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## An Auther's Depth Discovered Through a Freudian Lens: An Analysis of Wes Anderson's The Royal Tenenbaum's

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AN AUTEUR'S DEPTH DISCOVERED THROUGH A FREUDIAN LENS: AN ANALYSIS  
OF WES ANDERSON'S *THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS*

A Thesis

by

RAQUEL VICTORIA BUITRON

Submitted to Texas A&M International University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2020

Major Subject: English

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Approved as to style and content by:

Chair of Committee,	Paul J. Niemeyer
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	Deborah Scaggs
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## ABSTRACT

An Auteur's Depth Discovered Through A Freudian Lens: An Analysis of Wes Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums* (May 2020)

Raquel Victoria Buitron, B. A., Texas A&M International University;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Paul J. Niemeyer

While examining Anderson as an auteur, many aspects of his unique style allow me to relate characters and plot development to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concepts. Throughout Wes Anderson's film *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2002), I recognize specific Freudian theories of the life instinct and death drive, the pleasure and reality principles, and the Oedipus and narcissist complexes. Specifically, the children of the Tenenbaum family are prime examples of characters who attain multiple emotional flaws due to their parents' divorce early in their adolescence. Anderson is able to use his acquired film techniques to enhance two points that I will discuss: Freudian symbolism and Freudian familial and romantic relationships.

Freudian symbolism in *The Royal Tenenbaums* is noticeable with Anderson's use of clothing, dialogue, mise-en-scène, and music. The costumes of characters Chas, Margot, Richie and Eli represent the distinctive Freudian concepts of development: the death drive and the pleasure principle. The Tenenbaum children all display a strong regard for the obsession with death. Furthermore, the siblings all desire to stay within their developmental phase of Freud's pleasure principle. Anderson's use of deadpan humor within his characters' dialogue motivates me to define Royal's narcissistic qualities and Richie's development of an Oedipus complex.

The popular Freudian concepts are easily identified within the characters throughout their dialogue. Moreover, another film technique Anderson establishes as an auteur is *mise-en-scène*, a visual combination of the actor, the setting, the props, and the camera composition. The director found a way to complement Royal's narcissism and Margot and Richie's incestual love with visually stunning elements.

The symbolic elements of Freudian theories allow for a more direct approach to familial and romantic relationships where a bolder use of Freud's psychoanalysis is identified. A deeper connection to the family dynamics Anderson presents of a father and his children comes from a development of the death drive and the pleasure principle. Once they all progress from their flawed state of being, the Tenenbaum children finally develop an "inner satisfaction," something Freud considers the key to adult happiness.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

I clearly remember going to see my first Wes Anderson film at the local theater and noticed a very minute group of audience members. Although the theater was somewhat empty, most of the crowd laughed at all the same times and gave a sigh of relief when hit with dramatic twists throughout the plot. The director had a moderately minor yet loyal following after making many more films similar in style, characters, and even themes. After appreciating the artistry that is Wes Anderson, and rightfully categorizing him as an auteur, I could deduce that he creates thoughtful applications of psychoanalysis based on Sigmund Freud within his films. I can identify various connections of Freudian concepts in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2002), particularly Freud's pleasure principle, reality principle, death drive, Oedipus complex, and narcissist complex (derived from controversial psychoanalytic works including *An Autobiographical Study* [1924], *Family Romance* [1908], *On Narcissism: An Introduction* [1914], and *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* [1920]). Moreover, correlations can be made from the film to the theorist, like Freudian symbolism of characters through Anderson's use of clothing, dialogue, cinematography, and music. In addition to symbolism, one notices the familial and romantic relationships of the characters; specifically dealing with the patriarch, Royal, and the relationships he has with his children. Other noteworthy relationships include the forbidden romances in the film.

### Wes Anderson Background

After creating the short black-and-white, jazz-infused film, *Bottle Rocket* (1993) and showing it to the Sundance Film Festival in the 1990's, Wesley Wales Anderson successfully

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This thesis follows the model of the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*

became a part of the group of Texas directors who worked on indie films launching their career.

Anderson, like Richard Linklater (*Dazed and Confused* [1993], *Boyhood* [2014]) and Robert Rodriguez (*El Mariachi* [1992] and *Desperado* [1995]), was a part of a rise of new voices in Texas cinema who paved their way to Hollywood. Anderson has described his own fascination with making Super 8 movies with the help of kids in the neighborhood that he grew up in (Colloff 1). Unknowingly, Anderson started his career of filmmaking when he was going to a screenwriting class. He was attending the University of Texas (majoring in Philosophy) when he met Owen Wilson. In time, the two UT students started a friendship and discussed a variety of ideas for movies they desired to see to fruition (Colloff 1). Films like the studio version of *Bottle Rocket* (1996), *Rushmore* (1998), and *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) have all been co-written by Anderson and Wilson. Eventually, fans noted the connection between Anderson and Wilson's personal childhood experiences, and stylistic preferences throughout the movies they have created together. Directing all the films co-written with Wilson, Anderson's reputation became stellar in his unique style of moviemaking.

### **Auteur**

When Anderson came on the film scene in the 1990's, Hollywood was investing in up-and-comers from the independent movie genre which is known as Indiewood. Unfortunately, others in the field would "think of creative new ways to slag\_ [him, But his critics were] unable to acknowledge that Anderson has become the most gifted, playful, near-miraculous filmmaker currently at work in the United States, creator of an unbroken string of masterpieces and near-masterpieces" (Austerlitz 382). Because of a lack of mainstream popularity in major theaters, many audience members may have been confused due to Anderson's use of eccentric director qualities such as unusual deadpan comedy in the dialogue or repeated symmetrical composition

in the cinematography throughout the movie. Looking at an Anderson film is like watching a miniature version of what Saul Austerlitz calls “cinematic dollhouses: their wonder is in the perfection of their recreation of the larger world outside their frames” (382). The director launches a detailed picture of an exaggerated story with over the top characters, like a controlled story from a book he chooses. Anderson creates a visually enhanced story with beautiful imagery and exaggerated mise-en-scène, leaving room for Freudian themes like Oedipal complexes found in films like *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007). This film shows how three brothers travel through a visually stunning India to find their estranged mother a year after their father died. Even after the rejection they face throughout their lives, they unconsciously follow their underserving mother to seek attention and eventually gain closure. The Oedipus complex can be seen in all three brothers, particularly the older one, Francis, who plans the surprise visit to their mother without the others, Peter and Jack, knowing. The obsession with and fascination of seeing their mother after they are directly rejected connects to the Freudian notion of a boy who feels guilt or shame for having an unconscious desire for his mother. The death of the father, James Whitman, allows for the three brothers to look for their desire for their mother. I feel that this openly Freudian theme is alienating to modern viewers because it deals with the psychoanalytic patterns of dealing with suggestive Oedipal complexes, wealthy familial relationships and easy unfiltered dialogue are uninspiring and detached from his audience.

A few critics like Nigel Andrews and Jeremy Gordon consider Anderson to be pretentious and disconnected towards meaningful cinema, I wish to counter those who say Anderson is not an auteur by looking at his first film, *Bottle Rocket*, which establishes his important themes. The black- and-white film includes origins to Anderson’s style: a robbery heist that is planned by a group of friends who have nothing better to do with their time than to

get into boyish shenanigans. The filmmaker willingly attempts a different approach to movies by including a vulnerable element to his characters, even if they have a flawed personality like Dignan (Owen Wilson). Similarly, in the printed script from *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Royal proves to illustrate his vulnerability when he admits in the script, “Me too” after hearing Eli Cash, a friend of the Tenenbaum’s “always wanted to be a Tenenbaum” (Anderson and Wilson 109). The expectancy of accomplishments at such an early stage in Anderson’s career was nowhere near the average he was doing far more than other young filmmakers at similar times in their careers. Pamela Colloff explains how “at an age when most aspiring auteurs are still either lucklessly grinding away at film school or doing grunt work on other directors’ films [Anderson] already gained access to the seemingly impenetrable world of Hollywood” (1). Wes Anderson’s aesthetic is easily identifiable as eclectic and witty. Moreover, Anderson’s audience surrenders to the overall complexity of details he creates through his artistry and thoughtfulness in storytelling. The director’s vision is seen in the “music, framing, editing, comic rhythm—all are utilized to precisely calibrate an aura that is Anderson’s alone. The director is “A remarkably gifted manipulator of sound and image, Anderson’s films are overstuffed with jokes, asides, and blink-and-you-miss-it details” (Austerlitz 382). The filmmaker’s use of cinematography and Freudian themes of the death drive and Oedipus complex are the key to opening a deeper analysis of his work. Anderson succeeds in creating his films with a formalistic style so audience members can connect to his flawed characters. I believe Anderson’s experience with divorce at a young age allows the auteur to envision a dramedy, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, and write about the effects of a common family conflict in our society,

To better understand Anderson’s auteurism, terms need to be established in film. Like literature, film has distinctive marks that a true artist or author illustrates. This is how the

audience can spot a director's familiar technique, and the overall piece seems to blend into the other works made by the same director. The American film critic Andrew Sarris defines an auteur as a director who accomplishes a masterpiece of unique style and presentation within their films "the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature" (Sarris 562). Writing about the term auteur in an essay in *American Cinema* (1962), Sarris explained how a director can be compared to a great painter, writer, or composer when they create their films. Sarris continues to say the works of art contain similar qualities; patterns the appreciator notices. Although one recognizes Sarris as a monumental American film critic, he based his auteur definition on Andre Bazin, whose was responding to the French movement of the 1960's and whose groundbreaking essay, "De la Politique des Auteurs" argues that the auteur maintains his unique style of directing, like an author of a book. It is easily identifiable throughout the auteur's career. Bazin was an influential voice in French cinema and was known to approach in comparison with an artist and his works of art (Bazin 21). The French theorist believes the idea of defining what makes a true auteur can be "the social determinism, the historical combination of circumstances, and the technical background which to a large extent determines it" (22). In addition to Bazin's auteur description, I believe there should also be an appreciation for the individuality of the artist.

Wes Anderson's film *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2002) proves his auteur qualities in film. There are many different aspects of the director's style that answer the calling of Bazin's definition of the auteur. His Freudian themes including the death drive obsession and the pleasure principle are seen within his comedic take of the authentic and approachable dysfunctional family. Critic Donna Kornhaber says, "Within Anderson's meticulously arranged

and hyper-articulated film frames lie capacious questions of emotion, trauma, memory, aging, family, ethics, culture, literature, and filmmaking that scholars are still just beginning to explore” (128). There are more to Anderson’s visual representation of humanity through fundamental themes everyone can identify with. Identifying as a modern auteur specifically as an auteur of more recent time (decades after the original term had been used by many critics to identify well known auteurs in cinema like Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, and William Wellman) where the director also writes the screenplays for their films, now requires them to be a jack-of-all trades (Redmond and Batty 1). Other directors of modern auteur status include Quentin Tarentino, Tim Burton, Christopher Nolan, and Noah Baumbach. Critic Claudia Gorbman’s essay, “Auteur Music,” defines such directors like Wes Anderson as an “auteur melomanè,” directors who have a passion or even an obsession with music. Their films contain a great influence from the director, solely the music visionary who from time to time receives assistance from a composer or music director, like Mark Mothersbaugh; he has been a constant source of music in the majority of Anderson films since *Bottle Rocket* premiered. Not only does the choice of music define the director’s style, Anderson invests in great time and consideration towards the visual aesthetic known as the *mise-en-scène*.

