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Desire And Influence: Male Self-Realization And Film Progression Due To The Influential Women In The Films Of Wes Anderson

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DESIRE AND INFLUENCE: MALE SELF-REALIZATION AND FILM
PROGRESSION DUE TO THE INFLUENTIAL WOMEN IN THE FILMS OF WES
ANDERSON

by

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This thesis, submitted by Erin A. Meiers in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.


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 PROGRESSION DUE TO THE INFLUENTIAL WOMEN IN THE
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Erin A. Meiers
November 28, 2012

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To my husband, Craig Meiers and in memory of Eve Sedgwick

ABSTRACT

My thesis is an analysis arguing that the roles of women in three of Wes Anderson's films, *Rushmore* (1996), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), and *The Life Aquatic* (2004), are vital in influencing the men that surround them to come to a self-realization and in the progression of the film as each character finds closure, despite critic's claims. Critics Jesse Mayshark and Greg Carlson examine Anderson's films to be basically about men stuck in arrested development that as they rival each other they grow and mature, and discount the roles of women as simply a side note. I build upon their analysis by using the theory of erotic triangles in literature as they are explained by Eve Sedgwick in her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Much of her work builds off of Sigmund Freud and Girard's theories, although they differ in the fact that Freud and Girard see the love triangle as being symmetrical despite gender and Sedgwick theorizes that the triangle is asymmetrical due to gender and the rivalry for power between the men that crave homosocial interaction in the form of rivalry over the woman placed at the center of the triangle. What I do different is build upon Sedgwick, Mayshark and Carlson's examinations and includes the analysis of the women and how I believe that the women that anchor the triangle(s) are actually the most powerful and influential characters in the films. The women in Anderson's films and that I analyze are very intelligent, beautiful, strong, yet damaged individuals, that influence the men and themselves to come to a self-realization and acceptance of themselves and others. I

found that in a Eurocentric society, critics and audiences alike are more comfortable perceiving women as less influential and capable than their male counterpart, while being more vulnerable and emotional, although women have made headway in even the last twenty years and actually the last four (Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, 2009).

INTRODUCTION:

CRITICISM, EROTIC TRIANGLES AND WES ANDERSON'S INFLUENTIAL WOMEN

Girard finds many examples in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival... Within the male-centered novelistic tradition of European high culture, the triangles Girard traces are most often those in which two males are rivals for a female.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*

Herman: I'm in love with her.

Max: I was in love with her first.

Wes Anderson, *Rushmore*

“Her” in the quotation above is Rosemary Cross, a widowed kindergarten teacher at Rushmore Academy and the object of affection of the two primary male characters in contemporary writer and director Wes Anderson’s film *Rushmore*. The scene comes after Max Fischer learns that Herman Blume is having an affair with Rosemary Cross, turning what was a mentoring relationship into a competition for her affections, making the two males rivals. The love triangle formed in that moment resembles those of

traditional literature and film¹. Like Romeo, Juliet and Paris in Shakespeare's well known *Romeo and Juliet*, and Edgar, Catherine and Heathcliff in Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, the triangle forces the men to battle each other and the female, leading to the three characters maturing by coming to terms with their situations. Such love triangles form the core of this thesis's examination of three of the films of Wes Anderson, in order to show how the female character serves as a catalyst compelling the men to face their actual-self as opposed to their perceived-self and leading to character and film progression. This thesis will analyze such love triangles in detail in order to argue that, as does Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), male-homosocial desire is imperative for initial character development, but unlike Sedgwick, substantiate that it is Anderson's female characters, like Rosemary, that serves as both the dominant person in the love triangle and the character responsible for propelling the films' narrative. In three chapters, this thesis will examine Anderson's films, *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *The Life Aquatic*, arguing that all three include a female catalyst driving the men and the film's progression.

This thesis' reading adds to the corpus of criticism by challenging the typical understanding of Anderson's work by critics like Jesse Mayshark and Greg Carlson. Mayshark and Carlson tend to focus mainly on the male characters, understanding each film as being about a male crisis of arrested development with minor female importance.

¹ Love triangles are a common motif that has always been used in literature. Some more contemporary and well-known love triangles in film are, Bella, Jacob and Edward in *Twilight*, Luke Skywalker, Princes Leia and Han Solo in *Star Wars*, Allie Hamilton, Noah Calhoun and Lon Hammond in *The Notebook*. They are also used in television series such as Fry, Leela and Zapp Brannigan in *Futurama* and Sookie Stackhouse, Bill Compton and Eric Northman in *True Blood*.

In *Post Pop Cinema: The Search for Meaning in New American Film*, for instance, Mayshark states,

Wes Anderson has shown a recurring fascination with family structures and intergenerational bonds and rivalries... Mothers tend to be some combination of supportive and beleaguered, but they are less of a presence, when they are there at all—there are four dead ones among the families of *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, and *The Life Aquatic*. (116)

In short, Mayshark recognizes the congruent themes of the dysfunctional family units and homosocial desire, but also tends to discredit mothers by calling them “less of a presence.” Mothers, as I will show, actually carry an enormous amount of influence on the male’s lives, due to their prior nurturing even if they are now absent or not as involved in their children’s affairs as they once were. Similarly, Carlson in *Communication Ethics, Media, and Popular Culture*, states, “Anderson’s films appear more comfortable addressing paternal connections than they do mothers and motherhood” (260). The films do focus on paternal connections, but both Mayshark and Carlson do not address the maternal connections at any length, which are important because of what they represent to the characters and how they view women. In their focus on the films’ male relationships, both Mayshark and Carlson touch on female characters roles in terms of motherhood, but do not acknowledge the female characters that are present in the films for their influence on the men and the many things that they can represent to them, besides a love interest. This thesis, then, builds on such arguments and analysis of male interaction but also expands on them by examining how the women’s personas grant them the power to unmask other characters’ vulnerabilities, both

good and bad, and forcing them to reconsider the perceptions that they have of the women and of themselves, which assists them in coming to a self-realization and aiding the film's progression.

In order to make my argument, I rely heavily on the theories of Sedgwick in, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), because her articulation helps to strengthen my understanding of the roles and power struggle within the erotic triangle. *Between Men* primarily, as she says, examines the "social bonds between persons of the same sex," (male) which often leads to a "continuum between homosocial and homosexual bonds" (1). In patriarchal societies, Sedgwick states, there is "obligatory heterosexuality" (3) and that homophobia is a "necessary consequence" (3) for heterosexual marriage. In summary, Sedgwick explains that male homosocial bonds, although initially acceptable, eventually redirect their desire on a female forming an erotic triangle, because men can interact as rivals without the perception of being homosexuals.

Though Sedgwick's theories stem mainly from the prior studies of Sigmund Freud and Rene Girard², they are not in direct line with Girard and Freud. Her work is congruent with Freud and Girard as she supports and points out Girard's claim that men intentionally form rivalries over a woman as an acceptable form of interaction as well as to prove dominance. However, Girard and Freud describe the erotic triangle and the power struggle within as being symmetrical despite gender, meaning that all of the characters involved have equal power, while Sedgwick, instead, argues that the real

² She does include feminist theorist's examinations of the triangle's dynamics and the female roles, but she is more concerned with the male interaction, from comradely to rivalry.

relationship is between the men with the woman mainly serving as a point over which they can relate. Sedgwick's stance makes gender an issue, which affects the power struggle, as the woman is not viewed as a character with significant power, but the men are constantly using the woman in order to interconnect (have a bond of friendship and/or rivalry). Sedgwick states that her asymmetrical triangle is, "a sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment" (27). Sedgwick views the male relationships within the triangle as equally or even more important than the relationships that the males have with the women, but she believes that the males are still constantly shifting in their levels of power due to the rivalry that forms over the female.

This thesis, although using Sedgwick's discussion and her use of some of Girard and Freud's examinations, will not delve deeply into the "sexual folklore" (Sedgwick 22) of the "Oedipal triangle" (22) described as "the situation of the young child that is attempting to situate itself with respect to a powerful father and beloved mother" (22). The erotic triangle itself does use two males rivaling over a female, which Girard and Freud acknowledge, but they view the triangle as symmetrical despite the difference in gender, as it states on page 23 of Sedgwick's text:

In describing the Oedipal drama, Freud notoriously tended to place a male in the generic position of "child" and treat the case of the female as being more or less the same. Thus, both Girard and Freud treat the erotic triangle as symmetrical—in the sense that its structure would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the gender of one of the participants.

I argue that, although Girard and Freud do not consider the idea that gender can affect the power structure within the triangle, that the use of a female does change the power arrangement of the triangle because of her influence and anchoring point as a catalyst effecting the men and their development around her needs and her own evolution to self-realization. Although the Oedipal complex could be used to describe and analyze the triads that form in the films, I will use Sedgwick's language and theory behind the asymmetrical triangles as well as build upon her theory to argue that the female's station in the triangle is more important than the male homosocial relationships.

The critics Mayshark and Carlson, look at women in the same light as Girard, and are in opposition to Sedgwick's ideals, because she considers the female an influential member of the triad, not only because the men are trying to win her favor, but also because of what the female might represent to the male. When used to read the triangles in Wes Anderson's films, for instance, Sedgwick's arguments lead us to see that Rosemary is not only classified as a love interest to Max and Herman, but that she also represents a mother figure, Rushmore Academy, and a status symbol to Max; while to Herman she represents a new start at life, an intelligent and considerate partner, and youth by way of conquering a much younger competitor, Max³. Although Sedgwick's ideologies stem from Freud and Girard's analysis of familial dysfunction and male rivalry in the commonly used erotic triangles in English literature, she builds on their theories and differentiates herself by examining the roles that gender plays in the creation of the

³ The relationship that Max and Herman in *Rushmore*, as well as many of the male counterparts in Anderson's following films, is reminiscent of Freud's Oedipal complex or Oedipal triangle, but I stray from complex by siding with Sedgwick in finding the triangle asymmetrical due to gender. I deviate further by placing the female as the most important role in the triangle.

triad. She understands that the male relationships are imperative in the creation of the triangle, but she also considers the impact that the female has on the men becoming competitors, which weigh in heavily on my thesis by understanding the function of the genders within the triangle.

Though I use Sedgwick's theories for much of my analysis, I deviate from her work slightly because, although I understand that male homosocial desire is prominent, I focus on the female role within the triad, especially how the female affects the men in their quest for homosocial interaction through rivalry and their movement towards self-realization. I also analyze how sex and gender are perceptions placed on individuals due to their behaviors and societal standards. For instance, a masculine role can be played by a strong willed female⁴ who refuses to be a Stepford wife⁵. I will show that the female characters interrupt the male rivalry so that the males also compete against the female for dominance and attention from the other male, offsetting the balance of the triangle due to gender contention.

Another way this thesis differs from the work of prior critics is that it will study the competition component that the female adds, not just as the prize compelling the males to compete for the females attention, but as an active adversary. Anderson's females are often at odds with the males. For instance, in my reading of *The Royal Tenenbaums* I will argue that Eli is trying to get Margot to admit that he is a genius based on his most recent book, which she refuses and that he is as resentful of Richie and Margot's close

⁴ An example of this is Jane in *The Life Aquatic*. The main character Steve refers to her as a bull-dyke, meaning a lesbian that is more masculine and domineering in nature.

⁵ A woman who submits to the male's will and is preoccupied by domestic concerns and her own personal appearance. Term comes from the book The Stepford Wives by Ira Levin.

bond as Margot is jealous of Eli's correspondence with Richie while he is at sea. Eli is competing with Margot, as she is/was considered a genius writer, and both Margot and Eli are jealous of the relationship that the other shares with Richie. In subsequent films, the competition between the females at the center of the triangles and the male competition spills over into the success and acclaim of their careers as well as the competition for attention.

Of Anderson's seven films, this thesis will analyze only *Rushmore* (1998), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), and *The Life Aquatic* (2004). I am not analyzing *Bottle Rocket*, because although I believe it is full of many subtexts, it was Anderson's first film, and he did not have the budget nor the experience to bring the relationships full circle as his film's do now. I am also not performing a complete analysis of Anderson's three latest films to date, *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009), and *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012). His last three films are also multi-dimensional films with many of the same themes involved, but criticism of these films is not extensive. In *Wes Anderson: Why His Movies Matter* by Mark Browning states,

Traditional print media and academic journals have been very slow to react to Anderson's work, and some of the more interesting comments expressed so far have come from the virtual community via fan sites. (xi)

Due to the lack of or a "slow" reaction to Anderson's more recent films I am analyzing three of his first four movies, which have a suitable amount of criticism behind them in order to base my argument. Although the films and characters all have different environments and circumstances that they are reacting in, some more complex than others, there is always a narcissistic male, a strong but troubled female catalyst, a male

that the audience is meant to pull for, and a dramatic event which leads to their self-growth and acceptance. The films I am analyzing are not Anderson's most recent, but the theme of the erotic triangle with a female catalyst is apparent as it is in his subsequent films.

