work, but an auteur exercises these elements fully into his work, showcasing his mastery and nurturing a deep understanding of his craft as well as of the art of Cinema, effectively carving a unique niche for himself in the vast dunes of cinema.

A director of auteurist qualities would be known in the world of cinema for his varying distinctions across the elements of auteur theory. And so, a director’s entire body of work rather than a single, isolated work is taken into consideration when determining whether the director could be awarded the merit of being considered an auteur.

The origin and actual dispersion of the Auteur theory and its application in America came as the result of the New Hollywood Movement. The New Hollywood or The American New Wave or The Hollywood Renaissance movement is a cinematic movement that began in the late 1960’s and spanned through the 1970’s. The New Hollywood movement was the result of the restless cinephilia for new age style Cinema as seen from the film industries of Europe and Japan. The end of the Golden Age of Hollywood marked a shift in attitudes as the

commercially viable films began to be viewed tasteless and drew in significantly smaller crowds.

A need to expand creative expression was seen throughout this era as production companies shifted the reins of creative decision into the hands of the director. With the emergence of The New Hollywood Movement, Directors began to exercise their creative freedom, with unconventional storylines, cinematography and the exploration of taboo subjects.

The New Hollywood movement's start is credited to films *The Graduate* (1967) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), following which was a string of films helmed by Auteur directors that transformed the American film industry into a bold, liberal art industry. Some of the popular New Hollywood Movement directors are Woody Allen, Roman Polanski, Robert Altman, Hal Ashby amongst others. Apart from *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde* some other illustrious films of this era are *Rosemary's baby* (1968), *Night of the living dead* (1968), *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Easy Rider* (1969).

By the end of the 1970's, the New Hollywood Movement had declined with films like *New York, New York* (1977), *Sorcerer* (1977), and *The heaven's gate* (1980) failing at the box office. Yet to this day, the influence of the New Hollywood Movement remains, as many current-generation directors are inspired and follow various cinema movements like The American Eccentric Cinema that stemmed from the New Hollywood Movement.

Modern Auteurs like Satyajit Ray, Wes Anderson, Wong Kar-wai, and Quentin Tarantino amongst others and their unique stories and cinematography are thus greatly indebted to the New Hollywood Movement.

Relevance of Auteur theory in the present day

In the current day, Auteur theory is in fact, not a theory that governs filmmaking. Direction is a profession that can be pursued by any, without any barriers of age and gender

But alas, the relevance and impact that Auteur theory had on the film industry cannot be erased so easily. An Auteur is never a creation that spans decades to mature, but an Auteur is born from an individual's unique vision and his determination to execute and portray his vision in its truest essence. An Auteur is born from the yearning to remain the sole author of one's creative work.

Many of the current generation's most prolific directors possess a consistent vision that can be observed in their entire body of work.

Thus, Auteur theory establishes its long reign of impact and relevance through continued excellent applications by directors who yearn for the manifestations of their visions into monuments of wonder to be enjoyed by all viewers and to leave a definite mark in this ephemeral world.

Chapter 3

Wes Anderson's film: Employing Technical Competence and Personal Style

This chapter analyses Wes Anderson's films based on the technical competence exhibited in them. Technical competence includes direction style, cinematography, music, costume, and casting. This chapter examines Wes Anderson's unique directorial choices that have manifested in his works. The works chosen for the analysis of the technical competence are- *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch*.

The film *Rushmore* revolves around two individuals with antithetical views who form an unusual pair and navigate their budding relationship set in the Rushmore Academy. Max Fischer, a fifteen-year-old scholarship student enrolled in Rushmore High is one of the central characters of the film. Max Fischer's encounter with the successful industry giant Herman Blume is a turning point for the characters, with each developing a sense of companionship without the intrusion of any barriers of age or life experience. But this companionship comes into jeopardy with the entry of Rosemary Cross, a first-grade teacher at Rushmore. Ultimately *Rushmore* tells the story of masked individuals in a tainted world, chasing after happiness and finding companions amidst the sea of strangers. What Max Fischer, Herman Blume, and Rosemary Cross had in common was their deep, bottomless loneliness and restlessness- all stemming from the paramount need to find their place in this vast world.

Rushmore, from its very first scene till its last reminds its viewers of the meticulous planning and detailing that has gone into its creation. From carefully planned montages to strategic visual elements to signify theatricality, *Rushmore* transforms a rather unconventional script into a delightful and engaging watch.

Principal photography began in November 1997 and lasted till January of 1998. The major portion of the film was shot in Houston, Texas with Lamar High School and St John's School depicted as the hectic Grover Cleveland High School and the elite *Rushmore* Academy respectively. Casting was given meticulous care with director Anderson appointing 14 Casting directors for finding his perfect Max Fischer. Nearly 1800 teenagers across America, Canada and England tried for the prized role. But the role ultimately went to Jason Schwartzman, the seventeen-year-old scion of the Coppola clan with no aspirations to act. When envisioning Max Fischer, Anderson was "determined not to end up with some pampered offspring of a famous Hollywood dynasty" (Nathan). But meeting with the young Schwartzman, Anderson was moved by his stony face and dedication. Jason Schwartzman even "showed up for the audition wearing a school blazer onto which he had sewn his own custom-made insignia patch" (Dilley). Bill Murray, for Wes Anderson, was the perfect Herman Blume as the "genius of Murray is that his poker-faced melancholy is so indefinable, root cause doesn't even apply" (Nathan). British actress Olivia Williams was cast as Rosemary Cross.