### **Synopsis of *The Royal Tenenbaums***

Anderson’s take on a dysfunctional family surviving a divorce, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, starts with Royal (Gene Hackman) and Etheline Tenenbaum (Anjelica Huston) separating after having three children, Chas (Ben Stiller), Margot (Gwyneth Paltrow), and Richie (Luke Wilson), within a decade of living in a well-developed home on Archer Avenue. Etheline has made it a point to continue to raise the children with an extreme motherly devotion to each child’s unique gifts and talents, and she writes a book that is mentioned briefly, *Family of Geniuses* (The

literary reference to an imaginary book allows audience members to notice Anderson's appreciation for literature, another aspect of his unique style). Oldest of the Tenenbaum children, Chas, becomes known as the business savvy child who creates a new species of the mouse: Dalmatian mice. He invests in real estate property and thrives in financial aspects. The middle child, Margot, is a gifted playwright, wins an award of fifty thousand dollars in the ninth grade for her writing, and is introduced as the only adopted child of the Tenenbaum family. Richie, the youngest of the three, develops talent in tennis, learns to play the drums, and establishes himself as a mediocre painter. As they grow up, they see less and less of their father, Royal. Most of the film takes place 22 years after the breakup, when the children are grown, have their own marriages, children, and travel. The odd romantic connection between Margot and Richie Tenenbaum starts at an early age but is never directly addressed. Chas gets married and becomes a father to two sons. His wife tragically dies in a plane crash where all the other family members, including the family dog, Buckley, survive. Chas's life now consists of being an overprotective father who tries to keep his sons safe at any cost. Although Chas goes through enough to deny any realization of having a nervous breakdown, Margot moves back into her childhood home after hearing Chas and his sons vacate their apartment to find a safer place of refuge on Archer Avenue. After admitting she finds herself in a rut and loveless marriage, the middle child leaves her current residence with her husband, Raleigh St. Clare, (Bill Murray) a celebrity neurologist. Otherwise Margot stays in her bathroom all day soaking in a tub with a mini television strapped to a radiator next to her. In due course, Etheline fishes her out of depression as she helps move her back into the Tenenbaum house. Later, Richie follows suit after he hears about Royal's recent cancer diagnosis and also struggles with his own form of

depression after admitting to his best friend, Eli Cash (Owen Wilson), via telegram that he has fallen in love with his adopted sister Margot.

Eventually, the Tenenbaum children return to their mother's home as conflicted adults, where they strive to evolve into mature and well-rounded people. Coincidentally, Royal is kicked out of the hotel he has been staying in for years due to his unemployment. Royal attempts to reconcile with his estranged wife whom he has not lived with for twenty-two years while trying to parent his adult children through their life obstacles. The selfish patriarch manages to get in his wife's good graces under false pretenses and finds residence in his old home. He pretends he is dying of cancer and uses his family's compassion to his advantage. Now Royal becomes enthralled with his grandchildren and tries to involve himself in their lives. Soon after, Sherman discovers Royal's diagnosis of cancer is false and announces it. Royal is kicked out of the house and gets a job at the hotel where he had lived prior to moving back in with his family. The Tenenbaum father realizes he truly will miss being an active member of his family. Sadly, Richie attempts suicide after finding out from a private investigator that his sister Margot was not only cheating on her husband repeatedly throughout their marriage but was recently discovered having an affair with his best friend, Eli. Margot eventually admits she was using Eli to find some sort of connection to her brother. Eli becomes a drug addict with his minimal fame as a critically acclaimed author and reconnects with Richie. Furthermore, Royal soon realizes he has developed somewhat better relationships with his children and his estranged wife. He becomes a better father with true affection towards his family after years of not contributing to the prosperity of the children's healthy development into adulthood. Soon after Royal's forced separation from the Tenenbaum home the loyal patriarch gives Etheline divorce papers so that

she may marry Sherman. They celebrate with a wedding ceremony where everyone is in attendance.

Eli attempts suicide when he drives his car into the front of the house but he manages to survive. At the end of the film, Royal passes away in an ambulance and Chas stays with him until he dies. The Tenenbaums find closure to their family issues and begin newly reconciled relationships. Chas and his children have a new understanding of letting go of fear and having fun. Margot and Richie become romantically linked. The family, now purged of conflict, accepts adulthood and their new lives together. A multitude of Anderson's other films (*Rushmore*, *Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *The Darjeeling Limited*, and *Moonrise Kingdom*) are like *The Royal Tenenbaums* in that they also have a community that works on fixing their flaws together.

### **Film Terminology**

The mise-en-scène of a film are all the elements that contribute to the “placing on stage,” like the actors, lighting, decor, props, costumes (hair and makeup), frame, and camerawork. An auteur gives a unique style to these elements allowing for the audience to appreciate the characters and their relationships throughout the film. Wes Anderson promotes his story through the cast of actors he has used in his film career, including Bill Murray (*The Royal Tenenbaums*, *Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *Isle of Dogs*) and Luke and Owen Wilson (*The Royal Tenenbaums*, *Darjeeling Limited*, *Bottle Rocket*) among other well-known actors. The auteur has also made a brand name for himself by creating an “Andersonian Mood.” According to Austerlitz, Anderson films usually have a mix of emotions, like “bittersweet, tinged with regret and marked by loss; but the sheer inventive energy of his jewel-box films, and the comic engine that drives them, gives them a vigor not necessarily found in their plots” (382). A scene that

features an actor (typically a white male) who is the focal point of the use of lighting within a wide-angle lens and a particular orange and red hued color palette depicts a troubled neurotic character who usually finds a psychoanalytical flaw. The significance to the visual aids in understanding how Freudian symbolism occurs in Anderson's films allows the character's vices to become emphasized through the film. Keith Phipps observes a connection to Anderson and his appreciation for Charles Schulz characters. The actor's costume in an Anderson film is somewhat memorable of that specific character, like a Charles Schulz *Peanuts* character. In fact, the auteur draws great influence from the comic creator in his movies: "Like Schulz, Anderson creates characters who are identifiable from a distance by the clothes they wear and their defining characteristics (Linus' blanket, Margot's fur-and-Lacoste ensembles, and so on) and like Schulz, he isn't afraid to dangle his characters over the edge of the abyss, even if he's unwilling to let them go" (Phipps 1). Anderson distracts his characters with pangs of existential crises like Schulz's Charlie Brown character always dealing with life angst. Furthermore, the film's setting includes specific dated and detailed furniture or objects from a certain era of the past. Anderson is known for his eclectic, sophisticated, and nostalgic style, boldly representing a great appreciation for literature and all its similar elements towards film. Some props in the Anderson movies force the audience to not only invest in the characters and how they act and what they wear but also in the objects that surround them. The filmmaker motivates the viewers to gravitate towards unique elements in the scene of a film with objects like a B.B. visibly protruding under the skin of an actor's hand, a cut glove from Margot's collection, and a book in the introduction of the movie. The filmmaker has shown a high brand of specifically tailored objects like in *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007). I notice the director has Marc Jacobs, the eminent Artistic Director of Louis Vuitton, create luggage inspired by the film that would be the focal

point for some of the most prominent scenes in the movie. The three brothers of the film wear and use the luggage throughout the movie, allowing the audience to identify the characters as literally wearing their emotional baggage after dealing with the loss of their father, J.P. Whitman and attempting to reunite as a family. The luggage is detailed and thoughtful like the director with his craft of filmmaking. The visual of “a series of tropical motifs – giraffe, rhinoceros, antelope and palm tree – the luggage is perhaps a metaphor” (Classic Driver Magazine 1). Anderson’s choice of specific objects to showcase follow suit with how the director chooses certain schools of film theory to showcase in his cinematic works of art. Moreover, Anderson’s directing style consists of a combination of Formalist and Realism film theories. The contrast in the two dynamic theories creates what is known as the “Anderson Aesthetic.” A realistic theme and/or plot including depression, forbidden love with formalist (extreme visuals to give a sense of the surreal) qualities to heighten the viewer into a new version of an everyday problem or occurrence. First, the Formalist film theory suggests the ability to shape a story with an emotion using fantasy and surreal visuals. Another brilliant creator of film, Buster Keaton, can also be seen in Anderson’s use of formalist scenes within his film with minor yet meaningful shreds of slapstick humor (Ramos 1). Anderson not only creates great imaginative settings consisting of fantasy-like scenes, he also maintains a stability of real situations and themes. The way Anderson decides to manipulate the realism with the scope of formalist lens compliment the auteur’s style. Realism consists of a mirror of the real world and has little or no distortion in film. Anderson’s realist elements ascertain symmetrical compositions, long takes with pans and moving camera, and the use of deep focus are noted quite often in his movies (*The Royal Tenenbaums*, *Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, *The Darjeeling Limited*, and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*) and contribute to qualifying Anderson as auteur.

## Freud Theory

Some important concepts seen in *The Royal Tenenbaums* are all based on Freud's controversial theories about a pleasure principle and death drive. One must understand the basic parts to these theories and why they should be used to magnify the abundance of character development of self and relationships within the Tenenbaum family. Initially, the pleasure principle can be described through example: when a child feels the urge to want something that is seen immediately like candy and not giving way to any control, the child grabs it without any remorse or sense of conscious. Although childhood allows the pleasure principle to be excused because there is a lack of experience the child has in the world, later the same individual should shift naturally to the reality principle. In such a transition, a person will have options of the outcome, not a guarantee in getting what one desires; moreover, the candy may be someone else's like a teacher's or principal's (Freud 596). If this is the case, the candy may become connected to unpleasure, a sense of not feeling excitement but a displeasure in the rejection or repression of the candy. Many average people shift from the principles at ease, willingly wanting to be a part of the "mature" version of themselves and letting go of the recklessness they once knew (597). In Anderson's film, key characters like Chas, Margot, Richie, and Eli all find a delay in the change of principles based on their childhood trauma: a parent divorce, or in Eli's case, a lack of parent involvement. Another significant Freudian aspect represented in Anderson's film are the life and death instinct. Love and life stand against aggression and death in Freud's essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Suggesting a human's life preserving instincts are always countered by destructive impulses, Freud observed some people who dealt with a severe trauma and activated the death drive. The desire to self-destruct was stronger than usual with those who experienced trauma (Freud 606). Moreover, the destructive mode explains why

humans do reckless and unintelligent things and display irrational behavior towards life. Mainly, Freud treated “traumatic neuroses,” a type of reoccurrence of a certain traumatic experience (607). Anderson’s characters, particularly Margot, Richie, and Eli, escape their life instincts and turn to the death drive. Freudian themes of the shift from the pleasure principle to the reality principle, the imbalance between the life instinct and the death drive, and the destruction of the Oedipus and Narcissist complex can be viewed within Anderson’s use of visual and auditory techniques in film. The characters and their relationships can be appreciated when seen through a popular psychoanalytical lens of Sigmund Freud.

Sigmund Freud was known for his revolutionary theory of psychoanalysis including popular terms like “pleasure principle,” death drive”, and “Oedipus complex.” The Austrian neurologist practiced analyzing multiple patients throughout his lifetime, identifying various neuroses and curing them of issues that affected them. Freud created a theory using mental processes of development defined as “primary” and “secondary” principles in his essay *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911). The primary process is regulated by the “pleasure principle” while the secondary process is regulated by the “reality principle” (301). Coping with pressures from within the self and the outside world, the two principles manage to co-exist (301). Furthermore, the process of repression allows one to establish a control during waking life using the reality principle. When Freud included repression as a part of the development of the neuroses, he gathered an “insight to this connection” (301). Repression is “simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious” (570). Neurotics, also known as people who have a neurosis, usually avoid the reality principle because they find it “unbearable” (301). The denial of reality happens to a patient when they are unable to handle the truth of a situation in their life. The

ignorance of the reality pushes the person to repress the truth. Infancy and early childhood go through multiple phases that allow a person to transition through healthy mental development, according to Freud (“Freud: Genius of the Modern World” 1). For instance, the oral phase was the first stage where infants gained satisfaction through taking milk. The sexual connection found from an infant was towards their mother because she was the one feeding them. The development of another theory, the Oedipus complex, comes from the experience in this stage. The infant does not intentionally know it has an attraction to its mother. Freud refers to the unconscious being in control of these mental processes that help shape our sexual identity and sexual orientation (“Freud: Genius of the Modern World” 1).