This thesis is organized so that the films that I am analyzing go in chronological order by release year, which interestingly enough, correlates to the level of complexity. *Rushmore*, although it is complex, involves only one erotic triangle among acquaintances; while *The Royal Tenenbaums* has two separate operating erotic triangles. The one I discuss, due to its importance to the film's development, introduces the element of romantic love between two siblings, a further complication in the film. *The Life Aquatic* also incorporates two erotic triangles, which includes a possible father and son contention and involves one of the characters engaged in both of the triangles, making this film the most intricate of the three. These three films all incorporate at least one erotic triangle with an influential female anchoring the triad and forcing movement.

Each film has a drastically different dynamic, from setting, to familial bonds, to taboo topics, and even gendered bigotry, but through it all, the females that are vital to the film's movement all share some common traits, which each chapter will trace. First, each female in the triangles is aesthetically beautiful, independent, intelligent, and strong willed, with a past or present career outside of the home. Second, each is also damaged by the males that at some point held a large level of influence in her life, whether it is through death, in *Rushmore*, denial of their place in a family, in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, or denial of a relationship and the existence of their unborn child, in *The Life Aquatic*. Because of this prior experience, these women practice self-preservation in the form of

not fully committing to romantic feelings, and force the men they presently interact with to strive towards becoming worth-while suitors. Third, I will show that the women, although scarred, are stronger, more sensitive and more sensible than their male counterparts, for, their scars manifest themselves in different ways that add to their character and their place as anchor of the love triangles. These women refuse to be placed in the role of the passive accommodating and helpless victim; instead they have agendas and issues going on in their own lives without taking on the fixations that the male's have. Largely, I will show how each of the women, despite their differences of personality, environment and situation, also share common traits that influence the men in each triangle by the means of rejection, denial of feelings, and also acceptance, forcing the men to face their problems without placing the blame on anyone else, which leads each character to reevaluate his/her self-perception and come to a self-realization and acceptance of him/herself and others.

I often get asked about my interest in Wes Anderson. I explain that I am interested in his work for many reasons, one being that he is both the writer⁶ and director of his films, meaning that his ideas come to life. His films use intelligent comedy along with some sort of a tragic storyline and eccentric imagery. He often uses the same actors and cast⁷, and his characters are well developed with elaborate backstories. His style is recognizably different from the norm, which I find appealing. Moreover, I not only enjoy

⁶ Anderson is actually a co-writer of his films. He has collaborated his efforts with the help of Owen Wilson, Noah Baumbach, Jason Schwartzman, and Roman Coppola.

⁷ Anderson's cast often includes Bill Murray, Owen Wilson, Luke Wilson, Anjelica Huston, Jason Schwartzman, and Seymour Cassel. He also often attracts big name actors to star in his films, such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Bruce Willis, Edward Norton, Natalie Portman, Jeff Goldblum, Cate Blanchett, Willem Dafoe, Tilda Swinton, etc.

his work but think it is important to analyze because as he is a young contemporary writer and director, his portrayal of women and the men that obsess over them is a good interpretation of his view on gender roles from a generational standpoint. After reading criticism on the films, I came to see that my understanding of the films and especially the female roles is vastly different from theirs because I understand the women to be strong and independent, yet real because they, as most people, have their own set of quirks and insecurities.

I was introduced to Sedgwick and her theories on erotic triangles in literature as my idea developed and concentrated. I came to understand the potential that my thesis has on expanding on the prior analysis of critic's and of Sedgwick's theories to include the females' importance. My hope is that, although I will not change the view of women in society overnight, I want to show that there is a new interpretation that grants female roles influence beyond being characters that are simply included to fill the screen and be the overlooked male counterpart.

CHAPTER I:
**RUSHMORE: ROSEMARY’S REPRESENTATIONS AND EFFECTIVE ACTS
OF SELF-PRESERVATION**

I'm still waiting for your heart, because I'm sure that someday it's gonna start.

You'll be mine to hold each day, but 'til then this is all that I can say.

Here's comes my baby, here she comes now,

And it comes as no surprise to me, she's with another guy.

Here's comes my baby, here she comes now,

Walking with a love, with a love that's all so fine,

Never could be mine, no matter how I try.

“Here Comes My Baby” by Cat Stevens

The song in the above epigraph is used in *Rushmore*, Wes Anderson’s 1998 film about a prep school of the same name and the relationship that develops between a student, Max Fischer, his teacher, Rosemary Cross, and Herman Blume. As the verse above shows, the song is about a speaker who is jealous of another person for whom his “baby” has left him. In short, like in *Rushmore*, the song is about a love triangle. Further, “My Baby” could be understood to refer to Rosemary Cross, the love interest and the most significant character in the erotic triangle that ensues. Aptly, Anderson uses this song as background music during a scene when Max, who is secretly in a quest to win Rosemary’s love, convinces her to aid in his attempts to excel at his new public high

school, while his now close friend Herman, whom is tagging along, also begins to pursue Rosemary. The melody continues through brief subsequent scenes of Rosemary, Herman and Max, with the two adults tutoring, playing tennis, supporting extracurricular activities, and spending a considerable amount of time with Max. It is during these activities that, a growing attraction between Herman and Rosemary becomes evident, resulting in Herman and Rosemary's affair, Max's displeasure over the affair, and the formation of the love triangle that will be the focus of this chapter's analysis.

Rushmore is writer and director, Wes Anderson's second film¹, which establishes the themes of familial dysfunction and erotic triangles containing a female catalyst that are common and important to his oeuvre². The main characters presented in *Rushmore* are all dealing with inner turmoil because of family issues and societal pressures, which is manifested in various ways that lead to peculiar expectations and perceptions. This chapter will examine societal boundaries in relationships due to age, positions of authority, gender, power, status, death, and marital indiscretions and how they affect the power struggle and function of the erotic triangle. My argument is that Rosemary is the female catalyst that influences the men's transformation and the film's progression due to her position of power within the triad.

The erotic triangle between the three is, as I explained in my introduction using Sedgwick's words, "a sensitive registry precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning" (27), in which Rosemary has the most power because of what she means to the men. This chapter will show that Rosemary holds the power within the triangle

¹ Anderson's first film is *Bottle Rocket*, which I explained in the introduction, I am not analyzing due to his lack of budget and experience needed to fully create the deep issues holding the triads together.

because of her ability to influence the men due to what she represents to each of them. Despite the obvious fact that Max and Herman are both physically attracted to Rosemary, she also represents important aspects in the men's lives that they are missing and are desperate to have. Max sees her as a representation of status, a connection to Rushmore, and a mother figure, while Herman connects her to feelings of youth and a new healthy relationship. My argument is that Rosemary is the most powerful and influential character in the film because of what she represents to the men, forcing them to reevaluate their self-perception as she reconsiders her own awareness.

I make this claim in opposition to typical readings of the film. Critics Greg Carlson and Jesse Mayshark, for instance, mention the significance of mothers in the films but ultimately conclude that men or fathers, in this case Max and Herman, are the most important characters to analyze in *Rushmore*. In the Introduction I present a quotation from, *Post Pop Cinema: The search for Meaning in New American Film*, in which Mayshark points out that Wes Anderson often presents “family structures and intergenerational bonds of rivalries...” where “Mothers...are less of a presence, when they are there at all—there are four dead ones among the families of *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, and *The Life Aquatic*” (116). Though Mayshark's discussion of the familial theme acknowledges that Max's mother is deceased, it does not examine the role his deceased mother plays in his life and how her absence influences Max's life decisions. Similarly, when examining Max's choice of Rosemary, he states, “Max's crush on Rosemary makes sense as an extension of his identification with Rushmore” (125). So Mayshark acknowledges that Max associates Rosemary with Rushmore, but he does not put together the concept that Max now sees Rosemary as a mother figure

representing Rushmore, adding even more importance to her role. Mayshark recognizes that family structures often form “intergenerational bonds and rivalries” which is apparent as Herman and Max form a father and son bond that turns into a competition, but he does not state that Rosemary is the reason for this rivalry and the reason that she is so important to the men.

Like Mayshark, Carlson mainly argues that father figures are the chief concern in Anderson’s films, although he also touches on the role of Max’s mother. In *Communication Ethics, Media, and Popular Culture* he states, “This is not to suggest that mothers are ignored completely; while absent in *Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore* ruminates on Max’s deceased mother Eloise as a consistent motif” (260). While Carlson briefly examines women and Max’s mother, he, like Mayshark, does not consider the void that Rosemary fills as a representation of Max’s mother and therefore a representation of Rushmore. He also did not get into Herman’s attraction to Rosemary beyond rivalry, although she comes to represent a new life with a caring partner.

Both critics observe that Max is attracted to Rosemary because of her connection to Rushmore and that Herman is after Rosemary for the sake of rivalry, but this chapter will expand on their arguments to show that the male’s attraction to Rosemary runs deeper than they attribute, making her more important and granting her more power within the triad than they claim. I will also add to their arguments by exploring Rosemary’s attraction to the men, explaining that she feels sorry for Max, who also reminds her of her deceased husband, and that she feels an attraction to Herman because he is an adult that can fill the void that her husband left. This chapter will show that

Rosemary is integral to the triangle to initiate a rivalry, but what she comes to represent gives her the aptitude to influence the men.

I will analyze this film by first, explaining how the love triangle came about and functions. Next, I will look at how Rosemary became the key character that leads to the men's development. Finally, I will examine how the triangle ended up affecting Rosemary's progression. The film's movement begins with dysfunctional relationships and power struggles forming within a volatile erotic triangle anchored by Rosemary, but I will explain that it ends after coming full circle to help all of the characters reach an understanding and acceptance of themselves and one another.

The Love Triad

The love triad in *Rushmore* begins, as so many do, as a harmless friendship between three people, but it becomes toxic as the men ruthlessly pursue Rosemary romantically and become competitors. Because of their very different roles in life, Rosemary, Max, and Herman are an unlikely group of people to form an erotic triangle. Max is a young student, Rosemary is an elementary teacher, and Herman is a middle-aged, married, successful business owner. Despite their vast differences, the men form a rivalry over Rosemary that brings to light what Max and Herman are really searching for, a mother figure and connection to *Rushmore* for Max and for Herman a rivalry, youth and another shot at having a happy life.

The triad begins with Max's failing academics at *Rushmore* threatening his continued enrollment as a student. Max retreats to the library where he finds the following quotation by Jacques Cousteau written in the book *Diving for Sunken Treasure*, "When one man, for whatever reason, has the opportunity to live an extraordinary life, he

has no right to keep it to himself.” Intrigued by the quotation, as he feels he has the ability to live an “extraordinary life,” Max sets out to find out who wrote in the book, which leads him to Rushmore teacher Rosemary. He sees her and is instantly attracted to her for a range of reasons: her physical beauty, her gentle and vulnerable demeanor, and her status as a Rushmore teacher. Max begins spending time with Rosemary, and she notices that Max has a crush on her, which she addresses by telling him that they do not have a relationship beyond friendship because he is only fifteen years old and a student at Rushmore. Unfazed by Rosemary’s dismissal of them ever forming a romance, Max continues to engross himself with thoughts of her. The film thus shows Max and Rosemary’s relationship starting out by chance and being one that Rosemary understands to be a mentoring relationship though Max hopes that it will become romantic.

As with Max, the film introduces Herman to the triangle by presenting him at an awkward time, when he has become cynical and is in a failing marriage. Herman Blume is a man that Max befriends after hearing him give a speech at Rushmore that, like the quotation Rosemary wrote, resonates for him. Herman’s speech, although unorthodox, means a great deal to Max, because it is similar to his thoughts and theories on the other students at Rushmore. Herman’s states,

You guys have it real easy. I never had it like this where I grew up, but I send my kids here, because the fact is you go to one of the best schools in the country, Rushmore. Now for some of you it doesn’t matter, you were born rich and you’re going to stay rich. But here is my advice for the rest of you, take dead aim on the rich boys, get them in the cross hairs and take them down. Just remember, they can buy anything, but they can’t buy backbone, don’t let them forget that.

Because Max is an outcast and not rich, he feels that he and Herman are a lot alike and he introduces himself. Herman also becomes intrigued by Max because of his vigor for life. Herman's interest in Max is sparked further when Max, as a cross-guard after school, runs up to his car as he picks up his sons up from school.

Max: "Hi Mr. Blume. It's Max Fischer."

Herman: "Oh yeah. What's the secret Max?"

Max: "Secret?"

Herman: "Yeah, well you seem to have it pretty figured out."