Rushmore proudly presents a distinct visual style that is now synonymous with director Wes Anderson's style, with budding attempts at elaborate mise en scene and other visual elements. The writers of the film, Wes Anderson and Owen Wilson wished to convey a sense of "slightly heightened reality, like a Roald Dahl children's book"(Winters). The colour palette that *Rushmore* uses is a bold spread of the primary colours, which helps to bring forth a sense of grandeur and nostalgia. This usage of colour is very prominent in the scenes taking place in the Grover Cleveland High School in the second half of the film wherein Max, in his rich blue Rushmore suit and occasional red beret appears distinct and withdrawn from the rest of his peers who seem like a tasteless and monotone, signifying the apparent difference between Max And his new peers.

In typical Wes Anderson fashion, numerous visual elements also made a prominent impact and improved the overall watch of the film as well. From articulated calligraphy writings, Max's business cards, shots of Jacques-Yves Cousteau's "diving for sunken treasure" and even those hand-sewn curtains that divide the films into parts- any visual motif, however significant, added dimension to the film.

The theatrical aspect of the films is a significant part of the film. Beyond providing an effect of theatricality and artificial perfection, the theatre curtains that divided the films into various months can be seen as steps or chapters in which each character arises to self-realisation. The curtain symbolises Max Fischer's self-awareness and realisation as to how fickle life can be and how it cannot be artificially manipulated to his fancy like how he micromanages his school plays.

The several montages that are littered amidst the film are perhaps the most technical and one can argue, the most brilliant film technique utilised in the film. Although later on montages became one of the principal film techniques used by director Anderson, *Rushmore* features Anderson's early attempts at extensive montage use while creating and maintaining masterful mise en scenes.

From Max Fischer's Extracurricular activities montage features Max as the eccentric and ambitious leader and member of many Rushmore Academy clubs like The French Club, Debate Team, lacrosse, golf, drama, and Astronomy Society amongst many others to the research montage which features Max Fischer engaged in procuring the specimens, managing the expenses and creating contacts for building an aquarium to interest and appeal to Miss Cross are all excellent usages of a montage to convey the most visual message in the briefest of interval. But perhaps the most ambitious montage that was shot by Wes Anderson must be the revenge montage. In the briefest of time intervals, Anderson most skilfully portrays how

quickly the relationship between Max Fischer and Herman Blume sours over Rosemary Cross.

From Max Fischer swarming the hotel room Herman Blume takes refuge from his wife with bees to Blume driving over Max's bicycle, the short montage ends with Max Fischer's arrest. This montage, albeit short, instantly portrays how the relationship between Max Fischer and Herman Blume had taken a turn for the worst and to what length each individual would go to get revenge.

Apart from the montages, *Rushmore* also utilises various camera shots like camera panning, overhead shots and tracking shots which are all cinematography styles directly influenced by the French new wave movement as well as the American Eccentric Cinema which Wes Anderson championed during his directing career.

Even the soundtracks used for *Rushmore*, like the classic "Nothin' in the World Can Stop Me Worryin' 'Bout That Girl", "Ooh La La" and "Making time" amongst the others are all songs that resonate with the characters, specifically Max Fischer. Director Wes Anderson carefully chose songs of the "British Invasion" genre as he felt they suited Max Fischer's angry and loud personality.

Stripped of its directorial tag and represented purely on its story and aesthetics, *Rushmore* remains, even today, after 26 years, a film of pure magnificence. Released during an era where commercial success was seen as more viable than critical acclaim and artistic freedom, Wes Anderson as a director gave a film purely driven by artistic freedom with no limits. *Rushmore* is a film that parallels the concepts of the *New Hollywood Movement* with a fresh script, and is remembered even today for its loud, adult-parodying hero Max Fischer, Hollow, purposeless Herman Blume, and the untethered Rosemary Cross, and for all the loneliness that the characters carry that echo within its viewers.

Rushmore tells a story of individuals with a lacking - it may be a husband, a mother, a companion- and how these individuals find peace with their conscience and grief to enjoy the current for them. *Rushmore* is the coming of age, for Max Fischer, Herman Blume, Rosemary Cross and all its viewers- regardless of age, time or place.

While it was Anderson's own personal life that inspired *Rushmore* it was his love for reading and more specifically his love for the magazine *The New Yorker* that culminated in the creation of the eccentric comedy anthology film *The French Dispatch*, released in 2021. One of Wes Anderson's latest films, "*The French Dispatch* is a love letter to journalists set at an outpost of an American newspaper in 20th-century Paris" (Thompson).