The unconscious is what Freud says is a hidden source of what makes us who we are (“Freud: Genius of the Modern World” 1). Our past experiences echo in our present life and has something to tell us. Freud had a connection to his past when he saw a Greek tragedy on stage. Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, a play where Freud discovered a truth to himself. Oedipus finds he has killed his own father and married and had children with his mother unknowingly. This led him to stab his own eyes out from shame and guilt. The psychoanalyst remembered being jealous of his father and attracted to his own mother, an experience Freud theorizes we all go through during childhood. Freud assumed we all must work through this conflict. For example, little boys have a fear of castration as punishment for seeking possession of their mother. Girls were infatuated with their father and had to deal with complex feelings of inferiority because they did not have a penis (penis envy) (“Freud: Genius of the Modern World” 1). After lecturing on how everyone had an energy of the sexual drive as a component of the life instinct or libido, World War I redirected Freud’s concepts on the human psyche and the principles to which it must submit. The death drive came into the picture after soldiers were returning home with “shell shock.” A

term used to describe soldiers who would involuntarily shiver, cry, fearful, and were interrupted by their everyday lives by mental flashbacks of the war, even misguiding their memory (Joseph 1). These soldiers were known to have physiological flaws but were not acknowledged as psychological ailments. The same soldiers were going back into war after a quick recovery, only to come home psychologically flawed forever. This led to the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a neurosis where a patient uncontrollably relives painful traumatic experiences repeatedly. Freud saw how there was an instinctive desire to go to a path of nonexistence. He declared it was a natural part of us all to have a “Thanatos” or death drive. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud describes the death drive to be the second basic force in the mind, a biological capacity to self-destruct (“Freud: Genius of the Modern World” 1). There are fatal psychological impulses within us to undo the bonds of life. Soon after Freud’s emphasis on the death drive, he explains how the mind is made up of three elements: the id, the superego, and the ego. The id is defined as the unconscious or place where our hidden desires, our passions, like the death drive and our urge for sex reside. An internal subconscious that puts impossible ideals and allows us to mercilessly criticize ourselves is known as the superego. Navigating between the id and superego is the ego, a balance of the two elements (“Freud: Genius of the Modern World” 1). After defining multiple areas for psychoanalysis theory, I noticed how I could identify popular psychoanalysis concepts within the characters and their relationships within *The Royal Tenenbaums*.

Although Freud’s pleasure and reality principle are identified within the infancy or early childhood stages, the Tenenbaum children can be approached as working in the balance of the principles due to a rational point given by the psychoanalyst. Critic Ralph Von Tresckow Napp “It is basically necessary to realize that all who we are today, according to Freud, is only a

refined reflection of all that we became in approximately our first six years of life” (70). Some people stay stuck in a part of important mental development and manage to maintain an imbalance of the pleasure and reality principle. Many flaws are seen in the Tenenbaum family, especially after traumatic events occur in their lives. The prestigious family depicts a humorous yet realistic picture of a modern American family coping with various conflicts together. After observing the influence Freud made on the American family in terms of everyday life, Von Tresckow Napp observes how “Families are responsible in guiding children through the limits of our culture. The parent who neglects this leadership handicaps a child many times to the point of mental illness” (69). A devoted parent will attempt to do the best for their children, especially after a divorce. Etheline Tenenbaum creates a strategic plan for her children to succeed in excelling in their education and talents; however, the devoted mother lacked practice in helping her children emotionally. Freud would tell Etheline to connect to her children emotionally and train them in developing healthy psychological wellness. Von Tresckow Napp goes on to explain how:

This discipline is the insurance that protects us from ourselves in time of future need.

Abnormalities can set in if the training is too strong or too weak. The balanced road is not an easy one but a necessary one. Therefore, parents must accept the responsibility in training children. This doesn't mean they must be well educated and intelligent. It only means that they must emotionally feel, as well as, think within their capacity and in so doing recognize increasingly the symptoms in their children that suggest serious disturbances (69-70).

Understanding that a parent will need to be there for their children emotionally allows for a lower rate of neuroses dealing with any childhood issues the patient has unconsciously held onto

over time. Royal would assist his adult children in becoming emotionally stable. Royal's selfish existence shifts to servicing his children through their problems. Freud suggests "Without a devoted period of some sort of service to mankind we are not whole or qualified enough to attain the prize of inner satisfaction" (69). When a person can say that they worked or serviced mankind, they will be able to have a great sense self-satisfaction. A whole family misses a sustained period of work after the parents separate. The lack of work service not only resonates with Royal, but also with Chas, Margot, and Richie. Because the children were cut short of their careers at an early age, leaving their chosen work paths at the top of their game, the three Tenenbaum children are left with an absence of inner satisfaction. Furthermore, they were never consoled after the parent separation from either Etheline or Royal, leaving them out of practice with emotional coping strategies. I noticed that the theme of lacking inner satisfaction helps establish Anderson's auteur quality because of how he writes it into his films. Ultimately the family and their relationships with each other advances the growth of their inner satisfaction.

## Chapter Two

### Freudian Symbolism in *The Royal Tenenbaums*

Freud's influence can be seen in Anderson's use of clothing, dialogue, mise-en-scène, and music within *The Royal Tenenbaums*. One of the psychoanalytic theories is the pleasure principle which acknowledges the biological "self-preservation of the organism among the difficulties of the external world, it is from the very outset inefficient and even highly dangerous" (Freud 596). In other words, the push of the pleasure principle should be recognized as a natural detrimental trait. Freud's pleasure principle, a reckless desire to gain something wanted immediately, connects to the wardrobe of the characters, particularly the children of the dysfunctional family.

#### Costumes

Because each child takes instant gratification in staying in a successful point of time in their lives, they commit to remaining in the same attire as they did when they were children. Due to "peak[ing] early in life," Chas, Margot, and Richie were happiest before they became adults because their talents allowed them to excel at such a young age (Anderson 1). Rachel Joseph suggests, "The characters seem to play dress-up as adults--never really living in their own skin, like a kid trying on her mother's shoes, hopelessly big and ill fitting" (217). Joseph explains how the Tenenbaum children refuse to wear their wardrobe comfortably. Like the pressure that was put on them as young geniuses, the clothing represents the high expectations set on the children at too young of an age. All the pressure and lack of success after hearing about their parents' separation creates an imbalance of the pleasure and reality principle in the three Tenenbaum children.

## Chas 's Wardrobe

Initially, Chas's character wears a business suit as a preteen and, as the narrator tells us, "since elementary school, [had] taken most of his meals in his room, standing up at his desk with a cup of coffee, to save time" (0:2:23). The pleasure principle associated with Chas's direct happiness navigates him to the territories of business and financial management and are represented when wearing his suit. According to Freud, "The ego itself, it often succeeds in overcoming the reality principle, to the detriment of the organism as a whole" (596). The theorist describes how the repetitive practice of using the pleasure principle negates any way of transitioning to the next step to maturity and patience of receiving the desired object or not receiving it at all: the reality principle. In the film, twenty-two years pass and the ease of being able to control what Chas delighted in suspended his development when he could not properly grieve his wife after she dies in a plane accident later in the film. The lack of control shifts Chas into the reality principle where he impatiently waits for something wrong to happen. After having a random fire drill at night, Chas decides to go his mother's house because he feels his current residence is not safe enough. The widower and his two sons head to Etheline's house while her usual Bridge group is playing in the dining room. Surprised by her son's abrupt arrival, Etheline's concern is communicated for Chas who seems unhinged and paranoid like in this detailed scene:

ETHELINE. Chas?

Chas stops in the doorway. Pagoda leads Ari, Uzi, Anwar, and Buckley out of the room, up the stairs.

ETHELINE. What's going on?

CHAS. We got locked out of our apartment.

Etheline seemed confused.

...

CHAS. It's not safe over there.

...

CHAS. The apartment. I have to get some new sprinklers and a back-up security system installed.

ETHELIN. But there're no sprinklers here, either.

Chas looks up and studies the ceiling. He shrugs.

CHAS. Well, we might have to do something about that, too. (0:13:48)

Deciding to go home where he lived his successful childhood in business, Chas brings his sons along with some bags to stay over for a while. Paranoid and disconnected, Chas starts to lose his younger, successful, and creative identity as a widower in his late thirties. The widower feels better represented with his new sporty attire. In the scripted scene the narrator explains, "He is thirty-six and in top fighting condition" (Anderson and Wilson 11). The widower now focuses on being in the best shape of his life wearing a red jumpsuit, a uniform he and his sons use throughout the film. The single father's choice of red symbolizes his sense of pain, fear, and warning. Critic Kent Jones agrees "a mountain of hyped-up, burning anger in a red tracksuit" is what the control freak deems is his new representation of the reality that is his life (1). The symbolism of Chas's attire reveals the "shift from his pleasure principle (business) to his reality principle (concerned widower of two sons). Freud mentions "so the reality-ego need do nothing but strive for what is useful and guard itself against damage" (304). When addressing the reality ego, a navigator between the pleasure and reality principle protects itself from any damage.

### **Margot's Attire**

Chas is not the only character in Anderson's film to wear symbolic attire, his adopted sister manages to also have a thoughtful clothing choice representing her Freudian flaws. Margot Tenenbaum dresses in a unique mix of style at the beginning of the film when the film script describes she "is ten, with a barrette in her hair, wearing a knitted Lacoste dress and penny loafers" (Anderson and Wilson 1). Notably her short blonde hairstyle and charcoal eyeliner emphasize a girl who is troubled and still insists on staying a victim of childhood rejection.

Freudian theory explains how Margot's choice of remaining in her childhood wardrobe allude to her indulging in the pleasure principle. Freud's theory explains how the pleasure principle "keep[s] the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant" (595). Keeping the desired object around the person continuously will adhere to remaining in the said principle. Anderson frames Margot as a once successful person of the past who securely attaches to her safety net: her wardrobe. The knitted Lacoste dress, barrette, and penny loafers symbolize her sophisticated youth as a wealthy adopted child of Royal Tenenbaum. From a Freudian perspective, Margot's youthful clothing shows her stability in the reality principle; the thirty-something-year-old daughter accepts her adopted title from her father. In contrast, Margot covers her true feelings for Richie ( a tie to Margot's pleasure principle), her younger brother when she wears her fur coat. The use of the theory suggests she has a maturity to her that she uses to cover up her sense of the pleasure principle. Anthony Lane underscores Margot's wardrobe "with the sad, swish perfection of her Fendi mink, she seems smaller and more defenseless than her earlier self" (Lane 1). An unconscious motivation to remain stuck in a self-destructive phase, the once enthusiastic playwright does not exist in her anymore, an obvious distinction seen in her wardrobe choice. Margot's pleasure principle of childhood success shadows the insecurity of her lackluster adulthood. The sophisticated uniform Margot wears for years keeps her in the mindset of her early rise to success as a young playwright. The elegance of the brown fur coat represents a wealthy character who, despite her lack of career stability, keeps a distinguished style. Conflicted with herself, Margot's wardrobe represents a contrast of maturity and youth.