Max: "Secret I don't know, uh. I think you just gotta find something you love to do and just do it for the rest of your life. For me it's going to Rushmore."

Max and Herman's friendship grows as they both see something that they identify with in the other. Max sees a monetarily successful man that grew up meagerly, just as he is not a wealthy individual, and Herman sees a young man with a zest for life, something that he lacks in his current life. Max and Herman quickly become close friends and seem inseparable. The film thus presents Herman and Max forming a father and son type of bond. Even though Max has a father and Herman has sons, they find qualities in each other that they find more fitting than they do in their biological families.

The film begins to establish the triangle with Max forming close relationships with both Herman and Rosemary separately, and then introducing them to one another so that the three begin spending time together. Herman first meets Rosemary after attending Max's latest play, where Max introduces them and introduces Herman to Rosemary's companion for the evening, Peter. While at dinner Herman does not make a good first

impression with Rosemary because he inappropriately orders Max an alcoholic beverage. Max similarly irritates Rosemary by being rude to Peter and stating that he was not invited along. Herman tries to defuse the situation by saying, "Take it easy Max," and Rosemary replies, "You were the one that ordered him whiskey and soda." The scene concludes with Max making a commotion by insisting that Rosemary hurt his feelings by bringing Peter to the play and dinner with them.

Max: I'm just trying to figure out why you brought this gentleman to my play and my dinner which was invitation only...

Rosemary: What is wrong with you?

Max: What is wrong with you? You hurt my feelings. This night was important to me.

Rosemary: How did I hurt your feelings?

Max: Oh my God. I wrote a hit play... And I'm in love with you.

This scene exhibits Max's intense feelings of love and jealousy over Rosemary. Max is feeling threatened by Rosemary's male friend, Peter; and although Peter and Rosemary do not exhibit any romantic attachment, Max still focuses his jealousy towards Peter, not realizing that his real rival will be Herman, who has also become interested in Rosemary. Herman is Max's good friend, he understands Max's feelings for Rosemary, and witnesses his jealous rant, yet Herman is not detoured in his decision to also pursue Rosemary.

Herman admires Max for his gusto and station in life, as he is young and has everything to look forward to, while Herman is not happy or excited about his life, leading to his pursuit of Rosemary to rival Max. If Herman can attain what Max desires,

then he too can feel youthful and excited about life. Max asks Herman to seek out Rosemary because she will not speak to Max after his outburst at dinner and she did not show up to the groundbreaking of the aquarium that he was having built for her that led to his expulsion³ and subsequent enrollment at Grover Cleveland Public High School. In this scene Herman is lurking behind trees watching Rosemary teach a children's art class outside. She spots him and he comes over to talk to her.

Herman: Max wants to talk to you.

Rosemary: What for?

Herman: To apologize I think.

Rosemary: Are you his messenger?

Herman: No, I'm his friend...

Herman: What is your first name?

Rosemary: Rosemary. What's yours?

Herman: Herman.

This scene shows Rosemary and Herman beginning to flirt with one another, much of it through their body language of coy smiles and glances, even though Herman is married and tells Rosemary that Max is his friend. Herman and Max, being such good friends begs the question as to why Herman is flirting with the woman that Max claims to love. This phenomenon can be explained, as I presented in my introduction, through Sedgwick's description, "Girard finds many examples in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's

³ Max receives funds from Herman to begin building an aquarium on Rushmore grounds, because he believes that Rosemary will appreciate it since she has fish tanks in her classroom and wrote in an Aquatic library book, but Max did seek consent from the school to build it and he was also on academic probation so they expelled him.

already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival” (21). Max apologizes to Rosemary and she begins tutoring him, but Herman is often with them on outings because he is Max’s good friend, and the flirting between Herman and Rosemary intensifies. The song “Here Comes My Baby,” from the beginning of this chapter is playing in the background during the scenes of the trio interacting and Herman and Rosemary are forming more of an attraction for one another, which the song foreshadows. Herman eventually builds up enough confidence to show up at Rosemary’s house while Max is at play practice, and they hold hands while taking a walk as the song says, “walking with a love, with a love that’s all so fine,” and the affair initiates from there.

As the scene reveals, Anderson quickly complicates Max’s primary love triangle between himself, Rosemary and his perceived opponent, Peter, by adding Herman into the mix. Now both men are longing for Rosemary, even though Max is unaware of Herman’s agenda and continues to confide in him his desires. Herman does not want Max to know that he too is interested in her because it would damage their friendship and he can maintain an advantage by knowing what Max is thinking and knowing his schedule.

The actual competition between the men does not begin until Max finds out about the affair from his former chapel partner at Rushmore, Dirk, who witnessed Herman and Rosemary together. Rosemary and Herman have both witnessed Max’s jealousy in full affect, which they do not want to incite, plus Herman wants Rosemary to fall for him before Max finds out so that he can proclaim victory over Max. After Max is made aware of Herman and Rosemary’s affair he confronts Herman and tells Rosemary that

she ruined his life. From that point on the men begin battling each other by trying to discredit one another while still struggling to remain or get back in Rosemary's favor. Instead of Herman being able to show Max that he won Rosemary's affections and Max admitting defeat while maintaining their friendship, Max becomes livid and decides to ruin both Herman and Rosemary's lives by telling Herman's wife and Rushmore's head chancellor, Dr. Guggenheim⁴, about the affair.

Because the men are constantly shifting levels of power Rosemary is able to retain the most of the control in the triad and remain the most influential character. Max thinks that he has more power than Herman because Rosemary is spending time tutoring him, but he does not realize that Herman is having a sexual affair with Rosemary, which grants Herman more clout as he is given more access into Rosemary's life. Herman overestimates his dominance over Max because he has believes he has been able to manipulate Rosemary into falling in love with him, but Herman is mistaken. Rosemary, even if she thinks she is in love with Herman, is unable to completely give herself to him because she is still hung-up on her deceased husband. The fact that both males believe that they have the upper hand indicates that neither controls the triad.

In fact, it is Rosemary who controls any and all involvement that the men have with her and she displays this by ending their triangle all together. Rosemary effectively ends the triangle when she breaks off her affair with Herman, because she understands that the relationships that had formed between all of them were unhealthy. Her relationship with Max was harmful because his obsession with her and his fascination with defeating

⁴ Max showed Dr. Guggenheim pictures of Herman and Rosemary together to try to get her fired, but Rosemary had already resigned. Max protested Dr. Guggenheim allowing her to leave Rushmore, stating that she is the best teacher that Rushmore has. Max wanted to be the cause of her termination so that he had an impact on her life.

Herman was keeping him from forming relationships with classmates and also ruined his friendship with Herman. Her relationship with Herman was detrimental because he ended up losing both his family and his friendship with Max due to the affair. The triangle was not beneficial for Rosemary either because Max reminded her of her deceased husband, which contributed to her ongoing fixation with him, and her affair with Herman branded her a home-wrecker, even though she knew the affair would not last because Herman could not compare to her husband. The disbanding of the triad was actually good for each of the characters because as they searched for answers as to how everything had spun out of control each of them came to reevaluate their self-perceptions and ended up overcoming their issues and coming to a self-realization and acceptance of their lives that helped them to move on.

Points of Attraction

Max, Herman, and Rosemary are drawn together initially because of their proximity and frequency of being on Rushmore's campus, but their bond continues because of the needs that they fulfill in each other. Beginning with Max, his attraction to Rosemary and Herman begins because he finds them at a time that he is feeling especially vulnerable due to his career at Rushmore being threatened. Max identifies himself through Rushmore, a high-brow school that his beloved deceased mother got him into as a child, and being expelled from Rushmore means that he will lose his connection with his mother. Hence Max finds an attractive, intelligent and kind hearted teacher at Rushmore to keep him connected to Rushmore and fulfill the role of a supportive mother figure. Max's attraction to Herman is based more on his admiration and the fact that they both come from meager beginning, which allots Herman the ability to better understand him,

along with Max's search for a more suitable father figure that has money and status. Max is embarrassed by his father's profession as a barber. Although his father is kind and supportive, Max still lies and tells others that his father is a neurosurgeon. Max looks to Rosemary and Herman to form an alternate family that he feels is more suitable.

Like Max, Herman sees something in Rosemary and Max that he believes will fill a void that he has been missing for a long time; a passion for life and happiness. Herman admired Max's enthusiasm in everything he does. Because Herman is in a loveless marriage with twin boys that he abhors, he does not feel enthusiastic about anything and feels like his presence in his family's life is unnecessary besides being a bank account. Max reminds him of himself as a teenager, full of hopes and dreams and neither Max nor Herman comes from privileged households. Like Max, Herman looks to Max as a more appropriate family member. Max is the kind of son that he wishes he had instead of his twin sons. During a wrestling match, Herman peers out at one of his sons that is wrestling and grunting and disappointedly says, "Never in my wildest imagination did I ever dream that I would have sons like these." Herman even asks Max to come to his son's birthday party and to work for him, but Max turns down the offer because he is spending all of his time following Rosemary around and devising a plan to win her over. They fulfill a need in each other representing what they wish they had, for Max a successful and intellectual father figure that he could be proud of, and for Herman a son that is articulate and ambitious that he can more easily identify with.

Herman's attraction to Rosemary initially centers on the fact that Max desires her, but as he gets to know Rosemary he begins to look to at her as someone that he could be happy with, unlike his cold and unsupportive wife. Rosemary brings hope back into his

life and he feels youthful and happy to be involved with an attractive woman who is intelligent and cares for him. Herman does not consider the repercussions of his actions, and instead of ending his relationship with his wife, it is left up to Max who in a moment of revenge notifies Herman's wife who divorces him. Herman, like Max, looks to Max and Rosemary as the type of family that he would prefer to have, rather than the family that he does have.

Rosemary's attraction towards the men is more about her being kind-hearted and lonely since the death of her husband⁵. After Max asks Rosemary to tutor him, he shows her the book from the library that she wrote in. She explains that her husband gave her that book and she donated it to the library at Rushmore and said, "You remind me of him you know." Max said, "I do? How?" Rosemary tells him that her husband founded the Rushmore Beekeepers Society, a group in which Max was the president while he was still a Rushmore student. Being around Max makes Rosemary feel like a little bit of her husband is still around. They fulfill a role in each other's lives that is missing and that they long for, a representation of a mother figure for Max, and for Rosemary a version of her deceased husband.

Rosemary's attraction towards Herman is an interesting case, mainly because they both know that having an affair while Herman is married is considered immoral⁶ and also because they are breaking Max's trust by being together behind his back. Many of the actions that she engages in with Herman are because she craves the intimacy that she has lost since her husband's death. She enjoys being able to talk to an adult and express

⁵ Her husband drowned a year earlier.

⁶ Marriage in a Eurocentric society, such as the setting of *Rushmore*, is normally based on the Christian values of a monogamous marriage.

herself sexually, but he is mainly filling the void of a warm body. Because Rosemary allows Herman a romantic role in her life then abruptly ends it, she prompts him to reevaluate his choices and how he was disillusioned in his perception of her and himself.

Rosemary and the Men's Development

Dispelling the Fantasy

Rosemary's character is vital for the men's development because she influences the men's self-perception after she dispels the angelic views that they held of her. Max and Herman have built the fantasy of who they think Rosemary is in their minds, a mother figure for Max and the start to a new and happy life without consequences for Herman, both figures that she cannot possibly live up to. An especially clear demonstration of how the triad is built upon mistaken perceptions of Rosemary come in a scene where she realizes that herself and tries to tear down Max's misperception of her. Rosemary causes Max to question his reality, because he has been holding Rosemary up to the standards of his beloved mother. Rosemary shatters Max's fantasy of who he believes her to be by ultimately having to become very direct and explicit towards Max. This effective scene begins with Max in his Rushmore uniform⁷ entering into Rosemary's classroom and approaching her as she is packing up her classroom⁸.

Rosemary: Please, look, I don't think you should come in here. Look, I'm sorry I hurt your feelings. I'm sorry I love your friend instead of you, but... Please Max...

⁷ Max continues to wear his Rushmore uniform even after his expulsion and while attending his new school. He feels that it represents his elite status and allows him to still feel a connection with Rushmore.

⁸ Rosemary is packing up her classroom because she resigned. She felt guilty for her inappropriate actions with Herman, the married father of twin boys that attend Rushmore.

Max: You honestly believe you love Blume instead of me?

Rosemary: Yes.

Max: You'll have to forgive me if I don't take your word for it.

Rosemary: Stop (as Max advances towards her). Listen I'm going to lose it; I mean it!

Max: It's too late. (Max tries to forcefully pull Rosemary towards him by grabbing her by the arm and neck but she fights him off).

Max: Wait please. I got kicked out because of you.

