Adam Page
Intro to Film
7/31/06

Conceptual Storytelling in *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*

Ever since the production of the first feature film filmmakers have looked to books and plays for material, but few have acknowledged that source within the body of the film. What a typical movie going audience experiences is usually a film that is made in the standard fashion, starting off with opening titles and ending with a scroll of ending credits, with the story sandwiched between. Simple. Wes Anderson, however, is not satisfied creating his films in the standard way. Rather, by employing framing devices, he conceptualizes the narrative, adding another layer to the film experience. While both *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums* have traditional, linear narrative structures, they are made to unfold in the style of other forms of storytelling: theatrical, in the case of the former, and literary in the latter. Structuring his films as another medium, Anderson crafts not simply films, but conceptual pieces of storytelling that appear as one thing but are undeniably another.

Anderson is credited with putting enormous emphasis on the mis-en-scene of his films. The lighting and the coloration are reflected in the wardrobe and make-up of his actors and the settings and environments of his action. In both *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*, the director crafts a world that, while clearly being treated as the present through various references, is largely removed from modernity, using mid-century signifiers like turntables and retro furnishings. This altered depiction of reality is important to note because it is not simply a design concept for how his films look, but also for how the story is told.

Rushmore is designed like a play, rather than a film. The settings are typically enclosed spaces that come off more as set pieces rather than actual places on film. The framing is tight on the actors, keeping them enclosed as if to represent them in a small space, like a stage, rather than the large expanses cameras are capable

of capturing. Long shots that emphasize the entire space of a scene are favored over close-ups. Singular close-ups are rare and oftentimes serve to reinforce the theatrical format. An example is the close-up, slow-motion, of the main character, Max Fischer, taking a bow after a performance of his play. While the cast behind him are shot in full, with both the edge of the stage, the proscenium above and the setting behind all in full view, the close-up cuts to Max as he turns to look toward the stage, audience to his back. His point of view is exactly that of the audience, both the theatrical one pictured in the film, and the audience viewing the film. For a moment, he is no longer the protagonist, but literally an audience surrogate.