Titled onscreen as *The French Dispatch of the Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun*, *The French Dispatch* can be summed up as "a magazine run by an expatriate American from a made-up French metropolis going by the distinctly Andersonian name of Ennui-sur-Blasé and catering for an American readership" (Nathan). The film follows the French foreign bureau of Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun preparing the final issue of the magazine following the death of the editor of the magazine, Arthur Howitzer Jr.

The Film begins with Arthur Howitzer Jr., a peculiar man with stern views and passion towards his craft who had meticulously listed out the future of *The French Dispatch* magazine following his death. The film follows the various pieces from the farewell issue of *The French Dispatch*.

The film follows the farewell issue of the magazine, which begins with Herbsaint Sazerac's exordium of Ennui Sur Blasé, *The Cycling Reporter: Snapshot of a city*, followed by J.K.L. Berenson's *The Concrete Masterpiece*. The second feature article is *Revisions to a Manifest* by Lucinda Krementz. The final feature article featured Roebuck Wright's *The Private Dining Room of the Police Commissioner*. The final segment of the film explores Arthur Howitzer Jr.'s obituary which marks the end of the film.

Just as Arthur Howitzer Jr. of the French Dispatch coddled his writers, Wes Anderson too, was protective of his writing partners, or in this case, his story conceptioners. Although writing an anthology movie was different and never attempted before in the case of Wes Anderson, he was quite adept at writing a story within a story- or in this case, feature articles within a magazine. *The French Dispatch* is “Conceived alongside the latest line-up of familiar collaborators in Roman Coppola, Hugo Guinness, and Jason Schwartzman – though the screenplay is credited solely to Anderson – this was the closest he had ever come to channelling actual events” (Nathan).

Although not exactly sure of the terminologies of the fourth estate, with needed assistance, Anderson crafts a world that mirrors the real and blurs the lines of fiction. Many main characters of the film are direct inspirations or amalgamations of pioneering writers and journalists of *The New Yorker*.

Featuring an expansive cast throughout Four anthologies, Anderson employs many of his recurring team members as well, from the likes of Murray, Wilson, Swinton, Brody, Norton, McDormand, Ronan, and Schwartzman amongst others. His newer additions to the film like del Toro, Chalamet, Wright, and Khoudri amongst others quickly caught up with the norms and policies of an Anderson-esque film set and complimented the envisioned final product.

It wasn't just the cast that returned for *The French Dispatch* but even the production crew. Long-time collaborator Robert Yeomen who worked as the director of cinematography for nine of Anderson's films was in charge of the cinematography of *The French Dispatch*. Utilising black and white for the majority of the time for the first anthology, *The Concrete Masterpiece* as well as animation for the road chase sequence of *The Private Dining Room of the Police Commissioner*, the mode of cinematography varied. As Will Tizard said “Each shot is carefully composed and lit, often with perfect symmetry, for shooting with 200-

ASA Kodak 35mm film, which requires strong light” (Tizard). The 2D animated sequence on the other hand was handled by Gwenn Germain, who in an interview responded that “the main inspirations for the piece were two classic Belgian comics, Tintin and Blake & Mortimer.” (Zahed).

Adam Stockhausen joined Anderson for the fourth time for *The French Dispatch*, creating the fictional Ennui Sur Blasé around the French town of Angoulême. The set decorator of the film, Rena DeAngelo, was heavily inspired by French films like *The Red Balloon*, *Vivre sa Vie*, *Bande à Part* and *The 400 Blows*. The requirement for the film was "to get a feeling of Paris when it was dirtier—still beautiful, but grimy"(Andriotis). Other Visual elements of the film too were given punctilious attention. From Rosenthaler’s abstract paintings and frescoes, which was created on demand by Sandro Kopp, a German New Zealand Visual artist to every magazine cover of *The French Dispatch* featured in the film created by Javi Aznarez, a distinct visual identity is surely forged in the making of this film.

The colour palette showcased in the film is rustic yet nuanced - with variations felt and noticed within each anthology story. The Music and soundtrack for the film, on the other hand, was heavily inspired by the likes of Erik Satie and Thelonious Monk, resulting in the creation of a timeless soundtrack by Anderson’s usual collaborators Alexandre Desplat and Randall Poster.

Upon release, *The French Dispatch* reigned as an undisputed passion project with numerous accolades and positive reception. With bizarre narration, visually crafted cinematography, and strong performances, *The French Dispatch* is unapologetically Anderson.

As Ian Nathan states in his book, *Wes Anderson: The Iconic Filmmaker and His Work* “*The French Dispatch* marks the continued work of arguably the most distinctive director at work today – and one not likely to convert those that cannot stomach his made-to-measure

whimsy. A single frozen frame would tell you it belongs to the vision of Wesley Wales Anderson, and all the delightful contradictions that come with him” (Nathan). In every turn and take, Anderson showcases and maintains his undying love for *The New Yorker*. Even beyond an inspiration source, *The New Yorker* exhibits a way of life that resonates with Wes Anderson. *The New Yorker*’s “sardonic touch and intellectual rigour have not only been a guiding light in his life but can be felt in the fabric of his filmmaking” (Nathan).