Rosemary: No you got kicked out (Max interrupts)...

Max: Rushmore was my life, now you are.

Rosemary: No I'm not. What do really think is going to happen between us? Do you think we are going to have sex?

Max: That is kind of a cheap way to put it.

Rosemary: Not if you've ever fucked before it isn't.

Max: Oh my God.

Rosemary: How would you describe it to your friends? Would you say that you fingered me, or maybe I should give you a hand job? Would that put an end to all of this? Please leave my classroom.

Max is appalled, because he held Rosemary on a pedestal, representing a love interest, Rushmore and his mother, all ideals that this scene crushes. Rosemary has to be crass and mean to get her point across to Max, almost taking on the persona of a juvenile male in her demeanor and language to make Max understand the reality of their situation. She sets Max straight and makes him see her as a flawed person not an ideal because her role

as the most influential and powerful character in the triangle is being threatened by Max, both physically and verbally as he at first chooses not to believe her when she tells him that she loves Herman, and then grabs her to try and kiss her. Rosemary maintains her control, but only because she is strong enough to physically thrust Max aside and then by being crude and downplaying the virtuous perception that Max has held of her and the relationship that he has desired since first setting eyes on her. Max can no longer objectify Rosemary and place her in a glorified role, since she no longer exemplifies the pedestal figure of his fantasy, forcing him to reevaluate his perception of her and of himself for being so infatuated with this person that no longer fit his model of a suitable girlfriend. The film stresses Rosemary's power within the triad by showing Max as disillusioned when Rosemary forces him to reevaluate his self-perception and his perception of her, because she can no longer represent his righteous mother.

As with Max, Herman also perceives Rosemary in a fantastical light that is capable of making his life pleasurable, but again the film shows her power by demonstrating that Herman is only able to keep her on her pedestal as long as he appeases her, which means that Herman is playing a role that he feels she will appreciate in an effort to receive or continue receiving Rosemary's affections. Herman's love for her, like Max's, is based on a misconception of who Rosemary really is. Herman, although he initially begins pursuing Rosemary simply because of Max, feels like she can offer him a new start at his now stagnant and unfulfilling life. Rosemary causes Herman's self-realization by interrupting the fantasy world that he is living in where he does not have to consider consequences. Herman's marriage was basically over before he began an affair with Rosemary so his divorce was not that upsetting to him, but his happiness was short

lived, as he is crushed when Rosemary breaks up with him leaving him with nothing. He has no wife. His children hate him. He ruined his friendship with Max. A scene depicting Herman's life in shambles begins with Herman entering the hospital to visit a patient and running into Max on the elevator. Herman looks disheveled, with a black eye, smoking a cigarette and drinking miniature bottles of hard alcohol that he is masking by pouring it into a Diet Coke can and hiding the empty bottles in the hospital's laundry cart. He addresses Max and Max asks him who gave him the black eye. Herman tells him that it was one of his children, but he does not know which one.

Herman: Kids don't like it when their parents get divorced.

Max: I don't blame them.

Herman: Neither do I.

Max: How is she?

Herman: I really wouldn't know.

Max: Why not?

Herman: I haven't seen her in six weeks.

Max: What happened? She left?

Herman: (shrugs) She's in love with a dead guy anyway.

Max: Edward Applebee⁹.

Herman: (lighting the second of two cigarettes in his mouth) You know man, she's sweet but she's fucked up.

Max: (as Herman is leaving the elevator) Hey are you okay?

Herman: Ummm, I'm a little bit lonely these days.

⁹ Edward Applebee is the name of Rosemary's beloved deceased husband.

Herman's life has crumbled, because even though he lost his family and friendship, he was under the assumption that Rosemary was in love with him, that they were happy together, and that they would remain a couple. Herman had gained power over Max while he was with Rosemary, because he was finally happy and Rosemary allowed him access into her life, but only for a short time. Herman never considered that Rosemary may have reservations about their relationship because of the circumstances that the affair began under. Rosemary does feel she has to end the affair for many reasons including the fact that they broke Max's trust, she is a teacher at the school that Herman's children attend, and Herman is still married, but subconsciously she broke it off because he is not Edward Applebee (her deceased husband). Rosemary ended their relationship, much to Herman's dismay, which maintained her position of power within the triangle, because Herman was not given a choice in the matter. Herman was perfectly happy being with Rosemary, even after his wife found out and decided to divorce him. He was living in his fantasy world where Rosemary would make everything in his world wonderful again, without considering that she would decide to end the relationship, shattering his self-perception and the perception he had of her as his redeeming savior granting him all of his wishes. By maintaining all of the power within the triangle by ending her relationships with both Max and Herman she effectively terminated the triangle and the faultless perceptions that the men held of her leading to their self-realizations.

Rosemary's influence over the men and their decisions leads them to face some very unpleasant but probably ultimately necessary events, like Max being expelled from Rushmore and Herman getting a divorce. These events, however, lead to a self-realization that helps Herman and Max come to understand their situations and accept

themselves and others. Max began the film with a sense of entitlement, but because of Rosemary's influence and her rejection of his expectations, he is forced to reexamine his perception of her as well as himself, ultimately leading him to a more grounded and realistic sense of whom he really is. Because Rosemary broke up with Herman, he, like Max, comes to realize that Rosemary cannot and will not fix his life for him, that he has to take responsibility for his actions, accept the consequences and figure out who he is and what he wants.

Max's Growth Due to Rosemary's Influence

Max ultimately comes to a self-realization, but it occurs in stages because of his emotional attachment to Rosemary and her representation of Rushmore and his mother. The film stresses Rosemary's importance by showing how she changes Max's life and gives him a new and healthier sense of direction. Earlier in this chapter I described the scene that lead to the formation of the love triad, which is when Max began to progress, both socially and academically, but his growth halts after he finds out about the affair. After Rosemary tells him that she is in love with Herman, Max quits school and gives up on many of his dreams, succumbing to the fact that Rosemary will never be his. He goes through a type of depression, because since his expulsion from Rushmore he had clung to the friendship that he had with Rosemary, which kept him connected to his mother. After seeing Herman at the hospital and finding out that Rosemary broke up with him, he makes one last ditch effort to win her, but his perception of her is now different, and he sees her as a woman with her own set of problems. In order to ensure that Rosemary will see him, Max shows up at her bedroom window, which was actually her husband's childhood room that is still filled with all of his possessions, and claims that he was just

hit by a car and she invites him in to make sure that he is okay. While she is getting antiseptic for what looks like a wound on his head he quickly puts in a cassette of romantic music playing softly in the background. Max then begins by asking Rosemary why she broke up with Herman.

Rosemary: Okay. Um, A. He's married. B. He hates himself. And C. Well, he smashed up your bicycle didn't he?

Max: My previous bicycle, yes... He thinks you dumped him because of Edward Applebee... (She is surprised at his remarks about her deceased husband)

Rosemary: Although I will say that, Edward has more spark and character and imagination in one fingernail than Herman Blume has in his entire body.

Max: One dead fingernail.

Rosemary: Right. One dead fingernail (a single tear streams down her face)...

Max: How did he die by the way?

Rosemary: He drowned. How did your mother die?

Max: She got cancer

Rosemary leans in to take care of the cut on Max's head and he lightly kisses her, she pushes away, but not right away.

Rosemary: Is this fake blood?

Max: Yes it is.

Rosemary: (clearly aggravated) You know, you and Herman deserve each other; you're both little children. Let me show you the door.

This scene clearly shows that Max is starting to understand Rosemary's reservations with not just him, but any man that is interested in her, which helps Max to come to the realization that he cannot fill the void that her dead husband left, not that anyone could. Max then understands that he will never be with her. He comes to the realization that he was attracted to her because he was looking to her as a representation of his mother. As they were discussing the fact that her husband is dead and she was still comparing Herman to him, Max came to recognize that his mother too is dead and he was holding Rosemary to the same expectations that he had of his mother, a standard that she cannot possibly attain. Rosemary's candid talk with Max helped him come to his final self-realization helping him to accept himself and where he comes from. He begins to make amends and even tries to help Herman win back Rosemary. Max realizes that, he is a public school student, with mediocre grades, but he has a strength that lies in writing, directing, and acting in his plays.

Rosemary's Effect on Herman's Progression

Rushmore also shows Rosemary's importance in the triad through her ultimate effect on Herman's life. Herman's life changed due to Rosemary not only because their affair lead to him losing his family, but she also helped him to realize that he can be happy, if he takes the initiative and accepts responsibility. After she broke up with him, his ideal new life was shattered, but with Max's prodding and support Herman set out to win Rosemary back by building an eight million dollar marine observatory at Rushmore, but Rosemary did not show up to the groundbreaking. Herman was being selfish and

narcissistic in his pursuit of Rosemary, because he wanted to win her favor to prove dominance over Max, he did not care that it broke up his family and friendships, and because he concerned only with what Rosemary could give him, a new start. Rosemary influenced Herman's growth to come to the self-realization that his marriage was over and although she broke up with him, he will be able to find happiness again, because he found it with her, even if was only for a short while.

The Triangle's Effect on Rosemary's Development

Rosemary is the most influential character in the film leading the men to their self-realization, but this is not to say that she is not also damaged by the loss of her husband and in need of coming to her own self-realization and understanding that her perception of the male suitors in her life is skewed. The triangle affects Rosemary's development in the film and grants her the most clout by forcing her to make choices that influence the men's progression and helps her to realize that she is holding on to the memory of her husband to the point that she cannot have a fair relationship with anyone else because she compares all other suitors to her husband and no one can match up. The scene I described previously with Max and Rosemary having a sincere conversation in her bedroom when she speaks of how, "Edward has more spark and character and imagination in one fingernail than Herman Blume has in his entire body." And Max reminds her, that it is, "One dead fingernail." This dialogue especially illustrates that she is still in mourning for her husband and compares everyone to him, and if she is ever going to be able to engage in a meaningful relationship again she has to let go of him and reassess her expectations. Rosemary had been practicing self-preservation by not allowing herself to fully fall in love with anyone else; therefore not having to experience

the pain of losing someone that she loves again. She desperately misses her husband, which is clear by the fact that she obtained a job teaching at the school that he went to as a boy and is living in his childhood home with all of his childhood possessions.

Rosemary now comes to the realization that she has been holding herself back and not giving anyone else a fair shot. As Max is making the connection that he has been trying to use Rosemary as a surrogate mother and also as an object that can be won, she realizes that she has been pushing the men away because they are not Edward Applebee.

Although Rosemary had to come to her own self-realization, her presence and position at Rushmore is the point of contention that forced the males' to react to Rosemary's wishes and to reevaluate their lives because she rejected them and did not allow them to continue to manipulate and hide from their truths.

The last scene of the film helps the now disbanded triangle members understand that there is hope for their futures now that they have overcome their misconceptions. The scene opens with many of the rarely seen cast being seated for Max's latest play being performed at his new school. Rosemary is shown to her seat by an usher, which is right beside Herman's seat. They both look a little nervous and Rosemary says, "Hello Herman, looks like Max pulled a fast one on us." Then Max begins the play by saying "This play is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Eloise Fischer and to Edward Applebee, a friend of a friend." Acknowledging his mother shows that Max is accepting who he is and where he comes from, while giving some notoriety to the memory of Rosemary's deceased husband shows that he accepts Rosemary for who she is and not as a representation of his mother anymore. During the intermission, Herman is standing outside alone and Rosemary approaches with two cups of coffee, giving one of them to

Herman. She says, “What do you think of Max’s latest opus?” Herman replies, “It’s good. Let’s hope it has a happy ending.” Rosemary caresses his hair and the scene ends. This gives insight to the final scene of the film when Max is talking to Margaret Yang and her parents as well as his father when Herman and Rosemary address Max together and Herman introduces everyone, including his father, showing that he is no longer ashamed of letting others know who his father is and that he is a barber. Next, it shows Margaret and Max dancing as Herman interrupts:

Hello Margaret. May I cut in? I haven’t had a chance to cut a rug with your new girlfriend yet.

Max: (sheepishly) Awe, new girlfriend...

Margaret: Yes I am. Find your own dance partner Mr. Blume, I’m spoken for.

Max: No it’s okay. He’s my friend.

Rosemary: (to Max) Well, you pulled it off.

Max: Yeah, it went okay. At least nobody got hurt.

Rosemary: Except you.

