

Wes Anderson's *The Darjeeling Limited*. The commitment to a spiritual and cultural journey

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Abstract

Within the framework of the road movie genre, an analysis of the film *The Darjeeling Limited* is presented in the present document. In said film, the director seduces the audience with images that map a cultural-spiritual field. The story revolves around an initiatory trip and fraternal-familial encounter, in which a hypostatic narrative is identified for postmodern cinema, that director Wes Anderson portrays in non-judgmental form.

Key words: Road movie; Cinema; Cinematographic analysis; Post-modern cinema; Comedy-drama.

Our gaze fixes on the first image, which begins with a general shot that shows part of a city tinged orange, a street, and car driving full speed ahead. A harsh, direct zoom transports us into a taxi, making us spectators for a scene full of idiosyncrasy: people cramming the streets, three-wheelers and motorcycles driving the wrong way down the road, and even a cow in the middle of the main road are among the obstacles that a skilled driver must avoid to get to an overcrowded train station on time, jostling with travelers who seek an end, or perhaps a beginning. "Wait! Wait!", yells actor Bill Murray (businessman) running with two bags in his hand behind a train called *The Darjeeling Limited*. Simultaneously, in a close-up, actor Adrien Brody (Peter) is shown, with his peculiar glasses, while he listens to the song *This Time Tomorrow*, by the 60s British band, *The Kinks*.

Thus is the initial hook of *The Darjeeling Limited* (Anderson, 2007), which employs the road narrative. The notion of the journey, as an explicit part of the *road movie* theme, offers, as predestination intrigue, a car, in contrast, seconds later, to the *Darjeeling* train (representative of Indian culture, declared of world heritage by UNESCO in 1999) which is the vehicle of movement for this hybrid film (comedy-drama). It additionally will become the dialogic relationship (establishing relationships with the remainder of the movie) between visual composition and the camera's point of view. As Zavala (2003) expresses: "Roland Barthes, in his study of the codes of classical realism, the intrigue of predestination shyly reveals the

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conclusion from the story's beginning, for which reason it is only recognizable as such once the narration ends" (p. 7).

What events, what circumstances unite people? What separates them? What feelings and promises bring them together once again? Wes Anderson asks these questions in *The Darjeeling Limited*, his fifth movie about dysfunctional families, in which the societal reference to which the critique applies is the bourgeoisie conception. There is nothing further from the cosmopolitan life of the contemporary man, whose union is measured only by desire. In this sense, Anderson's film is both masculine and moralizing, and as such, many of his followers interpreted it as a failure. It is masculine because they are united by the memory of their dead father, left by the train on his way home. Here enters the myth, the woman, who in very few scenes, serves as the excuse upon which to unfold the masculine energy of the three sons who, marked by their blood, despite their physical and personality differences, are family.

Owing to the above, this is probably its director's most undervalued film, and a new demonstration of his rush to reinvent himself and not become stagnant, despite maintaining his characteristic traits. For the first time since his father's funeral the previous year, three brothers gather in India, where they begin an initiatory journey to unite once again. Two of these are played by Anderson's fetish actors: Jason Schwartzman (who co-wrote the script with he and his friend Roman Coppola) and Owen Wilson (whose character attempted suicide, something that the actor himself did that same year, just after the premiere). Further, the filmmaker made a short prequel film, entitled *Hotel Chevalier*. Although it may seem strange, Anderson's style perfectly fits within a country as varied and colorful as India. Its urban chaos portrays perfection in a story of search and redemption (Gutiérrez, 2018, s. p.)

This film, with its shades of comedy and drama, is clearly divided. First, there is a plan for the trip, made by the eldest brother (played by Owen Wilson). A year after the death of their father, the brothers go looking for their mother, who is completing a spiritual and humanitarian mission in some part of India. It is a round-trip journey. They travel to make sense of their own lives, confront their fears, clear their heads, and learn the value of new life and fatherly duties, as in the case of Adrien Brody, in his beautiful interpretation. The drama is cemented in their silences, their ever-expressive eyes (in the foreground), and coloring, campfires scattered with incense. The rituals serve as a backdrop for a recreative-spiritual act that later truly takes on meaning for them. The three brothers do not find enlightenment in temples or their tourist itinerary. The director shrewdly divided the shots (which always seek symmetry), from dramatic action, to imply the conflict between the rectangles: the train rooms, the camera, the halls, the restaurant, or the moving takes, in which the character in the center of the shot, seems to be the only thing that does not move. From the scenes inside to the natural, wide-open landscape, photographic surprise is offered by the director, especially in the window frames.