And paying homage to *The New Yorker* is in essence, paying homage to himself, for Anderson - for maintaining the same vigour, vision, and vitality to carve a distinct niche in Hollywood.

The French Dispatch remains as a memorable modern classic in the Wes Anderson cinematography lore, a perfect mix of whimsical and reality, in a fictional town that mirrors all the good and bad in our own. And, just as Arthur Howitzer Jr. of the film stayed true to his passions and brought the world to Kansas through his magazine, Anderson too remains - a force as original and inspired to bring to the world a slice of his extraordinary mind.

This chapter discussed the technical elements of the films *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch*, both of which are directed by Wes Anderson. This chapter, through the thorough examination of the technical elements of the above-mentioned films, exhibits the technical competence as well as the personal style that has manifested in Wes Anderson's films.

Chapter 4

Wes Anderson's films: Employing interior meanings

This chapter analyses Wes Anderson's use of distinct, recurring themes, and interior meanings. The films analysed are *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch*.

Rushmore is an original coming-of-age film, showcasing a series of bizarre themes, albeit proudly. Anderson's sophomore film forays into topics that are unconventional and might even make its viewers despise the film's hero in the second half of the film. But Anderson skilfully crafts a memorable tale- both in terms of the characters and the story. A metamorphosis point for Wes Anderson, *Rushmore* is "arguably a turning point in Anderson's filmmaking; at least aesthetically, it sees him coming into his own and finding the conventions that would come to be recognised as his hallmarks" (Eloise)

After *Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore* is thus, a point of metamorphosis for the director, wherein Anderson learns the craft of inculcating significant thematic concepts within the frameworks of his complex and unconventional narratives.

The main character of *Rushmore*, Max Fischer, the raven-haired, overambitious, overzealous fifteen-year-old makes a strong impression in the first half of the film. With his innocent smile, polite demeanour, and various talents, Scholarship student Max Fischer thrives in the elitist school of *Rushmore*, a contrast to his wealthy and privileged peers. But beyond his precocious inclinations to extracurricular and declining academics, Fischer ultimately was a teenager of just fifteen, constructed skilfully to appear as an adult capable of surviving any challenges that life hurls at him. Although the montage compilations portray Max as a jack of all trades, he was in fact, a master of none and was impending his first failure as an overambitious individual.

Herman Blume, the other major character comes across as a benevolent and magnanimous figure, a philanthropist so wise and giving in a harsh capitalist world. Himself

a capitalist, Blume seems to cling onto the last fading embers of a past- *Rushmore*, that grants him a constant amidst the unforgiving effervescent world. Beyond the industry magnate persona lies a man so insecure, with no companion to call his own in this cruel world. Blume reeks of Despondency. And without a purpose, Blume floats, or in the film's context, sinks to the bottom of the Blume family pool - his only source of escape.

Throughout the film, the parallels between the teenager and middle-aged man are hard to ignore. Their wants and needs, however different, at its core represents the loneliness that they face - an urgent need for companionship and meaning in a life of charades. They are foils to each other in the truest of sense and yet their contrasts pull and band them together in a companionship that fulfils their mutual needs. It was Max's ambition and clarity in his life that attracted Herman Blume while it was Blume's success and morals that enticed Max. Yet as the film moves forward, the viewer's begin to find nuances and cracks in the seemingly flawless masks of Fischer and Blume. Does Herman Blume find happiness and solace within his heaping success and financial stability? Is Max Fischer a capable young man as he claims himself to be?

In the first half of the film, on his second encounter with Max, Herman Blume asks, curiosity piqued about Max's well-assembled act "What's the secret, Max?" (*Rushmore*, 00:11:01-00:11:02) Max takes on to reply confidently- "The Secret. I don't know. Uh... I think you just gotta find something you love to do, then do it for the rest of your life. For me, it's going to *Rushmore*." (*Rushmore*, 00:11:08-00:11:18). As Dilley, in the book *Cinema of Wes Anderson* said "*Rushmore* is also used as a metaphorical concept, representing a prized goal" (Dilley). This concept is rendered aptly in the film as both Fischer's and Blume's object of desire is fixed on Miss Cross and she begins representing *Rushmore*. The film features a scene wherein both characters are seen acknowledging the place of Rosemary Cross in their life.

Max Fischer, after giving up on his revenge measures meets up with Herman Blume at his mother's gravesite where Herman opens up with- "She's my *Rushmore*, Max" (*Rushmore*, 00:57:38-00:57:40). This led to Max replying dejectedly-"Yeah, I know. She was mine too" (*Rushmore*, 00:57:42-00:57:44).

Rosemary Cross transforms into a placeholder or a symbol of all that Fischer and Blume want. This is made evident in the film as their ideals and charades are put aside to vie for the attention of Rosemary Cross. Their goal of *Rushmore* or true happiness and belonging was quickly set aside to accommodate Rosemary.

This might mark as perhaps the first point in the film wherein the characters are seen wanting something that is genuine. For Herman Blume, his need is more pronounced - a like-minded individual as a companion. But for Max, this need is embroiled in teenage trepidation and uncertainty. Max, since the beginning of the film, is constructed to be viewed as a well-put-together boy. He mimics an adult, in his approaches and mentality. He acts as a puppeteer, the master of his life. This analogy is perfectly depicted in the film by portraying Max as the director of the many *Rushmore* school plays.