Max: Naw, I didn’t get hurt that bad. (then they begin to dance together)

The film ends ensuring that everyone is where they should be. There is no longer a need for triad or control as Max has moved on to Margaret and acknowledges that Rosemary did the right thing when he said that he “didn’t get hurt that bad.” Max tells Rosemary this to show that although he felt hurt during the time that Rosemary was having the affair with Herman, he was able to move on with someone his own age with similar interests and he is resilient. He knows he was wrong to put Rosemary in the position that

he did, and he does not want her to feel guilty for hurting his feelings, because after all he did not lose anything over the affair, as Rosemary lost her job and Herman lost his family. Herman and Rosemary also seem to have mended their relationship as Herman now has his act together and his friendship with Max is restored. Rosemary now accepts her husband's death; she does not have to forget him, but she also cannot expect anyone else to be him, leading to her giving Herman and herself another chance at a relationship. All of the characters are hopeful for the future and are heading in a good and healthy direction because of the actions of Rosemary, bringing the film to a culmination.

Rushmore's use of a female persona in an erotic triangle and the evolution to a self-realization is not a new concept, but what I have done differently is examine Rosemary's place in a setting that may seem common, but that becomes encompassed by neurotic men and chaotic circumstances that need a strong woman to influence their evolution to their self-realization. Rosemary is the most powerful player and anchor of the love triad because she has the ability to either grant or reject the men a place in her life. Although she is in the midst of working on her own issues she becomes the most influential character in the film by being direct with Max and Herman and by not accepting the pressure that they put on her to fulfill their needs, which forces them to look at themselves and try understand what is missing in their lives and how to fix it on their own. By illustrating that she is a real person with real problems, Rosemary is able to steer the men in a direction that makes them move beyond rivalry and the fixations that have prevented them from progressing. In adding to prior criticism, and understanding that male comradely and rivalry is important to Anderson's films, I still believe the females are the vital characters that should be acknowledged for their influence on the

men and therefore the film's progression. In the films to follow that I analyze, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, and *The Life Aquatic*, I foresee many of the same themes coming to light such as familial issues, erotic triangles, male rivalry, strong and intelligent female characters, and an overall development of the characters involved reaching a self-realization due to the female influence.

CHAPTER II

THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS: THE INFLUENTIAL ROLE OF MARGOT AND HER SECRETS

*Don't question why she needs to be so free.
She'll tell you it's the only way to be.
She just can't be chained
To a life where nothings gained
And nothings lost
At such a cost*

“Ruby Tuesday” by the Rolling Stones

“She” in the lyrics above, is a fitting description of Margot Tenenbaum, the most influential character in the film, *The Royal Tenenbaums*. The Rolling Stones classic, “Ruby Tuesday,” epitomizes Margot and her extreme secrecy that allows her to be “free” from her fear of inadequacy, judgment and the confinements of her hollow marriage. Achieving her freedom comes from telling lies that come at the “cost” of having to be “chained” to a stagnant and loveless marriage as well as constantly denying the love she has for her brother Richie, even to herself. Fittingly, Anderson uses this song during a crucial scene in the film, where Richie and Margot both proclaim their love to one another, and Margot discloses the details of her many secrets to Richie, freeing her. Keeping so many secrets left her living a “life where nothing’s gained and nothing’s lost” without being able to share her life and true feelings. This divulgence alters the whole

feel and movement of the film from hopelessly dysfunctional to feasibly functional and primed for redemption.

I begin with this song to demonstrate how in this film, as in *Rushmore*, Anderson subtly uses multiple cinematic tools to clue in viewers to the ultimate importance of his female characters. As well as the use of song, Anderson makes his point through what the characters say and do and most importantly how these women affect the men around them. My argument is that, despite criticism placing the film's significance on the male characters, Margot's position as a Tenenbaum sibling, her gender, and her intrigue renders her the most influential figure in stimulating the males' transformation to come to the self-realization of who they are and what they want for themselves and their loved ones leading the film to a functional familial culmination.

The Royal Tenenbaums is the next feature film, chronologically (2001), from writer and director Wes Anderson that follows the theme of love triads and dysfunctional family dynamics. The film presents the uniquely dysfunctional yet high-brow family in which each character is dealing with his/her own external and internal conflicts that riddle their enchanted yet tortured lives. This chapter will examine the familial dynamics and societal taboos that are imposed on the children and close family friends surrounding this unique family. Taking place in and around the Tenenbaum family home (a brownstone), the film opens with a description of the young promising family, then jumps ahead twenty-two years to show how the family unit has dissolved to leave each member lost and troubled. I will show that, although there are two love triangles functioning within the film, the one that I am going to analyze will show that Margot is the intriguing and

influential female stimulating the men's and film's evolution to healthier and more productive lives by her position of influence within the triangle.

The characters that make up this close-knit ensemble begin with the patriarch and main character, Royal Tenenbaum. Royal is a narcissist, recently bankrupt, and estranged husband and father. His intentions are at first solely for his gain because he is broke, needs a place to live and is displeased that his long estranged wife, Etheline Tenenbaum, is considering remarrying. Royal squirms his way back into the family's house by telling them that he has terminal stomach cancer. After spending time with the family, he begins to reconnect with Etheline and starts to bond with his children, even though some of the children resent him. Although she and Royal have never been formally divorced, she is contemplating marrying Henry, her constant companion and the family's long time accountant. Henry encounters the hurdle of Royal during his pursuit of Etheline, mainly because the three Tenenbaum children forever connect Etheline and Royal. The eldest, Chas, is an entrepreneur and successful businessperson who lost his wife in a plane crash, and is now extremely over protective of his sons, Ari and Uzi, and their dog Buckley. His brother, Richie, is a former champion tennis player who has been living on an ocean liner in an attempt to overcome romantic feelings for his sister, Margot. Margot is adopted¹, an accomplished playwright and an extremely secretive and beautiful woman married the much older Raleigh St. Claire, a neurologist and writer who adores Margot to no avail. Eli Cash is also an ad hoc Tenenbaum sibling; he grew up across the street from the Tenenbaums, spent much of his time there as a child, and is Richie's best friend and confidant. Now an assistant professor of literature, mediocre

¹ Royal always makes a point to state that she is adopted when introducing her.

writer, avid drug abuser, and terrible friend (for having an affair with Margot although he knows of Richie's feelings towards her), Eli is still jealous of the Tenenbaum family. Though each of these complicated and quirky characters is influential in the film's movement towards a culmination, this chapter will argue that Margot, like Rosemary in *Rushmore*, is the most important and underappreciated character in the film because she is the catalyst inciting the males to grow out of their adolescent states to become accountable adults who can accept their situations and life choices.

In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, like *Rushmore*, I use Sedgwick's theories in order to explicate how this film shows erotic triangles as a tool forcing growth and self-realization of at least two male characters in competition over an anchoring female character. *Rushmore's* erotic triangle, although not uncomplicated, is more simplistic in comparison to the triangles used in this film. *Rushmore's* focus was on one triad between three acquaintances, whereas *The Royal Tenenbaums* is comprised of two operating triads within a close family unit. This chapter will analyze only the second erotic triangle, because, as I will explain, although both are crucial for movement of the film, the second triad is much more involved with the males' coming together and overcoming their diluted self-perceptions. The first triangle establishes the film's movement, but as I will explain, the second triangle is the one that I consider the most influential because it comprises three characters that ultimately reach realizations or truths about themselves and others and react drastically, which eventually leads to the characters' redemption, understanding and fulfillment.

To analyze *The Royal Tenenbaums* I will first examine the critics' analysis and show how much of their analysis is useful as I expand upon their theories. Second I will assess

the two erotic triangles that are functioning within the film and why I am choosing the latter of the two to examine, as well as explain how it began and functions throughout the film. Then I will show how Margot is the key character that affected the men's development due to the men's attraction to her and what draws her to the men. Finally, I will examine how the triangle affected the male's and Margot's advancement to a more functional and happy life through self-discovery and coming to their self-realizations.

The film's narrative may have been set into motion by Henry's proposal, Royal's lack of funds and Chas's inability to cope, but it continues to move and intensify because of Margot's presence, her actions and profound power within the triad influencing Richie and Eli's lives (e.g. choice of careers, failures, future plans, etc.). The power positions in the erotic triangle are apparent when analyzing the males' fixation and struggles to understand Margot's life choices, thoughts, and actions. Prior criticism of *The Royal Tenenbaums* lacks the deep analysis that is required to understand the complexity of the character's and especially Margot's essential role for inducing self-realizations. I will show that their analysis ceases prior to the full realization of the characters' development and the situations that illustrate Margot's crucial role in influencing the males to reach their self-realization and the film's culmination. Critics ascertain that Anderson's films are about males in arrested development, as Mayshark says, "misfits whose emotional maturity lags behind their accomplishments and whose inflated sense of their own importance is consistently challenged by the difficulties of interacting with other human beings" (116). I do not dispute this, but on the other hand, critics like Mayshark that focus on Anderson's men do not appreciate the female's influence, such as Margot's power over the males' choices. The claim that I am making is that with further analysis,

it becomes clear that Margot is the character that is key to the erotic triangle's functionality, affecting the males' reaching their self-realization and the film's development.

Critics analyzing Anderson's films, although they do not often give an extensive reading of his female characters, do give Margot a more in depth analysis due to her position as a Tenenbaum sibling. Carlson, for instance, in, "You are Forgiven: Interpersonal and Familial Ethics in the films of Wes Anderson," discusses Margot and Anderson's use of the "truthful liar" that is embodied by Margot.

Arguably the most effective case study for the purpose of illustrating Anderson's handling of the truthful liar, for she combines brutal, even hurtful insights about others while protecting her own fortress of insulation and seclusion... Margot exemplifies the truthful liar because she so flexibly navigates between honesty and secrecy and because her lies provide the thematic framework necessary to discovering truth's close relationship to falsehood (264, 265).

Margot hides her indiscretions and points out the faults of others in an attempt to keep the focus off of herself. She also maintains her secrecy because of the hurt that it could potentially cause. She rarely has to straight out lie. If she is confronted with questions about her secrets, she simply omits information or answers in a very ambiguous manner. One instance of this is when Raleigh asks her if she is every coming home and she answers, "Maybe not." Then he asks her if she has met someone else, she states, "I couldn't even think about knowing how to answer that question." She never gives a straight forward answer, but does not necessarily lie either, making her confusing to the

men, which leads to Raleigh and Richie seeking out a private detective to find out her many secrets.

Carlson's analysis, although it attempts to dissect Margot's character, does not develop these insights further in order to understand Margot's fixations, but instead focuses more on Royal and his positive attributes. "Royal did, in fact, save his family by bringing them all together following years of bitterness and separation" (269). Royal lies without remorse and is unaware of the damage he caused his family and the problems they deal with every day because of his past behavior. Margot, for instance, has deep-rooted problems manifested by secrecy and rebellion that are strongly associated with Royal's disapproval of her work and denial of her place in the Tenenbaum family. Instead of addressing Carlson's perception of Royal as an enlightened and insightful individual, this chapter will expand on Margot's role as a catalyst and as the vital character, influencing the men and causing the actions that ultimately bring the family back together as a cohesive unit.

Likewise Mayshark's analysis of *The Royal Tenenbaums*, begins by recognizing Margot as one of the main players only because of her role as a Tenenbaum child but lacks a thorough character examination, choosing instead to discuss aesthetics and the lack of development throughout the film. His character study, although limited, does mention that the "attempted suicide by Richie Tenenbaum not only fails but leads to a reconciliation" (128). Richie's attempt, being that it was not successful, allows him time to accept and forgive Margot, and give the family a wake-up call of sorts, which helps to bring them closer and realize that their time together is short. However, Mayshark does not refer to the reason Richie attempts suicide, which is because of Margot, and his

awakening as to who she really is, instead of his glorified perception of her. Mayshark's character study generalizes the characters by saying that they are, "too vibrant and quirky to be called two-dimensional but still something less than fleshed out...He compensates for the thinness of these sketchpad characterizations by filling up the frame with them" (129). In contrast, this chapter will argue that the characters are highly developed, especially, Eli, Margot, and Richie, because each of them have elaborate back stories leading to their ongoing neurosis, whether it be Margot's extreme secrecy, Richie's taboo longing for his sister, or Eli's mixture of friendship and jealousy towards Richie and Margot. These critics' examinations, however, are valuable for my study as I expand on their analysis by investigating Margot's role and effects that she has on the film's and men's progression.

The Love Triangles

The first triad involves Etheline, Royal and Henry, with Etheline as the anchoring point and most powerful character in that relationship. This triad does add to the back-story of the film, in that it explains Royal's reprehensible behavior and how it affects his relationships with Etheline and his children. This triad, although good for initial movement², is not the triangle that ultimately propels the men to change their ways. This triangle becomes predictable, not simply because of Henry's 'good guy' persona and close relationship with Etheline, but also because of Royal's past actions and current fabrications that are easily invalidated, foreshadowing another falling out with the family.