### **Richie's Outfit**

Alongside his siblings, Richie displays a symbolic representation of his Freudian faults

through his tennis ensemble. At the beginning of the film, the script describes Richie as “eight, with long hair, parted on the side, dressed in a Bjorn Borg style tennis outfit and a headband” (Anderson and Wilson 1). Richie’s professional tennis player wardrobe remains a part of his way to stay in the moment of his successful tennis career. Inevitably years pass and the audience sees the thirty-two-year-old resemble his former self with a beard and dark sunglasses covering his famous face. Not only does Richie hide his identity for the shame and guilt he has for his tennis career downfall, but he also attempts to cover up his affection for his sister. Hiding from his own feelings for his sister are something that assist in Richie remaining in his pleasure principle, where his immediate gratification is met with staying frozen in a time where it was acceptable to be in love with Margot. Furthermore, a sweatband remains on the middle child the entire film until he finally evolves into a better version of himself. The aged athlete sports a beige blazer with a tennis jersey underneath. Anderson describes Richie in the script as “thirty-two, with long hair, parted on the side, and a beard. He wears a khaki suit, a striped tennis shirt, a headband, and penny loafers” (Anderson and Wilson 12). The youngest Tenenbaum keeps his childhood attire throughout the film, now including a blazer and sunglasses. The new accessories to Richie’s wardrobe represent ways in which the professional tennis player protects himself from his own reality principle. The sunglasses Richie wears manage to provide a sense of security, a way to safely stand still in his professional and personal life. Eventually the expulsion of the considerate and insecure tennis pro who “cuts his trademark 1970’s tennis-pro hair and begins to shave his beard, removing all vestiges” of his past when he attempts suicide (Anderson and Wilson 34). The Freudian symbolism of Richie’s pleasure principle leaving him, creating a more direct and mature Richie who finds Margot and confesses his love for his sister shifting his mental process into the reality principle (Anderson and Wilson 102) after he cuts his

wrists and almost dies. Richie can now keep a healthy balance of both the pleasure and reality principle. Freud explains how “under the influence of the ego’s instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle” (596). The transition from the sense of security that the beard and long hair (Richie’s pleasure principle protected) to a short buzz cut where the viewer can see the character as his most vulnerable self. Wearing a set of 70’s sunglasses along with a tennis sweatband with a beard symbolizes the loss of vision after a specific traumatic situation, like losing a big tennis match that ruined his career. Richie wears the pair of sunglasses twenty-two years later, where the wardrobe accessory is a focus in the film. Freud explains, “the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it” (304). There is no end to either principle within the mental processes of the brain, only a constant fight for control between pleasure and reality. The “safeguarding” of Richie’s pleasure principle symbolized by his sunglasses and facial hair goes back to when he felt his most vulnerable in an important tennis match. There is a flashback that begins with details of “Margot and Raleigh, holding hands, watch from their seats in a courtside box. They look very concerned” (0:37:21). The obvious pain Richie felt at his match involved the newly married Margot when the couple unknowingly led Richie to experience a downward spiral from his success. After the painful experience, Richie’s protection of his pleasure principle came in the form of sunglasses and a facial hair. Moreover, Richie’s attire contributes to the symbolic representation of his evolution from an unhealthy imbalance of Freud’s pleasure and reality principles.

### **Eli’s Cowboy Style**

Although he is not a blood relative of the Tenenbaums, Eli Cash is looked at as another child, Etheline’s, as he is Richie’s childhood friend and former neighbor. Eli’s scripted

permanent attire of choice includes a “white buckskin jacket with fringe taken-in” with a “short-brimmed Stetson cowboy hat” (Anderson and Wilson 11). The western cowboy outfit suggests his love for the literary fictional world of westerns, a genre he helped contribute; Eli’s success as an author shows how he is making a name for himself that would allow him into the Tenenbaum family. The audience witnesses the most vulnerable state of Eli when he wears Native American war paint on his face while attempting to crash his car into the Tenenbaum’s home as noted in this scene: “Eli’s face is covered with Apache warpaint. He is dressed in a morning suit. He wears a distracted smile. He downshifts, accelerates, and steers toward the Tenenbaum house. He whispers: Here I come” (1:32:13). Behaving recklessly, Eli’s only desire for death took on immediate action when he could not be an official member of the Tenenbaum family. After the breakup with Margot, he is not able to get into the beloved and once successful family. A take on Eli through the lens of Freud suggests the precocious neighbor needed to self-destruct, a form of the death drive due to his rejection from the Tenenbaums. Slowly Eli unravels before the audience when he goes on a death binge of using an extensive number of drugs, as critic Donna Kornhaber explains: “Anderson’ protagonists are damaged, isolated, and deeply secretive or withdrawn” (53). Most characters in Anderson’s film have multiple realistic flaws that force them to feel alone in their damaged surroundings. For example, Richie’s childhood friend illustrates a loneliness he is surrounded in even if he is a well-known celebrity in the literary field. He is constantly looking for approval from not only Margot, his current lover, but also Mrs. Tenenbaum, Richie’s mother. There’s a scene where Eli is seen in a magazine article with a note specifically written in the script of the film stating: “Dear Mrs. Tenenbaum. Just in case you missed it. Love, Eli” (Anderson and Wilson 69). Etheline is reading the article clipping in front of Margot, when Margot asks, “Did Eli send that to you?” (0:48:11). The odd fascination of Eli

applying for admission to The Tenenbaums seems to be a regular with Mrs. Tenenbaum giving her approval with acceptance of Eli's career achievements. The motherly approval still is not enough when Eli is caught multiple times using drugs in front of Richie and Margot. Eli shuts down and withdraws from his childhood friends due to the state of pleasure he received from coexisting as a successful writer, a way of applying for membership into the Tenenbaum clan.

### **Dialogue**

The dialogue of the Anderson film provides evidence for Freud's theories of narcissism, pleasure and reality principles, life and death instincts, and the Oedipus complex. The director creates a deadpan humor within his character's word choice that enables me to identify their Freudian psychoanalytic traits. By addressing such concepts in the dysfunctional family, one determines how the auteur formulates a multifaceted Freudian film.

### **Royal's Word Choice**

Royal's word choice in the film gives understanding to Freud's narcissism complex within the estranged father. For most of the plot, Royal's selfishness can be examined easily with the way he speaks to his family. According to Freud, narcissists "are plainly seeking themselves as a love-object and exhibiting a type of object-choice" (Freud 554). Deliverance of the cold and direct composure Royal gives to his children after they have been told of their father's faux case of stomach cancer. Anderson combines sadness with humor to his antagonist, a narcissistic attribute at work in Royal's deliverance seen when the adult children agree to meet with their father, attempting to rekindle a lost relationship with one another. The only purpose for Royal's desire to reunite with his children is to be able to have family he can take advantage of. He is shown speaking to them with an insensitive tone. Royal shows no regard for Margot's

lack of being invited to family functions or consideration of his son's wife's death in this part of the movie:

MARGOT. What do you propose to do?

ROYAL. Well I can't say, really. Make up for lost time, I suppose. But the first thing I'd like to do is take you to see your grandmother, at some point.

RICHIE. (pause). I haven't been out there since I was six.

MARGOT. I haven't been out there at all. I was never invited.

ROYAL. Well, she wasn't your real grandmother, so I didn't know you'd be interested, sweetie. Anyway, you're invited this time.

MARGOT. Thanks.

Richie looks to Chas. He looks back to Royal.

RICHIE. You know, Rachael's buried there, too.

ROYAL. (pause) Who?

CHAS. My wife.

ROYAL. Oh. That's right, isn't it? Well, we can swing by her grave, too. (0:28:36)

Royal's lack of compassion for Margot continues to contribute to her wallowing in self-destructive habits. Now that the narcissistic father decides to spend some time with his children including Margot, she is finally considered a part of the family. Her nonchalant reaction to her father's invitation suggests how desensitized she's become to any involvement her father attempts to act on. Chas becomes another victim of Royal's careless mannerisms when he chooses an odd use of words -"swing by her grave"- to talk about visiting the cemetery to pay respects to Royal's mother and Chas's wife.

### **Richie's Hidden Love**

The minor yet poignant comedic moments in Anderson's film substantiates Freudian aspects that bring truth and character to extremely serious moments. An example can be noticed after Margot's husband meets Richie up on a rooftop to discuss his concerns for his marital problems. When Raleigh confides in Richie, not knowing Richie has feelings for his wife, Margot. The deeper meaning to Richie's reaction to Raleigh's assumption of Margot's extramarital affair continues to create a comic relief to an otherwise serious situation. The

dialogue written for the awkward situation amplifies the Freudian death drive of Richie as visualized in this scene:

RALEIGH. I'm utterly devastated. I don't know where else to turn. Will you advise me?

RICHIE. I don't know. What do you want to do?

RALEIGH. Well, I thought perhaps –

RICHIE. Find the guy and get him?

RALEIGH. (pause) Well, no. I thought we might ---

Richie punches his hand through the attic window. He kicks it. Raleigh looks shocked. He stares at Richie's bloody hand.

RICHIE. Who do you think it might be?

RALEIGH. (hesitates) I don't know at the moment. (0:50:04)

Although the emotional reaction of Richie punching through a window leading to an injury on his hand (another unconscious connection to his talent in professional tennis playing remaining lost) can be seen as endearing to viewers, the confidant of Margot's husband seeks immediate resolution and vengeance for the man his sister is having the affair with. A comedic moment in the film shares drama because I know how Richie truly feels by his actions and not his words while Raleigh is unaware of the incestual emotions the ex-tennis professional may have.

Associating Freud's death drive towards Richie's verbal and physical reaction of self-destruction starts in this scene and ends in a later attempt at suicide. The fact that the insecure and compassionate brother continuously craves pain and anguish when dealing with the notion of Margot as a romantic partner is easily noticed within Anderson's film.

### **Mise-en-scène**

The mise-en-scène, the setting, the lighting, objects, actors and how the camera position, shot size and angle of a film, advances the presence of Freudian theories within Anderson's cinematic piece involving the aftermath of divorce. The very first scene where the children are told from Royal about the separation happening between him and Etheline Tenenbaum may seem simplistic in style and theme; however, a cold and blunt environment and the close-up

shots mirrors the children's impression of their father and marriage. The disconnected father leaves the impression that the idea of marriage is temporary where individuals are not able to have a healthy balance of the pleasure and reality principles. The narcissistic tendencies of Royal are known at the beginning of the film, proving his progression from a self-absorbed life to a life where he dedicates himself to resolving his children's issues before he dies. Royal's attempt to fix his family shows how the narcissist has, "the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality, security is achieved by taking refuge in the child" (Freud 556). The auteur makes Royal's identity a narcissistic father who shows an understanding of the individual at fault for exuberating such tendencies as shame, guilt, and are often very defensive due to the need to seek self-preservation (Freud 560). Ultimately, the auteur captivates an estranged father's actions of guilt and self-defense because he has just been thrown out of his home after having extra-marital affairs and then having to talk to his children about his upcoming absence in his family.

### **Margot's Moment**

A memorable scene in *The Royal Tenenbaums* depicts Margot exiting a Greenline bus and walking towards Richie after the two have not seen each other for a while. The iconic Anderson scene was made with a slow-motion dolly shot of the simple bus stop reunion. The single frame of actress Paltrow walking towards her brother casually while her hair wisps into her face exposing her smokey mysterious eyes alludes to the troubled playwright's inner conflict. The quality of the auteur's technique includes a preference for symmetrical composition for the mixed emotion situation. According to Louis Thonsgaard, "the filmmakers who master the art of symmetry wield a powerful visual capable of communicating complex meanings that cannot otherwise be conveyed visually" (1). In other words, Anderson advances with the use of rare technicalities and practices. Using the symmetrical composition allows the audience to connect

the juxtaposition Margot feels when she sees her beloved brother. While it is obvious the two share a mutual love for each other, the Freudian desire to focus on self-destruction ruins the pleasure in the reunion.