Max is seen as capable of achieving everything that he wants. To achieve his dreams Max isn't afraid of taking any detours like lying about his father's profession to be on the same level as his peers or even making up obscene stories about him and his chapel partner's mother to boast about his social image. Yet Max's real needs remain shrouded. But after meeting Miss Rosemary Cross, Max as a character begins to shift. His perfect persona crumples and his thoughts and actions are aligned to Rosemary Cross. His efforts of reinstating the Latin language as a subject at *Rushmore* or even building a school aquarium under the guise of uplifting the quality of education at *Rushmore* were just immature yet grandeur attempts to appeal and attract Miss Cross.

This exhibits Max's true self as it portrays that he has ever done anything for himself. He is always engaged in activities with a seriousness that mimics an adult. He is never once seen acting like the fifteen-year-old that he is. The only glimpses of vulnerability that we see in Max are when Max fails to vie for Miss Cross's affection or in the presence of his father, a jovial old man to whom Max has nothing to prove. Max's needs are visceral- rooted in the grief of his dead mother and the need to be vulnerable without succumbing to the pressure of adulthood that Max himself places onto his shoulders.

And so, as Max's actions grow to be deplorable and makes him a rather despicable character, the vulnerability shines through; a young boy in the cusps of adulthood, the weight of expectation thrust onto his shoulders by himself. It is this very quality that both the viewers and Rosemary Cross see and recognise and makes Max Fischer a character of redeemable quality. Max Fischer and Herman Blume are hence characters that mirror each other in the most unlikely of ways. Herman Blume sees himself in the young and ambitious Max. Meanwhile, Max Fischer sees an idol in Herman Blume- a role model who he wishes to be in the future. While both characters bounces and ricochets in the course of the film, the film finds its success when both characters see each other in the eye at the end, recognising a bond that existed between them that went unseen in the chaos.

The enigmatic Rosemary Cross is the third and perhaps the most dynamic character of the film. Rosemary's introduction into the film can be seen as the rising action for the plot of the film. When introduced, the widowed teacher, with her ingenuity and originality raises interest amongst the viewers as well as within Max Fischer. Passionate and kind, Rosemary Cross conveys a sense of security in the busy buzzing world of Max Fischer.

But soon, following her introduction to Herman Blume, Cross's originality is overshadowed by the male characters. Suddenly, Rosemary is transformed into a prized

commodity, vied by both Fischer and Blume. She is suddenly defined by her connections and affection towards the male character.

Even as Rosemary Cross finds herself as the unwilling participant in a love triangle, she never falters or hesitates regarding her position. She maintains her morals strictly as a person of authority towards Max's romantic inclinations towards her. Even whilst navigating her grief of losing her husband, Cross does not shy away from providing moral support and encouragement for Max Fischer. But her husband's death is also a metaphorical shackle for her, as her grief and guilt prevent her from entering into a relationship with Herman Blume. This is portrayed in the film wherein Herman reveals to Max the end of his relationship with Rosemary by saying "She's in love with a dead guy anyway" (*Rushmore*, 01:04:46-01:04:48).

Rosemary undergoes many extremes in the course of the film from being the object of many romantic ploys, being the cause of disruption between the relationship of Fischer and Blume, and navigating her life in the absence of her husband - all while maintaining her profession. Rosemary Cross is, easily, a character that is viable for dislike among the viewers. Yet viewers cherish her and her struggles as struggles of womanhood. Rosemary can thus be labelled as a dynamic persona - reserved yet collected, mellow yet fastidious, rational yet emotional. Rosemary, even after devastating loss is seen to be in complete control of her life, knowing when to use her heart and when to use her rationale. Similarly, Rosemary decides to end her courtship with Herman Blume as she is still not recovered from the death of her husband. Rosemary also depicts her understanding on how her involvement has worsened and the relationship of Fischer and Blume.

Rosemary Cross, by no means, is a perfect woman. Yet the impact that she creates for herself and all those that surround her is astonishing. Although her role might seem shallow to the naked eye, Rosemary has much to offer- to Max, to Blume and to all the viewers.

A major theme exercised in this film is how death and its uncontrollable consequences play a huge role in governing a character and how they behave. Although not a pronounced theme, death reigns in the hearts and minds of our characters and exists within the actions committed by our characters. There are two deaths portrayed in this film, both of which are only mentioned in passing. First is the death of Edward Appleby, the husband of Rosemary Cross.

Very little information is made available about the character Edward Appleby. Yet his impact and effect are well portrayed in Rosemary Cross. Rosemary can be said to be the aftermath of Edward Appleby's death. From joining *Rushmore* as a teacher to declining any romantic advances that come her way- Appleby resides besides Rosemary as a ghost of grief. For Rosemary, Appleby's death is a personification of the shackles of her life-limiting her from her full potential.