Although Etheline does still seem to have feelings for Royal as they go on a walk

² After Chas and Margot have already moved back home for their own reasons, Richie comes home when he hears news of his father's cancer and short life expectancy. Richie's move home completes the formation of the second triad.

leading to Henry's jealousy and cynicism of Royal's claims, Royal quickly loses any status that he had regained with Etheline and the family when Henry proves that his sickness is a fallacy. Royal's motivations for his involvement and formation of the triangle are revealed rather early in the film, long before there is enough character interaction or information to initiate any significant character transformation, which deems the first triangle less significant for the evolution of the characters to a self-realization. The outcome of this first triad ultimately aids in Royal's understanding that he does want to be part of his family even though he abandoned them twenty-two years ago, inciting him to attempt to repair some of the damage he has done and mend the relationships that he has ruined.

This chapter's analysis however will focus mainly on the second triad, because it is more influential to the film's ultimate conclusion. This triad is arguably an erotic quadrangle, because, including Margot as the elusive focal point, there are three other men in competition for her affections and acknowledgement, her husband Raleigh St. Claire, her brother Richie, and Richie's friend and confidant Eli. Margot has a connection to each of these men in various ways. She is in a legal relationship with Raleigh³, a taboo relationship that is full of love, history and reverence with Richie, and a physical and competitive relationship that is very superficial with Eli. Though these three characters are all very valuable to the film and are in a contention to win Margot's love, the film leads us to exclude Raleigh's character as a suitor for Margot early on, because she so willingly leaves their shared residence to move home and takes no care to reassure

³ She is legally married to Raleigh, although the love and respect only comes from Raleigh.

Raleigh of any feelings of love towards him⁴. Although Raleigh is a point of interest due to what he represents to Margot, which is security, a father figure, and a cover (a mask to hide her true affairs behind), he loses his place in the triangle early in the film because he is not a viable love interest for Margot, which the film shows through her moving back into her childhood home, engaging in extramarital affairs, and not putting any effort into mending their relationship. Throughout my analysis, then, I discuss Raleigh solely for the role he plays in gaining information that is imperative to the film's climax and the male's transition to a self-realization. The triad is then left consisting of Margot, Richie and Eli, which is a relationship still riddled with complications that affect the power struggle within the triad. The traditional conventions of being in love become twisted with the inclusion of lust, jealousy, competition, blood lines, success, greed, abandonment, promiscuity, jealousy, and the taboo topic of incest, which all play a part in this triangle's interactions. This chapter will demonstrate how Margot's ability to retain power within the triad and force an evolution is due to her status as a Tenenbaum child (adopted), her gender, and extreme secrecy.

Margot's Importance

Attraction and Competition

The film's narrative may have been set into motion by Henry's proposal, Royal's lack of funds and Chas's inability to cope, but it continues to move and intensify because of Margot's presence, her actions, and her profound power within the triad influencing Richie and Eli's lives (e.g. choice of careers, failures, future plans, etc.). The power

⁴ Although Margot is married to Raleigh, she does not try to contact him or repair their marriage in any way.

positions in the erotic triangle are apparent when analyzing the males' fixation and struggles to understand Margot's life choices, thoughts, and actions.

Margot's appeal to the males is due to her beauty, intelligence, status, and vulnerability, yet she is complex and hard to understand because of her mysteriously secret life. She harbors insecurities about her worth and place within the Tenenbaum family, which in actuality provides her more dominance within the dynamics and development of Sedgwick's triangle because no one knows where her vulnerabilities lie. They know that she is adopted but do not realize the affect that Royce has had on her feelings of poor self-worth, because of his constant reminder of her adoption and her inability to express her feelings towards Richie because of her fear of judgments, so she removes herself from the limelight to avoid being ostracized. The males need Margot to try to prove their worth and achieve acceptance, and also because the film cannot progress unless the males have a point of contention for movement and interaction.

Much of Margot's importance in the love triad comes from her adoption into the Tenenbaum family, as well as her close bond with Richie and his unconditional love for her. Margot becomes the center of a contention between Eli and Richie because Eli is jealous of Margot yet he has an affair with her. Eli longs to have what Margot has; to hold weight and an understanding close bond with Richie, his best friend, a once acclaimed writing career, and the status as a Tenenbaum. Eli has always wanted to be a Tenenbaum and is resentful that Margot was adopted into the family with an encouraging mother, siblings, status as geniuses, and wealth, while he grew up meagerly across the street with his aunt⁵. Her presence in Eli's life becomes vital and an obvious point of

⁵ There is no mention of his parent's whereabouts.

conflict early on and into adulthood. The film shows that as a young child Eli tried and failed to take a stance of dominance over Richie and Margot and it continued into adulthood. These scenes illustrate Margot's essential role in the power structure of the triad and in influencing the males' to move towards their self-realization.

The film shows Margot's importance in the triad even as young children during a school outing. Margot's assertive statements and actions, which affect the males, stress the power imbalance within the triangle. A scene where Margot proves her power over the males comes at the beginning of the film when as children she convinces Richie to run away to the City Public Archives with her. Margot is standing in front of the Public Archives taking a picture of Richie when Eli approaches Richie. Richie greets Eli, and then Eli looks to Margot and states, "You said I could run away too." Margot cuttingly replies, "No I didn't, and don't tell anyone you saw us." Eli feels like an outsider although he is supposed to be Richie's best friend (Richie chose Margot over Eli). Margot, even at a young age (roughly 12 years old) holds an influence over Richie and exhibits an authoritarian status over Eli. She has the option to include or exclude Eli granting her all of the power in the triad's initial formation. Rejecting Eli leads him to feel that Margot is threatening his friendship with Richie as well as his status of being an ad-hoc Tenenbaum child. Margot did not allow Eli a place within her special bond with Richie and she holds a position as an actual Tenenbaum child (although adopted), a title that Eli longs for. Richie grants Margot power, because he follows her lead without question. Margot clearly retains the control over Eli and Richie during this first scene as children, but also retained her control as an adult.

As adults, Margot's level of importance to the men does not dwindle; in fact, Richie pines for her on an ocean liner which he boarded to try and forget about his feelings, but he just grows more fond of her, and confides in Eli that he is in love with her. Eli, despite being Richie's best friend and aware of his feelings for Margot, still engages in an affair with Margot, but Margot still has a dominant position over Eli because of Richie's romantic love for her along with his long standing bond with her has always been more powerful than Eli and Richie's friendship as she proved that day at the City Public Archives. Richie's connection to Margot has grown into romantic love and Eli, a. Eli is jealous of Richie because he is a Tenenbaum, and aspires to obtain something that Richie desires, Margot. To Eli, Margot represents two different things, a connection to Richie and the Tenenbaum family, and also a competitor for both Richie's attention and as a highly ranked writer. In Richie's eyes she represents perfection and love. Eli's jealousy and Richie's longing ultimately proves Margot's power within the triad and her influence affecting the males' actions and further attraction to her.

Margot's Influence Over Eli

The film further demonstrates Margot's influence on Eli's self-worth after he gives a reading from one of his current books. Eli looks to Margot for comments of encouragement, but the discussion turns to why she specifically does not think that he is a genius. Eli: "Why would a reviewer make the point of saying someone's 'not' a genius? Do you especially think I'm 'not' a genius? You didn't even have to think about it, did you?" Margot: "I know... Well, I just don't use that word lightly." Even though Margot has an affair with him, it does not change her view of his intelligence or status. Clearly Eli cannot win Margot's love or her admiration of his writing, and with Richie returning

home neither of them needed each other for their connection to Richie anymore, leading to their breakup.

The scene depicting Eli and Margot's breakup does not grant Eli any solace and in fact it points out just how much Margot does not value their relationship. Margot is again the figure controlling the situation and the triangle, despite Eli's odd, possibly drug induced, highly defensive, and emotionally charged dialogue. This prominent scene begins with Eli and Margot meeting up on a bridge. Eli tells Margot that he is not in love with her anymore, and when Margot says that she is not in love with him either, he strikes back by saying, "Yes, I know. You're in love with Richie, which is sick and gross." Margot, taken off guard by Eli decides to take a stab at his ego as well by asking him, "Have you been sending my mother your clippings?" Eli's face expresses his feeling of being attacked. Eli says, "Please stop belittling me." He tries to demean her to justify his actions by accusing her of dating him simply for status and money through his successful book sales. He states, "You never gave me the time of day until I started getting good reviews." Margot replies, "Your reviews aren't that good." Eli responds, "But the sales are." Eli is trying to take control of ending their affair and wants to think that Margot is distraught by this, when in actuality Margot agrees and is unemotional about ending the relationship. Margot firmly maintains control of the situation by taking jabs at Eli's search for approval through her mother. She also reminds him that his writing is second-rate, while he is well aware of her highly praised work, therefore maintaining her position as the dominant character in the triad. Eli cannot win, because Margot never really cares for him as a romantic interest; he merely fills the void of a warm body and a person that she can talk to about Richie.

Although Richie at this point is still unaware of the affair, Margot is and has been in control of the erotic triangle the entire time. Eli makes a big production of the break up, while Margot is dismissive of the notion that it was ever of any importance to her. Eli's character loses the battle to receive Margot's appreciation, acceptance and her love, leaving him the weakest person in the triad. Eli's longing for Margot first occurred to imply his dominance over Richie, which coincides with Sedgwick's theories explained in the introduction⁶. Eli fails at gaining control over Margot and dominance over Richie. Margot's gender makes the triad uneven because the men try to please her and she is able to choose who she lets in to her life. Richie had more power than Eli even before he knew of Margot's indiscretions and Eli's disregard for their friendship because Margot truly cared for him. Margot is the crucial figure needed to form the erotic triangle because she is perceived to be a status booster for Eli and the love of Richie's life.

As well as being the most influential member of the triad, the film also stresses Margot's importance by making her the cause for the men to react in a way that pushes them into reaching their self-realization. She is the reason for Richie's choice to live on an ocean liner, the reason that Eli becomes a writer and experiments with drugs (he does not want to deal with his reality), the reason that Raleigh confesses his suspicions of infidelity to Richie, which persuades them to hire a private detective, and finally the reason that Richie attempts suicide. The males' obsession with Margot affects all of their lives, to the extent that Richie tries to take his own life, but, as with Rosemary, her influence on these men's' lives ends up having a positive effect on them, leading each of

⁶ On page 21 of Sedgwick's book *Between Men*, it states: Girard finds many examples in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival.

them to evolve and to self-realization. Richie realizes that he can no longer hide his feelings and confesses his love to Margot. Margot understands that she has to admit her secrets to Richie and confess her love for him. And, although his self-realizations does not happen right away due to his drug addiction, Eli has to accept who he is, what he comes from and move on.

Margot's Effect on Richie

The characters' self-realization starts to unfold after Richie attempts suicide, but the reason that he tries to kill himself is because of Margot. Each character begins coming to their self-realization at different points and sometimes in stages. Richie's self-realization begins after a private detective divulges the many secrets that Margot has to Raleigh and himself, including her affair with Eli. Richie immediately retires to the bathroom, removes his signature wristbands and headband, and starts cutting his hair and beard. The music and camera view (*mise en scene* is set straight on as if the audience is the mirror that he is peering into) sets an eerie mood, as Richie removes his sunglasses, starts to shave, but stops, takes the razor blade out of the razor, and says, "I'm going to kill myself tomorrow." He starts to slit his wrists, and all the while flashes of his bird Mordecai and Margot come across the screen. Next, we see blood running down Richie's arms, he falls to the floor, Dudley⁷ finds him, and he is rushed to the hospital. Richie survives, but took drastic measures due his disillusionment and hurt after finding out about Margot's secret life, leading to the self-realization that he cannot bottle up his feelings for her anymore and must confront her about her actions.

⁷ Dudley is the subject of Raleigh's experiments. He is writing a book on Dudley due to his strange affliction of having a heightened sense of hearing, but cannot copy simple block designs; he is color blind and cannot tell time.

The Triangle's Impact on Margot

Margot's self-realization comes from the understanding that her secrets end up affecting everyone in her life. Because she is the cause of Richie's actions and Raleigh knows this her realization begins with Raleigh confronting her while at the hospital. Etheline, Dudley and Raleigh are in the hospital waiting room when Raleigh starts to let Margot know that he has found out all of her secrets and lets Etheline in on her secret life and the fact that her indiscretions are the reason for Richie's attempted suicide. Raleigh says to Margot, "You nearly killed your poor brother." Confused, Etheline looks to Raleigh and Margot for answers. Raleigh chimes in again and says, "She's balling Eli Cash." He then asks her for a cigarette, outing the fact that she has smoked for twenty-two years without anyone knowing. All of Margot's secrets come out in the open, which is troubling for her, but her biggest problem is realizing that she is at fault for Richie's pain when he is the one person that she cares for more than anyone else in her life. The scene not only makes Margot come to the self-realization that her "secrets" can be found out, but also that they can and do affect other people's lives in drastic ways that she never imagined. As well, Richie's suicide leads to a resolution within the first love triangle, for Etheline comes to the self-realization that Henry makes her happy and will always be there for her so she agrees to marry him. Raleigh comes to understand that Margot does not love him and she has made a cuckold of him, provoking him to move on. Royal realizes that his children are important to him, and he tries to fix his wrongdoings. Royal also makes Richie realize that Margot is not the angelic figure that he has held in such high regard, but explains to him that nobody is perfect, least of all himself. Everyone starts to understand their mortality and also begin to accept others despite their

misgivings which are due to Margot's actions being found out inducing the male's to react and come to their self-realizations.