Another instance where film technique is applied included framing the last critical shot in the movie where everyone is leaving Royal's funeral. The slow-motion symmetrical composition shot conjures the Andersonian ending. According to Louis Thonsgaard, a director would choose to use the symmetrical composition in the following circumstances:

Symmetrical compositions are often applied in scenes concerning death. As the simplest form of symmetry can express peace, stability and eternity, it is natural to apply symmetry in these situations. Furthermore, this use has evolved so much that we now often see dying characters in symmetries with diagonal axes. The acceptance or expectation of symmetry in connection with death is so great that it may be described as one of the most developed areas in the creative use of symmetry (1).

While it may be unfavorable to use the controlled and critical film technique, Anderson's popular use of symmetrical composition connects to a necessity to frequently use it, especially when framing a meaningful scene of death. In this case, Royal's passing leads the way for an effected group of people to continue to live in his legacy. Embracing and accepting the new reality that their present lives demonstrate how the universal shift from pleasure to reality principles keeps the family bond stronger than ever. Moreover, the same funeral scene makes a good example of how Anderson uses other camera angle and shot techniques to demonstrate the resolution to a dysfunctional family. Sunhee Lee examines the director's film technique from the ending of the movie: "As they leave Royal's tomb one by one, the shot shifts to slow motion accompanied by Van Morrison's 'Everyone', reflecting the reconciliation of this family. It is the sad moment mourning Royal's death, with alienated family members gathering. In this context, this sad ending filmed in slow motion might also be seen as a 'happy ending'" (Lee 428). Slow motion with the use of the music of a known 70's song commemorates the reconciled family, a

successful group of adults who now have a new outlook on their lives after becoming satisfied with what they will contribute to society. Freud's theories of psychoanalysis mentioned throughout this thesis all conclude with a need for one to become satisfied with your "inner" self (Freud 69).

## **Music**

Although the director is known for his creative visual style, Anderson is noted as a music auteur due to the recognizable melodic choices he enlists in his soundtracks. The *melomané* subscribes to the genius that is Mark Mothersbaugh, a film composer who attributes most of the background music to the film *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2002). Anderson picked songs that are thoughtfully coordinated to play at specific moments in the film. Mothersbaugh and Anderson's synergy takes on monumental scenes that illuminate a heightened sense of closure in this film (Gorbman 1). The skillfully selected choice of music includes the instrumental version of "Hey Jude" by The Beatles. The song has a variety of instruments played throughout the introduction, changing to a different instrument when a new character came onto the screen. Other popular 60's rock songs come into the soundtrack, resurrecting the sounds of musicians like The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, Paul Simon and Nico from The Velvet Underground.

Anderson plays Jackson Browne's "These Days" by Nico at a memorable scene. At the moment of Margot and Richie's reunion, there is a Freudian understanding of how Margot carries the reality principle towards the object of desire, her unrelated sibling. A natural sense of empathy and concern for the two conflicted secret lovers allows me to have a simultaneous appreciation in the cinematic visual and auditory artistry that is Anderson. Parts of the song's lyrics envelop a synopsis of the odd unique inner conflict Margot has had in her life up to this point. Nico sings, "And if I seem to be afraid/ To live the life that I have made in song/ It's just

that I've been losing/ So long" (Browne 1). Hearing the dark low talent of the musician sing the lyrics mentioned demonstrates another layer as to look at Anderson's troubled character. Her reality principle of avoiding love not only has to do with societal rejection (not legally incestual but still frowned upon) but mainly because of her fear of giving and accepting love she feels she does not deserve. This all go back to her father-daughter relationships that will be discussed later in the chapter. The submerging of the eclectic sound that characterizes Margot in a scene compliments the *mise-en-scène* of the conflicted Margot. The perfectly placed song includes a better understanding of a deeper conflict that coexists in the adopted daughter like described in the analysis of the song "These Days" noted in this critique:

[The song's lyrics] reflect the fear of missed opportunities, with an equally heavy fear of taking risks: taking a lover, dreaming of the future, or even simply sharing and connecting with someone else. Nico's voice perfectly captures Margot's self-isolation through its jaded, world-weary tone, and icy, mannered, lower-register vocals (Nico's German accent and slightly atonal singing) also contribute to the alienated feeling of the song, which sounds almost as if it were sung underwater, the intensity of the emotion suggesting someone "drowning" in depression (Dilley 115).

The genius of using a song to identify a character's inner conflict allows room for the auteur to develop a great use of visual details to compliment the music choice of the director. After discussing in depth Margot's depression and where it originated in the last chapter, one continues to link her desire for self-destruction with her forbidden love for her brother in the visual representation of Margot's safe place: the bathtub to the resounding "underwater" sound of Nico's deep tones. Therefore, Freud's approach to a person having a death drive explains how one "stands in opposition to the idea that instinctual life as a whole serves to bring about death" (613-14). The death instinct is witnessed in the spellbinding connection Margot has with water and depression. A sense of wanting to be dead within a space where life (water) lives.

## Chapter Three

### Freudian Familial and Romantic Relationships

When I focus on Freud's variations of psychoanalysis on the plot, themes, and characters within *The Royal Tenenbaums*, the noted theories permit me to talk beyond the aesthetic of the film. There is a deeper connection to the family dynamics Anderson presents of a father and his children. Freudian familial and romantic relationships allow a development of "inner satisfaction" of the Tenenbaum children.

#### Royal's Familial Relationships

The catalyst for the Tenenbaum children, Royal, inspires acceptance of past and present failures, flaws, and fears. The purging of odd, distanced, and untrusting relationships justifies the Freudian analysis of character's motivations of direct or indirect actions. Many indirect actions are "unconsciously" done. According to Freud, the unconscious is where humans can regulate all the desires that they cannot satisfy (Freud 572). The indication of humanity being the only group of beings that has such a gift/burden of neurosis is illustrated in the way we are dependent, since the day we are born. Unlike other animals, humans come into the world relying on the nurturing of mature individuals, adults, usually the parents of the infant. The care of others, the parents, since we are born, becomes assisted in the biological necessities (Freud 573-74).

Royal would never intentionally right the multitude of wrongs he assisted in creating in the Tenenbaum family dynamic. An example can be found in the film's script where a scene takes place in the dining room where the family resides. Royal tries to explain why he will be leaving their home for good. Chas, Richie, and Margot ask questions to their father and try to get some answers on why his marriage to their mother has ended. He admits not being truthful to Etheline. Anderson directs the scene which has fast dialogue between the father and his children:

NARRATOR. Over the next decade, he and his wife had three children, and then they separated.

INT. DINING ROOM. DAY

Royal sits at the head of a long table. He is surrounded by his children.

...

MARGOT. Are you getting divorced?

ROYAL. (gently) At the moment, no. But it doesn't look good.

RICHIE. Do you still love us?

ROYAL. Of course. I do.

CHAS. (pointedly) Do you still love Mom?

ROYAL. Very much. But she asked me to leave, and I had to respect her position on the matter.

MARGOT. Was it our fault?

ROYAL. (long pause) No. Obviously, we had to make certain sacrifices as a result of having children, but no. Lord, no.

RICHIE. Why'd she ask you to leave?

ROYAL. (sadly) I don't really know anymore. Maybe I wasn't as true to her as I could've been.

CHAS. Well, she says –

ROYAL. Let's not rehash it. Chassie. (Anderson and Wilson 1-2).

Royal is the perfect example of a narcissist because of his lack of compassion, especially for his children who need comfort in a devastating separation of parents. When applying Freud's narcissist definition to the careless dad, Freud explains how a narcissist attempts to "manage to keep away from their ego anything that would diminish it" (555). The ego Freud refers to is the navigator of the superego and the id. These mental processes Freud explains should have a balance of the id where a person's desires are exhibited and their superego, a person's inner critic where an endless judgment is made on themselves. With a narcissist, the ego navigates an exaggerated understanding of being the best in all regards. A typical trait of a narcissist is a concern only for oneself. Their needs and desires are more important than anyone else's. Royal is a character who only thinks of himself and puts others including his children last.

The only effort towards fatherhood Royal shows is with his youngest son, Richie.

Primarily Richie is the only child to receive direct invites to go on outings around the city from his father, resulting in a closer bond with Royal. Anderson directs a scene where both Richie and

Royal are leaving the cemetery after visiting family members' gravesites when they start reminiscing about Richie's professional tennis playing days. Soon after Royal remarks on how his son still had potential to keep going in tennis until he lost a match he did not even attempt to win. Richie's flashback of the scene is perfectly described in the film:

ROYAL. You probably had another good two to three years of competitive play in you.

RICHIE. (shrugs) Probably.

ROYAL. I had a lot riding on that match, you know. Financially and personally.

...

ROYAL. I kind of disappeared after that, didn't I?

RICHIE. (shrugs) Yeah, but I understood. I know you're not very good with disappointment. (0:36:44)

Royal is an example of how a narcissist only shows interest in a son's career downfall to avoid seeing them because Royal did not know how to handle disappointment as a father. The selfish mannerisms Royal generates remain acceptable to Richie because he is the only child who is not affected by his parents' divorce. Richie takes his dad seriously and has compassion for the estranged father. Known as the "washed up papa's boy" of the children, Richie may have influenced his father to unconsciously invest in adopting a sister with whom he may feel inclined to have romantic relations (0:43:07). According to Freud, the implication of fulfilling our desires when we cannot in real life becomes synthesized through the unconscious.

I believe on an unconscious level, Royal wanted to bring happiness to his favorite son by not making much of his own father-daughter relationship with Margot. The narcissist admits to being a terrible father to her his whole life, expecting her to accept his recent attempt at being a father to her now. Royal takes her to an ice cream parlor where other fathers are seen with their daughters. The awkward disconnect the two illustrate is seen in a memorable interaction:

ROYAL. Your brother's all torn-up inside.

MARGOT. (hesitates) Well, so am I, but I'm not going to discuss it with you.

Royal sighs. He leans across the table and says urgently:

ROYAL. Can't somebody be a shit their whole life and want to repair the damage? I mean, I think people want to hear that.

MARGOT. Do they?

Royal nods. Silence. (Anderson and Wilson 111)

Royal tries to activate a father-daughter relationship with Margot years after he identified her as his “adopted” daughter. Furthermore, he is only interested in patching up his connection to her after Richie confesses to Royal how he loves her. Later after Royal dies, the family attends the funeral of the beloved patriarch. In the last scene, where the family leaves the cemetery, the focal point of audience is when Richie is the last to leave his father’s grave, thus leading the audience to believe he has taken over his father’s leadership role as the new patriarch of the Tenenbaums. An audience member who understands Freud’s Oedipus Complex know why Anderson ended the movie with Royal’s death. When analyzing Richie through a Freudian perspective, the Oedipus Complex allows the ex-tennis player to choose between being an active or passive strain. The son who has Oedipus complex will either “put himself in his father’s place in a masculine fashion...or he might want to take the place of his mother and be loved by his father” (663). Initially Anderson establishes Richie constructing a passive Oedipus Complex with his father, taking the place of Etheline. After a family meeting occurs where they discuss whether Royal should stay in the Tenenbaum mansion in Richie’s room, Richie admits he already has his father staying in the house. Etheline and Chas are shocked at Richie’s quick decision without regarding their opinions. Richie’s family members notice the strong relationship Richie has with his father shared in Chas’s comment to his brother, “Looks like you and Dad are back together again, huh” (0:47:00)? Not only does the beloved son establish an active relationship with his father throughout the years, Richie even physically embraces Royal when no one else chooses to even when his siblings hear of their father’s faux cancer diagnosis. Richie goes in for a hug after his sister waves to their father in this scene:

ROYAL. I'll say good-night to you now, children.