Max Fischer's mother's death is another death portrayed in the film. Eloise Fischer's death was revealed when Max and Blume met up at the cemetery to put an end to the scuffle that happened between them over Rosemary. Eloise's death serves as a reminder to the viewer's how Max lacks a motherly figure in his life and how his fixation on Rosemary Cross could be limerence. But for Max as a character, the scene serves as the admission of his first defeat and his introspection into the uncertainties of adulthood.

Death, beyond its worldly altercations, is a metamorphosis for the characters as well. Death is portrayed metaphorically with Blume's loss of interest in his life. Amidst his success and reverence, Blume is, at his core, an individual who has lost his passion towards life. Drifting within a meaningless blur, Blume could be seen as suicidal even, at the beginning of the film. As Max's play on the Vietnam war comes to a close and all of the audience are engaged in dance at the end of the film, Fischer, Blume and Cross have grown beyond what

they were-what they were capable of. The events of the films can be viewed as horrid deaths that each character had to experience to present themselves as transformed individuals - free of any shackles or inhibitions that bound them previously.

Anderson's tenth feature film, *The French Dispatch* compared to *Rushmore* is a vehicle of multitudinous layers and nuances carefully crafted within the very core of the film. A special blend of themes, with ensemble cast and vibrant colour palette, Anderson's *The French Dispatch* is a passion project that is unrivalled in mastery. But beyond its pleasing visual imagery lies iron-welded themes that shine brightly and complement the aesthetics. This comic anthology is a testament to Wes Anderson- his life and his work.

The French Dispatch, a movie about a magazine run by American expatriates in the outlandish Ennui Sur Blasé, although based on a fictional town called Ennui Sur Blaise, literally meaning Boredom on jaded, its inhabitants are all individuals encompassing a passion both kindred and protected. Whether it is the French Dispatch main office, or the prison cells of Ennui Sur Blaise the riotous grounds of the chessboard revolution or the Headquarters of the Commissaire, passion runs deep within, and within the people that inhabit each of these places.

Moses Rosenthaler, the tortured artist who regains his passion for art after chancing upon his muse, Simone, finds himself invigorated, painting with any locally available supplies like powdered eggs, pigeon's blood, shackles grease amongst others. The works he creates are monumental and pure in the truest of sense, not tainted by any capitalist advances forwarded by Cadazio. His works are a symbol of his undying and honest love and admirations towards Simone. For Rosenthaler, Simone was more than a muse. Simone is the awakening of his slumbering talents. She was the Renaissance that awoke abstract art and its portrayal.

As the story moves into its next segment, the viewers are introduced to the rebelling student crowds of Ennui Sur Blaise. The chessboard revolution is the sum of small petty cases turned into a massive movement that can be encapsulated as “Les Enfants sont Grognons.” or “The children are grumpy.” Spearheaded by their young leader Zeffirelli, who is a symbol of freedom, Zeffirelli inspired mobs of unrest teens to conspire together to shape society intellectually. The bond forged between the young mob and the passion inspired by Zeffirelli is so paramount that Zeffirelli lives on as the symbol of freedom and individuality.

In the Ennui Sur Blasé police headquarters, Lt. Nescaffier, the legendary police officer and chef is the figure of undying passion. His creation of the “Police Cooking” is a result of his many years of service in the Ennui Sur Blasé police force as well as his kindred interest in cooking. Even in the dire situation of recovering from a poisoning attempt, Nescaffier’s mind runs at the very possibility of discovering a new flavour hidden within the deadly poison. His passion is evident and bright even in his weakest moments.

And finally, at the core of the film is Arthur Howitzer Jr. and his band of loyal writers. Although different in writing styles, approaches, and vision, the passion towards their craft is synonymous for all writers- be it Herbsaint Sazerac, J.K.L. Berenson, Lucinda Krementz, or Roebuck Wright. Each writer shows utmost loyalty towards their craft, keeping up with the credibility and integrity of the magazine. Arthur Howitzer Jr., a man with a vision and unprecedented passion towards his craft, devoted his life to the magazine that is *The French Dispatch*. His life’s work is a passion project that encompasses all that he wished to share into this world.

The Film takes on another player of meaning in the context of passion and individuality when it is realised that the film is inspired and modelled after *the New Yorker magazine* and its talented, original writers. Thus *The French Dispatch* is a homage to all artists and writers and storytellers who never lost their passion in the rat race of life.

Nostalgia is a common human experience- longing for something that only remains in the past tense. Nostalgia is felt everywhere, by everyone, over almost anything.

To take something so common and universally experienced as a tool to enhance a film experience is an extraordinary capability- one which Wes Anderson possesses.

Nostalgia is present in every Wes Anderson, in almost every scene and within every character.