Although Margot and Richie began their journey to self-realization, they reach their climax and source of closure when they are able to come together, discuss and admit their feelings for each other. This scene begins when Richie returns from the hospital and finds Margot listening to records in his tent (set up in the hallway of the family's home). He confronts Margot about her first husband Desmond and her affair with Eli. Margot replies to Richie, "Poor Eli. Anyway, we mostly just talked about you." Richie: "You did?" Margot: "Yeah, I guess that was the attraction." They proclaim their love for each other, then Margot asks him, "Why did you do it [attempt suicide]? Because of me?" Richie replies, "Yeah, but it's not your fault." Margot completes her self-realization after breaking down and crying, then tells Richie, as she starts to leave the tent, "I think we are just going to have to be secretly in love with each other and leave it at that Richie." The scene ends, but with "Ruby Tuesday" by the Rolling Stones playing in the background telling Richie what he already knows about Margot but has not been able to do; he cannot question her motives or actions and expect a definitive answer. He has to accept her for what and who she is if he wants to be with her. Although the triad no longer exists Margot's role here is illustrative of how her influence within the triangle and over Richie's life ends up affecting her own and all of the character's lives moving the cast to their own self-realization and the film's conclusion. Although, Richie and Margot begin to reach their self-realization through the fact that they cannot hide their love for each other anymore without destroying their lives and the lives of their loved ones, they must

still seek redemption through one another, but as is typical of Margot, her answers are ambiguous.

The Triangle's Resolution Due to Margot's Influence

As well, Margot's effect on Richie spills over to resolve the first triad. Royal begins to realize his mistakes earlier in the film, but never quite reaches that pinnacle that renders him a complete understanding of how to make amends with his family until Richie comes to him for advice on Margot⁸. Richie goes to the hotel where Royal works as an elevator operator and tells him all about what has transpired between himself and Margot. Royal starts trying to give Richie advice, and states that "it is probably illegal" to engage in a romantic relationship with his sister. Richie reminds Royal of Margot's adoption, to which Royal states, "It is still frowned upon." Royal then recants and tells Richie to go for it, but stops himself and says, "You know what? Don't listen to me. I never understood her myself. I never understood any of us. I wish I could tell you what to do, but I just can't." The scene concludes with Malachi, Richie's bird, returning after he was set free and Richie telling Royal that he still respects and views him as his father, leading to the climax of Royal's self-realization. Margot's effect on Richie inadvertently influenced Royal's realization that he can still try to make amends with his family by doing the right thing. He decides that he wants to see his family happy and that is what will make him happy. In order to make Etheline happy, he rushes over to her house with divorce papers and a notary public so that she can marry Henry. Royal tells Etheline, "I didn't think so much of him [Henry] at first, but now I get it, he's everything that I'm not." He loves Etheline, but knows that Henry will be good to her and make her happy,

⁸ This is after Richie and Margot proclaim their love for one another.

which makes him happy, reaching his full self-realization and effectively ending the first triad in the film.

Eli, on the other hand, has a harder time reaching his full self-realization because of his drug abuse and addiction. Margot tells Eli that he is not a genius that she does not love him, and Richie also confronts him about the affair and stages an intervention. Unable to face the reality of his mediocrity and the fact that he betrayed his best friend, Eli escapes from the intervention. Eli's drug abuse occurs because he cannot compete with Margot and does not want to deal with his reality. He does not reach self-realization until, while in a drug induced haze, he crashes into and kills Chas's dog and admits that he needs help. Killing Chas's dog actually helps Royal get in Chas's good graces because he selflessly buys Chas's children a new dog proving that he is changing his ways for the better, and Chas also realizes that Royal will not always be around and decides to forgive him. This all occurs because of Margot's influence over Richie and Eli causing a domino effect over the other characters.

Margot and Chas do not interact very much throughout the film, but her impact on the other characters and their self-realizations rolls over to change his life as well. Margot directly and indirectly alters the characters to come to a self-realization starting with her influence on Richie. Richie then reaches out to Royal, and Royal becomes a humble loving man leading him to grant Etheline a divorce, and attempt to amend his relationship with Chas. Chas forgives Royal because he has a self-realization of his own, when he realizes that his neurosis with safety⁹ is inhibiting his children from being able to experience life. Although she came to her self-realization through Richie's suicide

⁹ His wife died in a plane crash while he, his children and their dog survived.

attempt, Margot is the vital character that affects the males' actions and transformations to a self-realization and acceptance of themselves. Margot's actions and her reconciliation with Richie influences him to reach out to Royal creating a pay-it-forward atmosphere that extends to and connects the entire family.

Self-realization to the individuals in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, as in *Rushmore*, is crucial to the film's ultimate development and closure. In *The Royal Tenenbaums* the Tenenbaum family (including Eli) is and has been living in a sort of standstill of maturity, until Margot causes a domino effect of progression. Margot, Richie, Eli, Raleigh, Etheline, Chas, and Royal are stuck in dysfunctional relationships that are unable to progress and are idle in their own development. Coming into each character's self-realization gives the viewer the perception of hope for the characters futures. By leaving out the element of the character's self-realization, the characters and the film cannot reach any type of closure. The film would fall short of telling a real story with an evolution because no one and nothing would advance eliminating any story. The erotic triangle, with Margot acting as the catalyst for the men to focus on, forces a progression to a self-realization.

This film is definitive to the fact that women, in this case, Margot, carry the most influence in moving the film. Despite criticism of this film, like *Rushmore*, and the next film that I will be analyzing, *The Life Aquatic*, women are the vital characters forcing character self-realization and the film's movement. I believe that in the light of our Eurocentric society male's place value on the ability to obtain women and their acceptance, but women are still often viewed as secondary. Even in a contemporary film by a young up and coming writer and director such as Anderson the audience has already

been conditioned to view women as being of minor importance. Margot is not the main character of the film, but without her presence of attractiveness and influence, there would be no erotic triangle and power struggle, because men would have no point of contention, leading to a lack of emotional depth and movement within the film. The males' in *The Royal Tenenbaums* have aspirations of gaining Margot's support, love, and acknowledgement which allowed Margot all of the power. Women as a focal point in an erotic triangle is a theme in Anderson's films that I believe add depth and will continue to be a theme because of the development that they bring to the back stories of the characters and the movement they create towards each film's closure.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE AQUATIC: REBIRTH AND REALIZATION THROUGH JANE

*She's an old-time ambassador
Of sweet talking, night walking games
And she's known in the darkest clubs
For pushing ahead of the dames
If she says she can do it
Then she can do it,
she don't make false claims
But she's a Queen,
and such are queens
That your laughter
is sucked in their brains
Now she's leading him on
And she'll lay him right down
But it could have been me
Yes, it could have been me
Why didn't I say,
why didn't I say, no, no, no*

"Queen Bitch" by David Bowie

The "Queen" in the above quotation depicts Jane Winslett-Richardson, the most influential and powerful character in the erotic triangle in Wes Anderson's film, *The Life Aquatic* (2004). David Bowie's enduring song, "Queen Bitch," is used in the background of a scene right after Jane, who is a reporter and pregnant single mother in the film played by Cate Blanchett, has impacted Steve Zissou, bringing him to accept himself, strengths and his flaws, while he is sitting outside of the premier of his latest documentary alluding to Jane's vital influence in the triangle forcing a progression. The song's use in this

scene makes it a suitable commentary on Jane as a British “Queen” and “ambassador” of strong women who “don’t make false claims.” Her straight forward persona, attractive aesthetics, and rejection of Steve Zissou, the captain of the *Belafonte* and a team of misfits that are on an oceanic expedition that is at the heart of the film, played by Anderson favorite, Bill Murray, leads him to be jealous of her relationship with Ned (Steve’s possible son, played by another Anderson favorite, Owen Wilson) and calls her a “bull-dyke” that is out to get them, despite the fact that she is pregnant. My argument builds on and in some ways contrasts criticism that focuses primarily on the film’s male characters for analysis, though I will argue that Jane’s gender, her relationship with Ned, her pregnancy, and her career as a writer who could restore Steve’s dying career make her the most important figure in the film, it is because of all of those qualities that help her catalyze the males’ to a self-realization.

The Life Aquatic (2004), like *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*, is a film that includes erotic triangles and intricate familial dilemmas with at least one juvenile acting male. The film’s premise begins with Steve discussing his next documentary, which will be a voyage to locate and seek revenge on the elusive Jaguar shark that killed his colleague and friend, Estaban. Steve is also seeking to revive his career and ultimately leave behind a legacy as he faces aging and mortality. During this pursuit, he encounters many figures who prove both valuable and problematic in accomplishing his goals, including Steve’s estranged wife, Eleanor, who is often part of the crew, and questions, fixes, reassures, and mostly funds Steve’s projects. Steve’s arch nemesis and fellow oceanographer, Alistair Hennessey, is a constant nuisance who threatens Steve’s career and relationship with Eleanor, yet he is valuable to Steve’s venture because he adds

competition right from the beginning. Steve also meets Ned Plimpton, a pilot who helps to fund his latest mission and who may be his son. Jane Winslett-Richardson, joins the crew to write an article that could rekindle Steve's diminishing popularity as an oceanographer and serious scientist. Jane also plays the role of a love interest and catalyst to both Steve and Ned. Combining all of these characters with the varied crew in the close quarters of the *Belafonte* intricate relationships are bound to form and self-preservation along with egos get in the way of the real issues of forgiveness, acceptance, mortality, and self-realization.

This chapter will show that Jane is the most vital character to develop movement and a progression to closure. First, I will review what critics have said about this film and explain how I add to their analysis. Next, I will examine the formation and function of the two triangles that are present in this film, and explain why I examine the second one because of its greater influence on the men leading to their progression towards their self-realization. I will then show how Jane's presence and attraction is important for the film to form a point of contention in the erotic triangle that develops to allow for male competition and the male struggle for power over each other and over the female that leads to their self-realization. Next, I will illustrate how Jane functions in the triangle by influencing their development and how she reaches a self-realization of her own. Finally, I will explain how the characters become closer and more realistic which is instrumental in reaching a resolution and progression of the film to a culmination.

While critics are aware of the crucial absent father and child component of the film they do not go as far as to recognize that Jane and her pregnancy causes a rift between Steve and Ned making her the most integral character in progressing the men to finding a

self-realization. Jesse Mayshark for instance, explores the film in the same fashion as he has throughout the analysis of Anderson's other films: acknowledging the male camaraderie and competition but not the importance of women to the film's development by being the catalyst initiating the conflict. I claim, however, again drawing upon Sedgwick's work, that Jane, because of her gender, is the more powerful and necessary character within the erotic triangle because she is the point of contention between the male counterparts. Mayshark briefly mentions Jane as being the, "pregnant magazine reporter accompanying the voyage" (134). He states that her presence during, "Their father-son bonding is tested" by revisiting the "competition between Max Fischer and Herman Bloom for Rosemary Cross, but this time both father-figure and son are older, and the advantage goes to the son" (134). Mayshark's analysis is beneficial in understanding the male homosocial factor, which I add to by examining Jane's role not just as a pawn for the men to battle over, but also because she represents a mother figure and love interest to Ned, and a rebirth, youth, immortality, a revival of his career, and a romantic interest to Steve. Mayshark recognizes the apparent love triangle and father-son conflict but does not recognize Jane's role as being influential beyond this point, which I argue because she becomes very important to the Ned and Steve because of what she comes to represent.

Greg Carlson's criticism, like Mayshark, does not examine the female's role at depth. In contrast to Mayshark's analysis, he does not state specific scenes or dialogue, but more examines his film as a whole. In *Southpawfilmworks movie reviews* (<http://www.spfw.net/blog/?p=214>) Carlson notices Anderson's use of labeling and discriminatory dialogue through his film: "Anderson has relied on questionable gender

and racial stereotypes in the past, and Zissou's homophobia remains troubling as a comic motif." In *The Life Aquatic*, Steve, the main character, uses a combination of gender and homophobic stereotyping in order to try to put down a specific character that he is either jealous of or feels threatened by, Jane and Alistair. One instance is when Steve speaks to Ned in regards to Jane:

Steve: We gotta watch ourselves around this Jane character. Don't tell her anything personal. If you're not sure about something change the subject and look for me. This bull-dyke's got something against us.