Similarly, the artifice of the trip becomes a truly spiritual trip when, in the middle of the film, after being kicked off of the train for fighting, the brothers help three youths cross a river on an improvised raft. These three children could be the men themselves. Adrien Brody (Peter) marks, with his poetic acting, this rupture. Could he be a father? He couldn't save the

child, who was fatally stricken by river rocks. The director knows to cut the scene at the most dramatic moment in the movie. We see Owen Wilson save one of the children. Later there are broken sounds and images. Water, ropes that yield and break. One of the brothers, right in the middle, runs. Later, Adrien Brody appears, full-length, and with the child in his arms, with his bright eyes and his face covered in blood. This is among the film's most dramatic scenes.

There are, then, three main characters: three brothers who come together to regain their lost confidence. The eldest brother has delusions of an authoritarian father. The second brother had a close bond with his father, but also a certain hesitance to assume the paternal role. The youngest seeks, by way of casual sex, to find security after breaking up with his girlfriend. It is a film in which the idea of family is set in chaos, discontent, misunderstanding, and division.

The hypostatic story narrative invites one to focus their attention on the reconciliation between brothers and the encounter with their mother to find internal peace. There is a chronological discourse that occurs within the train, causing various events that are epiphanies for the characters, with a shy entrance to comedy that is opaqued by sentimental gestures and traits. The slow camera, which travels horizontally and surreally, and the musical sequence in certain subjective movements, cause the aesthetic to operate linearly.

According to Sánchez (as quoted by Cuevas, 2009), the flow of images and sounds, that take on the improper function of linguistic signs capable of message transmission, and thus a story, are considered: the visual and auditory image. As indicated by García (2003), images are imbued with discursive meaning that exhibits three fundamental properties that affect the narrative structures. The following are sequence's aforementioned properties: Order, duration, and frequency (quoted by Cueva, 2014, pp. 30-31).

Jason Schwartzman, who plays Jack, adds humor to the Wes Anderson film. Owing to his drug addiction (he always drinks a cough syrup sedative) he embodies the anomalous being, contemporary addict, incapable of facing his own fears, or facing his pain. Because of this, the film refers to a moralizing and spiritual journey, not the strongest sedative in India (which actor Owen Wilson takes for his face), but rather the lack of confidence that produces the most distress.

Later, what comes of this story is a disappointing reunion with the mother, who continues to run, and an unfortunate acting hire of the great Natalie Portman, who, in her role as Jason Schwartzman's (Jack Whitman) girlfriend, only acts for a few seconds. However, only followers of Wes Anderson movies would understand the intent, as this scene is the prolongation of the *Hotel Chevalier* (2007) short film, which, in 13 minutes, narrates Jack Whitman and his girlfriend's love life. Further, the influence of the movie *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) must be underscored. It was also directed by Anderson, not only in terms of scene composition, camera movements, and color use, but also with the idea of a dysfunctional family with misunderstood characters, each of whom fight their own demons.

This post-modern film recycles elements of classical cinema, which are characteristic of Wes Anderson. By way of object centering, rapid scene change, the first straight-on character

shots draws the audience into a world of complexities, repressed personalities, and dramatic moments that completely removes them from the story's comedic action. A linear trip narration, which, from beginning to end, causes the audience to feel the agility with which the facts are presented, in one way or another, seeks to transmit the sensation of tension created in the story.

This trip is one of spiritual revelation, given in images, music, and locations that Wes Anderson chose to film, of the landscape that opens, and the pain of a death that simultaneously propels life, in its common destination. Several characters have clear objectives (to visit their mother), but after achieving this goal, unsatisfied, they opt to continue on with their lives, leaving the past behind, and finding a new version of themselves and their brothers. After their trip through India, life would never be the same.

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