There are Anderson touches that are entirely his own. His love of analogue gizmos and kitsch relics is found in chunky black-and-white television sets, clunking Dictaphones, record players, and bikes with seventies-style banana seats. If this were to be a children's film then it would inevitably reflect the childhood Anderson experienced. Seventies-style nostalgia is written into every frame (Nathan)

Anderson also yields Nostalgia as a tool in *The French Dispatch* as well. From Herbsaint Sazerac's comprehensive dive into the lacklustre Ennui Sur Blasé to Arthur Howitzer's death and final rites- Nostalgia is represented aptly. Memory too, is a symbol of nostalgia in the film. In *Revisions to a Manifesto*, Krementz's work on the revolutionary manifesto and her subsequent play on the chessboard revolution are a homage to Zeffirelli and his ideals. For Krementz, the chessboard revolution was beyond a news story to cover, it was her journey of self-discovery and guidance.

In *The Private Dining Room of the Police Commissioner*, Roebuck Wright recollects his experience of being a homosexual and an outsider to the society. This facet of nostalgia transforms Roebuck Wright, a character in an ensemble film into real human beings that the viewers can relate to. In a deleted segment of *The Private Dining Room of the Police Commissioner*, Roebuck Wright and Nescaffier, both expatriates, recollect their experiences of being in a foreign environment. These expatriates are on a haunting journey of "seeking something missing... missing something left behind" (*The French Dispatch*, 01:40:00 -

01:40:06). Wright departs from Nescaffier with “Maybe with good luck, we’ll find what eluded us in the places we once call home” (*The French Dispatch*, 01:40:12 - 01:40: 18).

The etymology of nostalgia is rooted in the Greek words’ *nostos*, meaning return home and *algos*, meaning pain. Thus, nostalgia, in this context can very aptly be called the experience of “the impossibility of going home again, of living in exile” (Durham).

The very last edition of the French dispatch is released as a memoir of the late Arthur Howitzer- written and published according to his penchants. Although, in the present, this last edition of *The French Dispatch* may not invoke any emotions amongst the employees of the organisation, one can anticipate the wave of emotions that will overcome the employees in the coming future.

As Dilley said in his work, *Cinema of Wes Anderson: Bringing Nostalgia to Life*, “The very titles of Wes Anderson’s films each evoke a sense of nostalgia in different ways” (Dilley). The French dispatch stands for passion, companionship, and individuality. These concepts- as diverse and removed as they tend to be, evoke nostalgia thanks to the settings, themes and characters.

“When I’m on a movie, part of that process is creating a setting for the story and a world that they live in. That is the kind of movie that I like to make, where there is an invented reality and the audience is going to go someplace where hopefully they’ve never been before. The details, that’s what the world is made of. Those are the paints” (Miller).

Wes Anderson- the globally acknowledged director is prominent in the film industry for being a director having a distinct visual style. Anderson’s distinction is marked by his symmetry, usage of a desaturated colour palette and meticulous cinematography amongst others. But an average viewer might find a Wes Anderson film to be too idiosyncratic. Wes Anderson garners much praise for his visually strong films but many overlook his recurring eccentric themes and storylines that are as distinct as his cinematography. As Elyse Durham

states “There exists in the popular imagination a misconception that the filmmaker Wes Anderson is a man of style over substance. Search for his name, and you will soon be lost in a deluge of parodies, homage and outright send-ups, all featuring his signature aesthetic: bold colours, retro accoutrements and a rollicking 1960s soundtrack” (Durham).

But Anderson, with his oeuvre of feature films and multiple short films proves that he is a man of both style and substance. As a director, Anderson not only exhibits extraordinary technical competence and vision but also proves himself as a man capable of perceiving interior meanings and presents them faithfully. “A Wes Anderson film in general defies categorization: it is not a romance, and not an action thriller, nor a mystery, nor science fiction, nor fantasy, nor horror. Instead, each of his films is what could be perceived as a somewhat outrageous combination of elements of satire, fantasy, comedy, tragedy, farce, and drama” (Dilley).

And this unique way of capturing reality, interpreting and presenting them in the most poignant and distinct manner is what makes Wes Anderson a storyteller of the most established and magnificent variety.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Andrew Sarris, along with other notable theorists like Eugene Archer and Pauline Kael, since the emergence of the Auteur theory has maintained the notion that Auteurism is not something superficial. As Andrew Sarris states “Auteurism is not now and never has been an organized religion or a secret society. There are no passwords or catchwords” (Sarris). Yet Auteurism is not something that can merely be replicated. It is an inborn talent and can only be polished and sophisticated through vision and commitment.

Since his prolific entry into the industry, Wes Anderson has been acknowledged and recognised as an auteur- the artist of his films. “His work is completely a product of his own personality, and his films aim first and foremost to be objects of art rather than populist entertainment, yet he has nonetheless built a large enough following to consistently attract top stars and the financing that comes with them” (Millman).

Be it his first film or his latest, his directorial choices shine to lend a new dimension to every project that he works with. This paper aims to establish Wes Anderson as an auteur; based on the merit of his technical competence, his distinguishable personality and the interior meanings presented in his work within the context of two of his films, *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch*.

As Sarris puts forward in his work, *Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962*, a director, in helming a project, undertakes roles “designated as those of a technician, stylist and an auteur” (Sarris).

As a technician, Anderson proves himself to be entirely accomplished, exhibiting complete understanding and control over the production process and cinematography. Anderson’s technical competence is exhibited in his films over the years, his ingenuity and

acumen being the cornerstone for crafting a visual image for his films and his image as a director.