ROYAL. Thank you, my sweet boy. (0:29:48)

Due to the circumstances of a father trying to find comfort in his children after he fabricates a lie of having stomach cancer, Royal takes advantage of Richie's passive Oedipal Complex. The youngest Tenenbaum child takes the place of his mother since the divorce of the two twenty-two years ago. Richie coddles the narcissist unconsciously, feeding into his father's ego. Freud insists "the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality, security is achieved by taking refuge in the child" (556). When dealing with the narcissist as a father, Freud explains how they would find comfort in knowing their child would maintain a piece of them forever, making sure their legacy was preserved.

### **Death Drive**

Chas, Margot, Richie, and Eli all experience forms of their death drive and life instinct conflict. Freud explains one of his theories where we all have a drive towards life noted in his essay *An Autobiographical Study* (1924). The theorist consolidates his past references to instincts of "self-preservation and for the preservation of the species" defined as Eros, otherwise known as the life instinct (Freud 36). Dedicating a life to being healthy, being safe, and having sex (a way to multiply and contribute to the biological process of creating life), people instinctually want to live. On the other hand, human beings also have an opposing drive known as the Thanatos, otherwise noted as the death drive. Obvious factors of the death drive are noted when patterns of behavior lead to self-destruction and may come from anger, fear, and hate. They can be directed outward towards others or inward to the self. These drives come from intrinsic forces that naturally develop in humans (36). The ability to desire things like sex and aggression contributes to the control these drives have in a person's life; furthermore, the aggression desire is an "external representation of the death drive" (Barry 1). Destruction is the main goal of the

death drive. According to Freud, most individuals can use their death instinct outwardly at others, while some people “direct it at themselves,” leading to self-destruction (614-15). In some people, aggression is faced inwards, leading to depression and even in extreme cases, suicide. As a case in point, Anderson’s Tenenbaums among other characters magnify their death drive leading them to severe depression resulting in forms of self-destruction like Eli Cash. Anderson creates a state of disillusionment within his characters that acknowledges Freud’s life and death instincts. Most of the characters have some subconscious desire to seek out death.

Chas’s life instinct overcomes his desire to die and instead he attempts to control death. The oldest child of the Tenenbaums attempts to seek out a safe and healthy lifestyle. Anderson presents Chas as a father who forces his children to become skillful in avoiding death. Chas instills in his sons a strong reliance on their life instincts by exercising daily, taking martial arts lessons and practicing random fire drills. His paranoia increases after becoming a widower. The lack of control Chas feels towards his surroundings shifts Chas into the reality principle where he impatiently waits for something wrong to happen. The widower creates an impromptu fire drill after his sons have gone to bed. He shouts and carries a lantern, urging Ari and Uzi to take the drill seriously as they make their way out of the building. While he rushes them out, Chas times their exit and seems to never be satisfied with his children’s safety. The scene begins:

Chas, Ari, and Uzi stand on the sidewalk, looking up at the building. The street is deserted. The tape recorder has been turned off. The lantern is still blinking. Chas turns off the lantern and presses stop on his stopwatch.

CHAS. Four minutes and forty-eight seconds. We’re all dead. Burned to a crisp.

Chas shakes his head. He looks disoriented and weak.

NARRATOR. Over the last six months, he had become increasingly concerned with their safety.

UZI. We left Buckley.

Chas rubs his eyes and his temples. He says quietly:

CHAS. It doesn’t matter. (0:12:26)

Chas desires a relationship with death solely by reinforcing his power over it. Many of Chas's mental processes give way to his life instinct, allowing him the desire to survive life. The unusual endeavor of trying to avoid death traps the single father into being another version of his father, Royal. Chas does not allow his children to have healthy a childhood and he does not evolve from grieving his wife who died a year ago. Another instance where Chas attempts to control death is when he lies to his sons about his father's death. Uzi and Ari confirm their grandfather exists and is alive, contrary to what they were once told about him:

UZI. Who's your father?

CHAS. His name's Royal Tenenbaum.

ARI. You told us he was already dead.

CHAS. (hesitates) But now he's really dying. (0:23:55)

Even when fabricating a fictional death of his estranged father, Chas is not able to control the idea of Royal's limited time due to his cancer diagnosis. Eventually we see how Chas will ultimately have to accept the chaos that surrounds him, including death. Freud's essay about familial dynamics *Family Romances* (1908) assists in identifying where Chas's death wish for his father comes from. The theorist describes a patient "to be seen in the familiar day-dreaming which persists far beyond puberty...[and] are found to serve as the fulfilment of wishes and as a correction of actual life" (299). It has always been a dream of Chas to imagine his father had already died, especially after he was rejected by Royal multiple times throughout his childhood. Even though Chas's desire for his father's death manifests from a childhood fantasy, the oldest Tenenbaum child finally develops a closer bond with his father later in the film and accepts Royal's real untimely death. Eventually Chas's desire for controlling death was to prevent death from killing his loved ones. A life instinct is the overwhelming force that drives Chas in his past and present mental processes.

The adopted middle child of the Tenenbaum family, Margot, is unlike her older brother in wanting to avoid death. She desires death and commits multiple acts of self-destruction, a form of the death drive. Freud's recognition of when an organism goes against its life drive to continue living "wishes to die only in its own fashion" (614). Here Freud is stating how people who have a strong influence from their death drives are trying to end their lives the way they want. Motivated to end her life unconsciously in her bathroom submerged in water, Margot inevitably feels compelled to accept her persuasion towards desiring death. The melancholy playwright embraces the concept of self-destruction by sabotaging her safe space, the bathroom in which she locks herself. Margot's mode of death drive can be recognized when she keeps a television strapped to the radiator in front of her bathtub while she smokes in bathwater. The death trap of a bathroom seems to give Margot peace and solace. She does not find any need to stay safe and healthy in her life. Her deathly habits are the way she chooses to die. A genuine concern comes from Raleigh and he contacts Etheline who visits her daughter to discuss her problems. Soon Margot goes back to her childhood home after her mother explains how Chas and his sons are now living with Etheline. The film scene shows the actions and dialogue between the characters:

Margot is in the bathtub watching *Planet of the Apes* on her little black and white television set. Etheline sits on the edge of the tub with her coat in her lap.  
 ETHELINE. Raleigh says you've been spending six hours a day locked in here watching television and soaking in the tub.  
 MARGOT. (pause) I doubt that.  
 ETHELINE. Well, I don't think that's very healthy, do you? Nor do I think it's very intelligent to keep an electrical gadget on the edge of the bathtub.  
 MARGOT. I tied it to the radiator.  
 Etheline examines the television set. There is a length of red twine wrapped around it and knotted to a pipe. (0:18:57)

Margot deals with her inner conflict, like her other family members in "isolation from each other and from their own feelings is what each member of the Tenenbaum family must struggle

against” (Orgeron 50). Not only does Margot suffer from a need to sabotage herself, she desires isolation and refuses to let anyone else into her life. The scene where Margot is introduced by her father as his adopted daughter at dinner parties emphasizes the middle child’s emotional neglect from her father as seen in this scene:

NARRATOR. Margot Tenenbaum was adopted at age two. Her father had always noted this when introducing her.

CUT TO: A cocktail party, Royal introduces Margot to a group of elderly men in black tie.

ROYAL. This is my adopted daughter, Margot Tenenbaum.  
Margot nods politely. (0:03:30)

Royal’s rejection of Margot at a young age and depicting her as an object to show off at cocktail parties instills a great insecurity. Margot does not feel like an actual Tenenbaum. Her insecurity leads to an increase in an influence from death drive. Her odd fascination with staying in her bathtub for hours every day to avoid her marriage to Raleigh St. Clair is evidence of how she chooses to be reckless with not only her multiple affairs but also the objects she chooses to surround herself with. Margot’s self-destruction only increases when she begins smoking soon at the age of twelve after her parents divorced. She patiently waits for death, not at all trying to control or avoid it like Chas; Margot develops a lasting relationship with death once her parents separate and her father rejects her talent at a young age. She is never taken seriously by Royal, and that only allows her to never take her own love life seriously.

### **Pleasure Principle**

Freud explicates the concepts the pleasure principle and the reality principle in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, advising how children meet conflict when attempting to transition from childhood to adulthood. According to Freud, the pleasure principle is having immediate gratification towards whatever a person desires. This is an immature way of being, seeking out things that apply to selfish wants of a human. Usually, there is no one else receiving

direct satisfaction because it comes with a selfish act. Furthermore, the opposite principle deals with patience: the reality principle. The contrasting approach comes with maturity and allows a person to accept no immediate gratification if they cannot receive the desire immediately due to societal expectations and the rules of engagement. There is an understanding of either getting a long-term gratification or possibly no reward at all. The idea of labor within human society is necessary, yet with the hard work comes a sense of repression towards our desire for pleasure and gratification (Eagleton 151). The need for all human beings to push down their desire in order to survive defines what Freud labeled the “pleasure principle.” Freud devised a theory describing a natural development all humans have programmed within them: The pleasure principle and the reality principle. Everything the pleasure principle adheres to--eat, sleep, protection from harm-- connects to the element of maintaining life with the parent’s support. Eventually the pleasure principle is fulfilled alongside an erotogenic zone that is developing. Freud explains how the infant slowly ages and begins to develop multiple erotogenic zones in multiple bodily needs. Although Freud’s Pleasure Principle Theory was intended to help analyze the child development through psychoanalysis, I will be applying the theory to the Tenenbaum children who are past their early childhood years. As stated by Freud, that a person who follows the pleasure principle healthily starts from infancy to six years old. In other words, everyone is the same throughout their lives. Furthermore, Anderson’s neurotic characters are easily identified as classic examples of being influenced by their reality and pleasure principle.

After Margot realizes Richie is attracted to her, she surrenders to the societal expectation of disengaging in a form of incest. Margot states, “I think we're just going to have to be secretly in love with each other and leave it at that, Richie” (1:21:14). The conflicted playwright activates her reality principle when involving her feelings for Richie. Freud explains how we eventually

shift between the pleasure principle to the reality principle where maturity and patience start to form within the individual. Freud's concept of the pleasure principle is "the postponement of satisfaction" (596). The game now of waiting for whatever gives one pleasure will now begin, thus leading to an understanding that Richie's feelings for his sister will not go unnoticed, just ignored for the time being until it becomes appropriate for them to be together.

Richie ignites his obsession with death when he realizes his forbidden love for his adopted sister, Margot. Since this realization, the once talented tennis star begins to unravel. His self-destruction mode initiates when he spots Margot with her new husband, Raleigh St. Clare. At the tennis match that ruins his career, he begins to deteriorate, leaving only a shell of a tennis star. The path of self-destruction continues when he later learns of Margot's multiple affairs including with Richie's best friend Eli. The same day Richie encounters a clear perception of his sister, he decides to attempt suicide as seen when Richie whispers to himself in a bathroom, "I'm going to kill myself tomorrow" (1:10:52). The scene continues with the brokenhearted brother slitting his wrists with a razor. By reading this morose situation in a Freudian context, one "might suppose that the life instincts or sexual instincts which are in each cell take the other cells as their object, that they partly neutralize the death instincts...thus preserve life" (Freud 618). Without having the security of saving himself for Margot now that she has had multiple affairs during her marriage to Raleigh, Richie feels set in the death drive. Even though the star-crossed lovers avoid getting mixed up with each other, eventually the two self-destructing individuals suffocate from a deep desire to die.

