



Director
Wes Anderson

Starring
Adrien Brody,
Owen Wilson,
Jason Schwartzman

Certificate 15
USA 2007, 1h44m

Wes Anderson's 5th feature, *The Darjeeling Limited*, sees him resume his fascination with dysfunctional but financially liquid family structures. *Darjeeling* might be seen as the final part in a trilogy beginning with *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004). In these films, while money can't exactly buy happiness, it can at least secure a better class of misery. In *The Darjeeling Limited* the afflicted modern-day aristos are three estranged brothers all grieving in different, but comparably self-destructive, ways for their father, a year on from his death. At the instigation of one sibling, Francis (Owen Wilson), the trio, who have not seen each other since the funeral, convene for a train journey across India. The trip is intended to function at once as a spiritual journey, an attempt at fraternal reconnection, and a search for their lost mother, who has taken religious orders in a convent in the north of the country.

Yet if this makes *The Darjeeling Limited* sound like a Road Film by train (a Rail Movie?), what lies at its narrative and thematic heart is actually the notion of a journey aborted, not completed. That motif could in turn be used as a metaphor for everything that's right or wrong about Wes Anderson's oeuvre and signature filmmaking style. It all depends on your point of view: in the decade or so since his debut *Bottle Rocket* (1996), this director's critical status has evolved from that of Great White Hope to Decidedly Acquired Taste.

For Anderson's supporters the significance of the uncompleted journey motif goes something like this. Here is a filmmaker whose movies celebrate quirk, nuance and detail, both in how they look (beautifully composed frames full of colourful, exquisite flotsam and jetsam) and what they are about (solipsistic eccentricity as the default setting of human existence). The joy of an Anderson film is that it replaces the serious-minded business of narration—the timetabled journey herding us along from A to Z—with the frivolous pleasures of aberration—the unscheduled, distractingly weird stops at B through Y (assuming, that is, we get anywhere near the latter). Francis' attempt to organise the journey through India with the aid of laminated daily itineraries (all produced by a paid assistant) is relevant here. Those objects—borderline psychotic in their glossy neatness, absurd yet attractive all at once, focused on the minutiae rather than the end goal—embody something like the unique pleasures of an Anderson film from a fan's point of view.

Anderson's detractors, however, might interpret the motif of the curtailed trip in a rather different manner. The fey staginess of this filmmaker's work, full of garishly strange eccentrics and bespoke props, filled to bursting with arch references to the popular culture of years gone by, is the product of artistic precocity rather than maturity. Like Max Fischer, hero of the director's second feature *Rushmore* (1998), Anderson is the cinematic equivalent of a clever teenager who refuses point blank to grow up.

Ultimately, there is nothing unfamiliar about *The Darjeeling Limited*, nothing that will make you like Anderson if you didn't already, or that will disappoint you if you already admire him. What most might be able to agree on at least is the beautifully crafted nature of this movie. For the sheer intensity of attention paid to intricate, sumptuous choreography of colour, frame composition, props and interior design, Anderson is perhaps matched only by Pedro Almodóvar. Like the stencilled Louis Vuitton luggage the central protagonists schlep around the subcontinent, *The Darjeeling Limited* is an objet d'art. Its beautifully executed outer surfaces confer on it a degree of desirability, regardless of what is, or is not, contained inside.

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