In *Rushmore*, Anderson's second foray into feature films, one can observe the inception of Anderson's iconic and distinguishable *Mise-en-scène* as well as discover cinematography techniques like montages, symmetrical framing and bird's eye view being employed.

Rushmore also features other elements like the unique use of colour schemes, long takes and intricate production that are now synonymous with a Wes Anderson production. *The French Dispatch*, on the other hand, being one of Anderson's latest feature films, is the aggregate of Anderson's growth as a director. Featuring technical competence of remarkable stature, *The French Dispatch* is the final form of metamorphosis in Wes Anderson's journey. "I have a way of filming things and staging them and designing sets ... There were times when I thought I should change my approach, but in fact this is what I like to do. It's sort of like my handwriting as a movie director. And somewhere along the way, I think I've made the decision: I'm going to write in my handwriting" (Gross).

It is the awareness and the readiness to improve his craft that establishes Wes Anderson to be a competent technical director.

As a stylist, there is no director whose styles are as widely recognizable as Wes Anderson. "His cinematic style has been credited with inspiring a new generation of indie films such as *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004), *Garden State* (2004), and *Juno* (2007)" (Dilley). In fact, there is "No American filmmaker—not even Woody Allen—has a more recognizable aesthetic or a stronger authorial voice" (Overstreet).

Be it the recurring cast and production, the dialogues or the visual presentation, a Wes Anderson film is always discernible. From *Rushmore* to *The French Dispatch*, Anderson's growth is a testimony, a metamorphosis of him as a director.

He is a director whose “films are extensions of his life and personality” (Nathan). The idiosyncrasies and bold choices reflect in such a perceivable manner that Wes Anderson’s filmography is recognised as a genre today.

The most important criterion in establishing a director as an auteur is the interior meanings that the director encloses within the films. The “Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director’s personality and his material” (Sarris). Andrew Sarris describes interior meanings as the soul. And by Soul, he meant the “intangible difference between one soul and another, all other things being equal” (Sarris).

Wes Anderson rightfully portrays and presents his soul to the audience by enclosing the essence of what he is and what he stands for as interior meanings within his films. In *Rushmore*, being set in Anderson’s alma mater, its young, driven protagonist who is also a theatre director seems to be a reflection of Wes Anderson himself. Thus, one can conclude that *Rushmore* is part autobiographical.

Whereas, *The French Dispatch*, beyond being a love letter to his favourite publication, is a testament to Anderson's artistic identity. Depicting artists and revolutionaries in settings and mediums where they thrive, prospered, and attain pleasure through the actual manifestations of their artistic vision, makes *The French Dispatch* a tribute to Wes Anderson, by Wes Anderson.

Many might place Anderson’s films in a category of “style over substance”, finding the whimsical visuals and colours hollow and absurd. Yet many fail to catch onto the deep meanings and themes that are presented within each of these films. “Anderson’s balance of theme and style is deceptively agile, allowing for a quick steady pace through the film that typically leads to a gut-punch of an emotional resolution” (Anastos).

The common Thematic concepts used in Wes Anderson's films include Found Family, dysfunctional families or relationships and grief among others. But amongst all other themes used in Wes Anderson films,

The most fascinating thematic concept Anderson explores is the loss of innocence, whether on a societal, cultural, or personal level. In fact, this theme enforces and adds depth to the themes previously mentioned. Most of all, it arguably explains his entire aesthetic; he looks at the world through a storybook-like lens because that's the way he processes balancing idealism through the bittersweet realities of life (Kirchgeßner).

Thus, by fulfilling all the criteria, Wes Anderson can be confidently branded as an auteur. His impact is so great that he is put alongside the likes of legendary filmmakers like Woody Allen and Martin Scorsese.

A close examination of the generic, aesthetic, and cultural significance of Wes Anderson's films, most prominently known for their whimsical, deadpan humour, deliberately and studiedly (and sometimes jarringly) unique filming techniques, extensive literary references, and interplay with historically significant literature and films (Truffaut, Welles, Lubitsch, etc.), reveals that Anderson's influence on American film culture and contemporary culture in general cannot be underestimated (Dilley).

Being branded as an auteur is a mighty feat for such a relatively young director. Yet Wes Anderson continues on his trailblazing journey without any pressures or inhibitions, unceasing in his actions of creating films with his signature.

"Although the auteur theory emphasizes the body of a director's work rather than isolated masterpieces, it is expected of great directors that they make great films every so often" (Sarris).

Both *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch* are monumental in their own ways. With the former being one of Anderson's earliest films and the latter being one of his latest, they are both pivotal in tracing Wes Anderson's growth as a director and an auteur. But beyond this, the filmography of Wes Anderson which spans nearly 3 decades has much to analyse. But, due to time constraints, this dissertation is limited to establishing Wes Anderson as an auteur based on one of his earliest and latest films. Amongst his filmography, *Rushmore* and *The French Dispatch* were chosen for this dissertation as they provide a proper yardstick to trace the growth of Wes Anderson as an auteur.

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