### **Eli**

Eli Cash, the neighbor who grows up to be treated like a family friend to the Tenenbaums, illustrates symptoms of a death to seek death; Self destruction being somewhat

contagious among the Tenenbaum children and anyone they may associate with. Eli's desire for self-destruction begins after envying the genius that consumes the Tenenbaum family. Eli becomes a successful writer of western, which he believes elevates him to the intellectual standard of the Tenenbaums. He becomes focused on success to the point of taking drugs like mescaline and cocaine. The narcissistic neighbor envelops his success with death when he attempts to coax his true humble identity with narcotics and drives his sporty convertible car into the front of the Tenenbaum's childhood home: the setting for the wedding of Etheline and Sherman. Eli survives, like Richie, and finally admits to needing help with his drug addiction among other things. At one point Chas chases Eli into a serene Japanese garden because Eli almost ran over Chas's sons. There is still hope for the Tenenbaum children, including Eli.

Freud's pleasure principle maintains stamina within the gifts and talents the Tenenbaum children exhibit in the film. The legacy of Royal manifests into his genius children all with a curse of sticking to their pleasure principles as opposed to maturing and transitioning into adulthood with the reality principle. The reality principle as described by Freud is "the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure" (596). In other words, the natural progression from the pleasure principle to the reality principle substantiates patience for achieving the desired object.

### **Chas**

Chas falls into the world of business and finance and soon knows more about investments and maturity than his own father. After having to defend himself in court and confessing about how his own father had stolen from him, Chas relives a painful memory of having to defend

himself from Royal in the judge's chambers. Royal is already known to have stolen money from his son. In following scene where the lawsuit takes place comes as a flashback:

JUDGE. And how was it possible for Mr. Tenenbaum to withdraw these funds without your written authorities?

ROYAL. Objection, your honor. Now, dammit –

ROYAL'S LAWYER. This isn't a courtroom, Royal. Don't object.

CHAS. Because I started the corporation when I was a minor, so my father was the primary signatory on most of my accounts (Anderson and Wilson 54).

The betrayal felt from Chas after he proves to know exceedingly more about business and law than his father upholds the pleasure principle found in the demanding career lifestyle. Freud's pleasure principle ignites within the oldest child when nothing else in his world is controllable. Chas's pleasure principle consists of escaping into his world of business and finance. He excels in the stress driven atmosphere where "three secretaries are still at work, and Chas is on the telephone" (Anderson and Wilson 75). Even after his wife's death, Chas upholds his business career and keeps good control of it, therefore, he finds solace in his work environment. After using Freud's pleasure principle to analyze Chas's situation, one can see a sense of desire and escape from things the widower cannot control amplify his gifts and allow him to want to stay in a heavy work atmosphere. Ben Stiller manages to capture Chas's lack of patience and short temper on set. Chas is one who initially severs ties with his dysfunctional relationships like described in this scene of welcoming his brother home after not seeing him for some time: "Chas watches from his window on the third floor. Richie looks up and sees him. Richie waves tentatively. Chas waves back without smiling" (0:26:26). The business-like mannerisms Chas practices have underlying meaning for the audience. After spending time with his wife before she passed away and later missing her presence while trying to raise their sons alone, he distances himself from any relationships that will be too much for him to handle if those people happened to die. He feels no need to waste time reuniting with anyone from his family that he

feels is unnecessary. For instance, when the family finally sees Richie after he is on a hiatus overseas for a year, Chas nonchalantly waves to his younger brother from a second-story window. Etheline, Margot, Uri, and Uzi are surrounding Richie with hugs and warm greetings. Because Chas's life has become a sense of keeping active in all aspects, he loses his connection to his family. Alongside "Chas's business appears nonexistent, in fact, he seems to feign business, and this could well be his 'invention'" (Orgeron 52). In other words, the audience notices how Chas alludes to having a business yet never seems to have a calm professionalism about him. Moreover, the same can be said for the widower's personal relationships involving his family. When applying a Freudian perspective to Chas and his insensitive and controlling nature, it can be seen that the single father exhibits a pleasure principle activated within him: the attempt to control everything around him.

### **Margot**

The dysfunction of the family dynamic not only affected the children of the divorce, but also the parents. Royal's narcissism allows the successful lawyer to make all his family victims of his shallow and selfish charade. Royal's narcissism starts at the beginning of the film when he is asked about his daughter's first play:

CHAS. What did you think, Dad?

ROYAL. It didn't seem believable to me.

Chas looks to Margot. She is silent.

....

CHAS, Did you think the characters were –

ROYAL. What characters? It was just a bunch of little kids dressed in animal costumes.

MARGOT. Goodnight, everyone.

Margot quickly collects her unopened presents from the table. She puts Royal's aside and sets it in front of him.

ROYAL. Sweetie. Don't get mad at me. That's just one man's opinion. (0:05:36)

The cruel remarks made by Royal towards his daughter on her birthday is just one of many experiences the children feel direct rejection through use of word choice. When applying Freud's

pleasure and reality principle to the patriarch's character, one notices the shift the patriarch makes from pleasure to reality principle when he runs out of money and is unable to continue his life of selfish immature actions.

### **Royal**

The narcissistic identity resonates with Royal when he makes selfish choices throughout the film. Not only does Royal leave his family but he continues to slowly self-deteriorate, running out of money while living at a hotel, but now he is left without a real connection to any of his children or to his estranged wife. For the insensitive elderly ex-lawyer, the attention Royal is given from his family after he lies about having stomach cancer forces him to accept his identity of husband, father, and now grandfather. The narcissistic father lives for twenty-two years happily away from his family until he is kicked out and owes money for a hotel room he can no longer pay. He considers seeing his children and ex-wife again only after he is in need of a place to stay.

### **Richie and Margot**

Margot and Richie develop a close bond together and would do things independent from the rest of the family. For example, as children, they would stay the night in a museum and survive off animal crackers and juice boxes where the narrator explains, "She and her brother Richie ran away from home one winter and camped-out in the African Wing of the Public Archives" (0:03:51). Margot and Richie form an innocent love that gives way to their direct pleasure principle of happiness. Since these experiences occur when the two are children, I believe there is a strong case for Margot and Richie to be influenced by their pleasure principle. Freud explains how this strong desire for direct pleasure is "from the very outset inefficient and even highly dangerous" (596). Although Margot and Richie are innocent in forming a bond as children, they are steering through troubled waters later when their connection evolves into a

forbidden romance. As children, their shared affection for one another is acceptable and never questioned, unlike their adult relationship where they feel unaccepted by their family. After Margot realizes Richie shares her unapproachable love, she surrenders to the societal expectation of disengaging in a form of incest. Margot states, “I think we're just going to have to be secretly in love with each other and leave it at that, Richie” (1:21:14). The conflicted playwright is persuaded more by her reality principle as an adult when she considers her romantic feelings for Richie. Freud explains how most of us eventually shift between the pleasure principle to the reality principle where maturity and patience start to form within the individual in saying “the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle can only be made responsible for a small number, and by no means the most intense of unpleasure experiences” (596). Freud explains how a shift from pleasure to reality principles usually involves a feeling of “unpleasure.” An attraction for a sibling, regardless of not being a blood relative, may be considered “unpleasurable” in my opinion. Furthermore, Margot never gives into her romantic love for her brother, an action led by her reality principle. Later in the film, the only one who accepts their unorthodox love is Royal, the patriarch of the family in the scripted scene where Richie admits to his father on a rooftop of the hotel where Royal works how he feels about Margot. The fast-paced conversation between the two is illustrated through a scene of the film where the rooftop of the hotel where Royal works is displayed, a safe space where Richie admits to a truth he has hidden for a long time. Royal and Richie have open dialogue about the forbidden love the Tenenbaum siblings share:

ROYAL. Margot Tenenbaum?

RICHIE. Yeah.

ROYAL. Since when?

RICHIE. Since always.

ROYAL. Does she know?

RICHIE. Uh-huh

ROYAL. And what's her feeling about it?

RICHIE. I think she feels confused.

ROYAL. I can understand that. It's probably illegal.

RICHIE. I don't think so. We're not related by blood.

ROYAL. (pause) That's true. (silence. Royal nods.)

ROYAL. It's still frowned upon, but then what isn't these days, right?

(Richie nods. Royal shrugs.)

ROYAL. I don't know. Maybe it works. Why not? Hell, you love each other, and nobody knows what's going to happen, so – (1:22:45).

Moreover, Royal is the only one who also marks Margot early in her childhood as “my adopted daughter.” In all his arrogance and selfish manners, Royal unconsciously assists the two Tenenbaum children to fall in love and eventually admit their feelings later. Skeptics to Royal's role in Richie and Margot embracing and no longer denying their love for one another would argue how Royal disassociates from his adopted daughter that show society how his family consists of a female prodigy he picked out. Royal's interest solely consists of his own gain, not his children's. Furthermore, Margot has no trust or connection to her father until later in the film, after he attempts to reconcile their tattered relationship. Freud's pleasure principle can be seen in Margot's way of living her dishonest life of secrecy. One witnesses Margot continuing to live a life of rejection and self-destruction, the only way she sustains optimism is by feeling accomplished in her secret extramarital affairs and constant taciturn cigarette smoking that she does behind her husband's back; a husband she assimilates as a father figure, something Richie could not be until the end of the film for Margot. Richie is always an advocate for Margot's marriage, he volunteers to help his sister whenever she needs advice. Richie starts talking to Margot after leaving the cemetery visit with their family. Then Richie nonchalantly mentions to his sister how he can help her with any marital advice if she needs any assistance in dealing with an older husband. In film scene of the cemetery conversation Richie begins his dialogue by

passive-aggressively stating how his sister's husband is too old for her and carries on with wanting to help her with her marriage even though he is not married:

RICHIE. (shrugs) Well, if you need someone to talk to, let me know. OK? I like Raleigh very much. I know he's a lot older than you are, and you're having some problems, but – Anyway, maybe I can help. (0:39:31)

Richie's attempt at comforting his sister like a friend illustrates their closeness. Furthermore, Richie identifies Margot's unconscious desire for a patriarch figure as a romantic partner due to the lack of healthy relationships she had within her own family (biological and adopted). Freud explains how "Most of the pleasure that we experience is perceptual unpleasure. It may be perception of pressure by unsatisfied instincts" (597). Notably one connects Margot's lack of enthusiasm in her marriage to an "unpleasure." She seems to desire the "unpleasure" of being in an unsuccessful relationship with a father figure. Therefore, the marriage is not identifiable as a product of her reality principle because it aids Margot in resuming her state of being stuck in a rut, her "unpleasure" principle.

Interacting with Freud's theories of the pleasure principle, reality principle, life instinct, death drive, narcissism, and other concepts allow for the audience to see the full range of Anderson's dramedy, *The Royal Tenenbaums*. I can identify an unusual frame of Freudian psychoanalysis that is a great guide when exploring the characters and their actions in the dysfunctional family film.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion: It's All Hereditary

Wes Anderson's quality filmmaking allows his characters and the conflicts they go through emphasize a collaborative mix of realistic themes in his movies, specifically *The Royal Tenenbaums*. I have argued in this thesis that the topics range from identity, family, control and are easily recognizable through a Freudian perspective. Not only does the "tender-hearted work" on divorce magnify the auteur's take on real life conflicts everyone can relate to, but I find the director's use of *mise-en-scène* is beneficial in discovering them. The Freudian psychoanalysis depth is reachable with expertise in filmmaking, and I appreciate the charm and eccentricity that is Wes Anderson. The given concepts of the pleasure and reality principles, life and death drives, narcissism, and the Oedipus complex allow Anderson's dysfunctional family members in the film to resolve their issues with improvement in self-growth and family relationships. Furthermore, the well-developed conclusions to most Anderson's films includes an individual who becomes a better person alongside the community they were a part of. Anderson produces *The Royal Tenenbaums* where a family with dysfunction ends up working together to figure out where they need to fix themselves and in return fix the family unit.

Although critic Nigel Andrews makes a point about Anderson's extensive buildup of characters that illustrate "America itself," I disagree with Andrews's argument that he leads his audiences to "nowhere." The movie builds on various concepts, characters (who are empowered on the screen by wardrobe, music, and *mise-en-scène*, and meaningful Freudian aspects that enrich the cinematic profile of a dysfunctional family that begins as tethered and disconnected ending with resolution, clear identity and a sense of community (Andrews 1). I further disagree with Andrews's argument that the film being "choppily surreal style and the obsession with

death, wealth, charlatanism and self-pity” (Andrews 1). Although there is a good representation of obsessing over death, a common practice of being a person is to come to terms with mortality. Fear or acceptance creates a character, like everyday people, who is worth viewing their story on film. The side-effects to taking on such serious notions like death consist of wealth, charlatanism, and self-pity in an Anderson film. Directing intense discussions and actions dealing with death, Anderson creates humor using dialogue, slap-stick antics, and character development. A pretentious narcissistic breed of humanity is always pointed out in Anderson’s films as a means of laughing at them. He does not hold them up to be praised but instead to be humiliated. Because of the “wacky décor, waggish voice-overs and winsomely spoofy performances” (Andrews 1) I feel that the themes of family in conflict, a moment to laugh at what most Americans face, an acceptance of reality, are enhanced.

Key indications of Freud’s imprint on Anderson’s suggestive mixed genre of drama and comedy approach to an American family that survives a separation of marriage are recognizable in the characters’ attire and dialogue, and Anderson’s use of cinematography and music. Because of the auteur’s strength in artistic use of advancing Freudian concepts like the pleasure and reality principles, life and death instincts, and the narcissist complex at play, the familial and romantic relationships are well-represented. Royal’s narcissism is slowly extinguished and his selfish qualities throughout the film start to unravel. This allows him to reconcile with his network of gifted children as they are now adults struggling in their unappealing lives. In a way, the Tenenbaums have inherited classic narcissistic traits: insecurity, shame, and guilt. I am able to identify these traits within the Tenenbaum children. To illustrate, Chas becomes irrational with lack of control after his wife’s death, leaving him afraid of death. Chas’s life instinct goes into hyper-vigilance and dismantles the fun of Uzi and Ari’s childhood, like Royal did for him.

Even though Royal was terrible father, especially after he was sued twice and disbarred from Chas, the estranged dad makes a change for the better when he attempts to heal his son's wounds from past experiences. Chas resents Royal because of his past experiences of rejection from early on in childhood. There was a time where Royal took Chas, Richie, and Eli out to an outing involving teams who had to look out for each other. B.B. guns are in use on the opposing team. Royal betrays Chas after going against him and lodging a B.B. into Chas's knuckle, which the film makes clear that Chas can feel into adulthood. Betrayal was initiated early by Royal when he goes against Chas and fires a B.B. at his hand. The scene begins with Royal aiming at the puzzled boy:

ROYAL. Hold it Chassie.

Chas freezes. He looks up and sees Royal watching from the roof with a B.B. gun trained on him. Royal is dressed in khaki pants, sunglasses, and no shirt.

CHAS. What are you doing? You're on my team!

ROYAL. There are no teams.

...

NARRATOR. The B.B. was still lodged between two knuckles in Chas's left hand.  
(0:03:07)

Royal does not just leave his oldest son with a memory of pain, but Anderson provides a symbolic injury alluding to how Chas must always live with his wound. After the father-son relationship is fixed, it's just in time for the patriarch to die knowing he shifted from having a narcissistic complex to dealing with his reality of dysfunction around him. Soon enough, the patriarch of Chas's family is now himself, although he has his own flaws to carry on to his sons and prevent them from gathering the same conflicted perspective. In the beginning, the widower was known to "cit[e] trumped-up claims of insufficient safety systems in place at the high-end apartment building where he lives with his children, he moves what remains of his family back into the dilapidated home where he spent his childhood—even into the same room, where he and his sons now sleep together" (Kornhaber 48). After Chas's wife is gone and he tries to give his

sons a safer life, he manages to go back to his mother's home where he, ironically, did not have a healthy childhood. Now he rehashes his past alongside his children, much like Royal. The estranged father also moves back into Etheline's house when he claims to have stomach cancer, forcing everyone to deal with his bold presence. After the family is back together under the same roof, Chas shifts away from a normal concern for his children's safety and tries to control death. I believe the business savvy single father has an overabundance of the life instinct compared to his death drive. Chas needs to be balanced out with his death drive and later finds his stability through his salvaged relationship with his father. Eventually he reevaluates his priorities and lessens his worry, allowing himself to enjoy his sons' company. Once the widower lets go of his past pain, he relives a second childhood and gains a substantial amount of time reconnecting with Royal.

Another child susceptible to receiving Royal's narcissist streak would be Margot who learns to love through example. Before her own marriage disintegrates due to having multiple affairs, a parallel can be made from her adopted father and his reason for leaving his family twenty-two years ago. In the beginning of the film Royal admits to being "untrue" to Etheline. Moreover, Margot marries an older man who others have compared to a father figure. Rejecting Raleigh repeatedly throughout the film, Margot manages to transfer any repressed anger she has over her father to her older husband. Royal never gives Margot positive attention other than when Royal describes her as his "adopted daughter." Now that she has control of her own life and the choices she makes, she not only has multiple lovers throughout the years but also treats her husband horribly, just like Royal would have treated her. An instance of the cruel treatment is noted in a scene where Margot's husband comes to visit her at her mother's house where she is living to escape her rut of a marriage. Margot responds to Raleigh with a lack of conviction

when asked if she is coming back home as seen in this part of the conversation. Raleigh admits, “I want to die” while he keeps his composure holding a cookie in his hand waiting for his wife to respond with compassion (0:49:11). Margot is not invested in her marriage and therefore does not react to Raleigh’s concern for her. Known for her monotoned words and modern propriety of simple conversation, Margot’s dialogue and lack of emotion create an admirable personality that I believe rationalize her behaviors due to her dysfunctional childhood with no active father figure. I can see the parallels between a table conversation Margot has with Raleigh where she is expressing little sensitivity to him and when Margot meets her father where she holds no compassion for Royal. Margot’s lack of affection is a result of what Royal shows to her while she was growing up. The fact that Royal entices Margot to treat Raleigh better after seeing Eli leave her room as noted in a scripted scene is ironic. Royal demands Margot change her unfaithful ways after seeing Eli leave her bedroom window. She immediately tells him to mind his own business, a trait he did very well in the past. Royal’s words to his daughter are given in honesty and genuine concern:

ROYAL. I don’t like the way you’re treating Raleigh.

MARGOT. What are you talking about? You don’t even know him.

ROYAL. I’ve met him. And I don’t think he deserves –

MARGOT. Stay out of it. (0:49:20)

When Margot’s denial is called out from her estranged father, her pleasure principle may be threatened. A change of balance from pleasure to reality is initiated after Royal tries to help Margot out in her marriage.

Finally, youngest of the Tenenbaum children, Richie, has a better chance of inheriting his father’s narcissism by admittedly leading his family as the new replacement to his father in a better developed and new improved Tenenbaum family with compassion and generosity.

Although Richie attempts suicide midway through the film, he disengages his previous feelings

of insecurity, and guilt, and his shameful past. A key factor of becoming an acceptable version of narcissism (apparently everyone has a natural need to love oneself) includes, “A person who loves has, so to speak, forfeited a part of his narcissism, and it can only be replaced by his being loved. In all these respects self-regard seems to remain related to the narcissistic element of love” (Freud 560). In other words, one who loves and respects oneself is an acceptable part of human nature and will provide a way of maintaining a strong sense of security. Richie proves to graduate into the acceptable level of narcissism when he takes on a different approach to his life. Anderson focuses on the flaws of his protagonist and gives him room to adapt to a better version of himself in his old sheltering environment. In the scene where Richie attempts suicide (1:10:52), the physical shield is taken off in front of a mirror in a bathroom. Anderson creates a shot of Margot and Mordechai; his pet hawk being released flashes on the screen when he slits his wrists. The bathroom symbolizes water, a place where life and death are against the troubled siblings; therefore, the bathroom is what takes Richie to his death drive. A fear of loving his adopted sister Royal distinguishes the noticeable difference in his son after he attempts suicide as shown in the following scene where Royal states, “I have to say, he didn’t look half bad for a suicide. Attempted suicide anyway” (1:17:34). Simply put, Richie shifts from his narcissism and learns to be clear, worthy, and honest with his life. After leaving the hospital, Anderson takes a moment to highlight the new Richie whose face is now visible and his symbolic injury of self-inflicted cuts to his arms, now bare with stitches, mark the occasion of separating from his past. Margot looks at the wounds, a mark of how the two should embrace change, and confess their secret love for one another as viewed in this scripted scene:

MARGOT. How many stitches did you?

RICHIE. I don’t know. You want to see?

Margot nods. Richie unwraps one of the bandages. His arm is covered with jagged, criss-crossing stitches and dried blood. Margot looks stricken.

MARGOT. Jesus, Richie. That looks horrible. (1:18:20)

Finding Margot in his tent that he was residing in while his father took his bedroom, Richie retreats to his safe childhood haven adorned with family pictures and other objects that seem to cast a mellow and morose mood. A Freudian similarity comes to mind when the viewer approaches a coincidental setting where Margot was known to be for hours a day in her bathtub. The connection between the two is now made to be stronger than ever in their shared desire to self-destruct. Furthermore, one can remember how Margot symbolically protects herself from her true identity, a woman in love with her brother. A reflection of Margot's shield of insecurities lies in her fur coat where many profound years of success and love were unattainable preventing her from advancing in her life. The audience is known to the conflict the pair share. Evidently, Donna Kornhaber observes, "Richie and Margot's relationship makes clear that it is both truly heartfelt and an impossible product of an emotionally distorted upbringing" (Kornhaber 58). The pair deal with mixed emotions for each other that they are unable to deal with due to the way they were raised from an estranged narcissistic father. Freud's perspective of a narcissistic parent could be applied to analyzing the Margot-Richie subplot Anderson contrives. In Freud's Narcissism theory, a parent "inclined to suspend in the child's favor of operation of all the cultural acquisitions which their own narcissism as been forced to respect, and to renew on his behalf the claims to privileges which were long ago given up by themselves" (Freud 556). In other words, Royal's new involvement compared to his selfish behavior from the past, compliments the newfound truth the couple progress to.

In conclusion, enhancing a character's personality, emotions or flaws are perceived through wardrobe, dialogue, mise-en-scène, and music in Anderson's film. Although the depth of Anderson's movie reflects significant examples of Freudian concepts in the characters and their

actions, I sense a deeper message is given through the use of “music, framing, editing, comic rhythm—all are utilized to precisely calibrate an aura that is Anderson’s alone”(Austerlitz 1). Wes Anderson’s quality filmmaking allows his characters to transition from a defined Freudian flaw in adulthood to a successful way of living after forgiving and reconstructing their relationships with their estranged father. Many children in America can relate to Anderson’s “dramedic” depiction of a separation of family early on in their lives. The evolution of the individual and their own success in life comes from the familial relationships we have, not from our childhood, but from our ever-developing adulthood.

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