Ned: I don't think she's a lesbian; she's pregnant.

Steve: Bull-dykes can get pregnant. Anyway, I'd back out now, but we need the press.

During another separate scene Steve states to Ned: "That pregnant slut [Jane] has been playing us like a fiddle." Most of the gendered stereotyping in this film focuses on Jane, besides a couple quick jabs at Alistair¹. Carlson notices the motif of Zissou's homophobic dialogue, but never really examines why he reverts to it in certain instances. Carlson's analysis is beneficial because I add on to it with the understanding that both of the characters that he aims the homophobic gendered slurs at are competition for him within each triangle. Steve is in a constant power struggle within his triads, and he tries to discredit each character and make the other character in the triangle feel similarly, which would grant Steve a majority of power within the triads.

¹ Steve calls Alistair a "slick faggot" to Eleanor, but this is due to Steve's jealousy over Eleanor's romantic history with Alistair as well his jealousy due to Alistair's success as a young, popular and well-funded oceanographer.

This chapter will further develop critics' limited analysis to show that Jane is the most powerful player in the triad and her highly developed character is vital to the men's progression to a self-realization and the film's development. Due to Jane's gender, pregnancy, single status, and career as a writer for a magazine, she is able to represent a mother figure to Ned, and immortality, a competitor, and a mechanism to a revived career to Steve as well as a love interest to both men.

The Triads

The Life Aquatic like the two previous films faces the complication of Sedgwick's erotic triangles leading to competition and an evolution to character self-realization and completion of the film. *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaum's* triangles include complications due to age, family dynamics, competition, and status issues, but *The Life Aquatic* complicates the erotic triangle further. *Rushmore* had one triad between three unlikely acquaintances; *The Royal Tenenbaums* was made up of two separate triads within one close-knit family with the latter of the two triads being more important to the film's progression. *The Life Aquatic* is the most complicated triangle of the three films, because it also contains two triangles, but adds Steve as an aggressive member in each of the functioning triads. This chapter will concentrate on the second erotic triangle, because although both are useful for understanding the back-story and some of the character's neurosis, the second triangle is the most vital to the character's and film's outcome.

The first triangle, between Steve, Alistair and Eleanor, illustrates Steve's history of insecurities over Eleanor and his abilities to produce respected scientific documentaries. Steve and Alistair are in a constant state of competition over Eleanor and over their professional status. Eleanor is a point of contention, because she is the largest monetary

contributor to Steve's voyages and "the brains" behind Team Zissou, threatening Steve's authority and status as the Captain. Eleanor and Alistair's history together is influential in the development of the plot, but they do not create the conflict that engrosses Steve. They lack the passion of new love and new life (Jane is visibly pregnant) as their affair ended long ago, and although jealousy remains, they do not influence the characters to transform. Steve's controversial ways and competitive nature does not stop with Eleanor and Alistair, his problematic behaviors forms a new erotic triangle as Ned and Jane are introduced into the narrative, forming the second and I argue the most important and telling triangle that centers on the female, Jane.

The second triad, between Jane, Steve and Ned, proves Jane's vital importance to the film's development and the characters' self-realization. The arrival of Jane, an attractive, intelligent and pregnant writer, right after Steve decides to add Ned to his crew and accept him as his possible son, throws in a complication because both Steve and Ned are attracted to her. Besides the male competition for Jane's affections, she is pregnant with her married editor's child, leaving her emotionally unavailable initially, because she still loves her editor and hopes that he will want to be an active parent. Half way through the film, after pirates attack the *Belafonte* and Jane has formed a close relationship with Ned, she comes to the realization that her editor has abandoned her and their unborn child (just as Steve did to Ned and his mother). Jane calls her editor and leaves a message to confirm that anything that they had is completely over, leaving her able to open herself up to Ned, which infuriates Steve. Steve's narcissism leaves him unable to accept outright defeat from Ned. Jane's acceptance of Ned ignites Steve's insecurities, forcing a

realization of his mortality, acceptance of his shortcomings and acknowledgment that life is short and revenge is trivial.

Jane's Importance

Jane's presence in the film and triangle is essential for the men to form a point of contention leading the men to battle for power in the triangle, although Jane will retain ultimate control. Jane's importance stems from many avenues of representation and capability, including her ability to resurrect Steve's career. From the beginning of Jane's introduction into the film, she proves problematic to Steve because he did not take her seriously and she makes him confront many issues that he normally avoids. A scene depicting this is during Jane's first interview with Steve. From the start, Steve has trouble answering Jane's questions about his last voyage, because she begins asking him serious questions about his longevity and aspects from his last documentary that did not seem "real." Steve explains to Jane that he thought this was a supposed to be a "puff piece" answering simple questions, such as, "Favorite food? Sardines. Favorite color? Blue." Steve assumes that because Jane was a fan of his as a child and because she is a woman that she would not be asking him about things that question his film's significance in the scientific community. One of the questions that Jane asks Steve is how he feels about his latest film, which he does not have an answer for and turns the question back on her. Jane explains that she is "honest" and that elements of his film seem "fake." Steve retaliates by pointing a gun at her and verbally attacking Jane, telling her that she is a bad reporter. Steve feels attacked and insulted by her questions and calls her out by saying, "You're taking something out on me."

This scene shows that Jane is not a simple side character, but a character that makes Steve really question his ability to keep making quality documentaries, due to his age, dwindling popularity, and competition with the popular and well-funded Alistair Hennessey. Steve's character during this scene and throughout the film is difficult to deal with on many levels, because although he is the captain of the *Belafonte*, he makes many poor decisions that affect the entire crew, such as entering unprotected waters leading to pirates taking a hostage and Ned's inheritance that he was contributing to Team Zissou. Steve becomes even more of an awkward character with the introduction of Jane, because he wants her to look up to him with admiration and he also wants her to be attracted to him. Steve has long avoided the reality of his age and the declining popularity of his films, by not even considering retirement prior to her questions. During the same interview, Jane asks other questions that alarm him, like "Is it true that this is going to be your last voyage?" to which he responds "Wow, No comment. Who told you that? No god damn it; I'm only 52." Steve does not appreciate Jane asking him questions about the end of his career. Jane does not fill the role of the compliant, ego-pleasing, female that women usually portray in Steve's tainted perception of reality. Steve underestimates Jane's intelligence and feels that he must win her affection by impressing her and making sure that she does not spend time with Ned, because Ned and Jane instantly took to one another. Jane's character is essential in making Steve panic, because he knows that her article can make or break his career, placing all of the power in her hands.

Jane is very influential, not only for calling Steve out and pointing out reality, but also because she becomes a point of contention for Steve and Ned to battle over. Steve is

attracted to Jane, but because his ego gets in the way of reason, he is leery of her intentions, and he is also jealous that Ned and Jane are spending time together. Steve tries to limit their time together and tells them that they cannot be in each other's rooms. The scene begins with Steve finding Jane and Ned sleeping in bed together. Steve is infuriated.

Steve: (bursting into the room without knocking) I'm about to blow my stack. I turn my back and the bullshit begins. Ned you're a scumbag and Jane you're a god damn liar."

Jane: What the fuck are you doing in here?

Steve: What the F are you doing in here? I warned you about being in other people's cabins. You were supposed to go home.

Jane: Well you convinced me to stay and finish the story.

Steve: Is it still the cover?

Jane: I don't effing know.

Steve's jealousy and Ned's disregard for Steve's wishes to stay away from Jane causes a large rift in their once blossoming relationship. Jane's influence over Ned and lack of reciprocating of Steve's feelings causes the contention that brings Steve and Ned eventually to a self-realization of acceptance of their circumstances and each other. Without Jane's presence, actions and power within the triad to influence the men, there would be no reason for the men to clash and they would never confront the real issues, deeming Jane crucial to the development of the film.

Jane's Influential Presence Causing Self-realization

Jane's Influence Over Ned

Jane causes character self-realization by her involvement in the film and power within the triad that ignites the conflict between Ned and Steve, which in turn makes them confront each other and hear the truth. Jane influences Ned and Steve to confront fresh issues of jealousy, opening the door to the bigger issues stifling their relationship from becoming genuine and meaningful. The scene begins with Steve insulting Jane's character to Ned, inciting Ned to stand up for Jane, because of the relationship that they are forming. Insulting Jane infuriates Ned, because of what she represents, a love interest, and a single mother figure much like his own. The scene begins by Steve barging in to Jane's room, where Ned and Jane are sleeping, insulting both of them, until Ned asks if he can speak to him privately. Steve agrees and starts to walk through the ship as the camera follows by a side view of the hull or layout of the ship, and Ned follows. They bicker the entire way until they reach the masthead or crow's nest, which is like a high lookout point, where they face each other and the disagreement gets brutal and malicious, but leads to the truth coming out and a step in the right direction to self-realization. Ned begins by trying to come to a common understanding civilly, which Steve does not appreciate.

Ned: "Look Steve, I know we both like her and you're angry and embarrassed, but let's leave her out of it."

Steve: "You think that is what this is about? Shit Ned, what has that bullydyke been telling you?"

Ned: "Alright, I'm going to warn you now, be a gentleman."

The fight continues to develop, until they reach the masthead and Steve continues to insult Jane

Steve: "That pregnant slut's been playing us like a cheap fiddle."

Ned: "That's it, I'm gonna fight you, Steve."

Steve punches Ned in the face.

Steve: "You never say, 'I'm gonna fight you, Steve.' You just smile and act natural, and then you sucker-punch him."

Ned: "You fight your way, and I'll fight mine..."

Steve: "No, listen Ned, don't you try to..."

Ned punches Steve.

Steve: "I think your Team Zissou ring might have caught me on the lip. You call yourself my son, but I just don't see it. It's nothing personal."

Jane enters the scene standing behind Ned.

Ned: "A week before she killed herself, my mother told me that you'd known about me since the day I was born. Is that a fact?"

Steve: "That's a fact."

Ned: "I ought to have stayed in Kentucky where I belong."

The conversation concludes as Eleanor arrives and boards the boat. Steve and Ned are initially arguing over Jane, because Steve is jealous that Jane and Ned are still engaging in a relationship, despite Steve's feelings for her, although they are not genuine. Steve still feels entitled to be with her, because she is doing a story on him and he wants to beat Ned, but as far as the triangle's function at this point, Steve continues to lose ground with Jane's constant rejection of his advances and acceptance of Ned's company. Steve tries to injure Ned by telling him that he does not think that he is his son, knowing that Ned was hopeful to find and connect with his father, and they were forming a father-son bond

even though it is unclear if he is his father or not. Steve's disregard for Ned's feelings allows an opening for Ned to ask him straight out if he was aware of his existence, which Steve admits without apology. Ned reaches a point of self-realization, finally admitting to himself that his father always knew about him and still never tried to reach him.

Ned's final step in reaching self-realization is also due to Jane's presence and acceptance of him over Steve, forcing Steve to accept defeat confronting his wrongdoings (denial of Ned's existence, battle to win Jane's affections while trying to hold on to Eleanor, and respect his mortality). Steve demonstrates that he wants Ned in his life and has come to respect him by not reacting jealously to a note Jane wrote to Ned, and by showing Ned that he kept and cherished the letter he wrote to him when he was twelve.

This next scene illustrates Ned's final and favorable transformation in his process towards self-realization that, although Jane's character does not play a large role, her desire to strengthen her relationship with Ned, and Steve's acceptance and respect of their bond deems Ned pleased for the possibilities that his future holds with Jane and Steve. The scene begins with Ned convincing Steve to attempt to finish his goal of finding the Jaguar shark by searching for signs from the helicopter. On the way to the helicopter, Ned is reading a letter from Jane describing her wish to get closer to him. Steve: What's that? Ned: A letter from Jane. Steve: What does she say? Ned: Nothing to speak of. Steve does not inquire any further, finally respecting their relationship and terminating the struggle for power in the erotic triangle. While they are flying, Steve shows Ned the letter that Ned wrote when he was twelve, explaining who he is and what a fan he is of Steve. This endearing moment finishes and satisfies Ned's journey towards self-realization, because Ned accepts the fact that Steve knew about him and never tried to

find him, but he is more content knowing that Steve saved his letter all these years and did wonder about him. Suddenly Steve spots the fluorescent snapper that preceded the Jaguar shark during the initial sightings. The initial excitement turns to panic, as the helicopter malfunctions, and it becomes clear that they are going to crash. Steve attempts to protect Ned, by placing his arm across Ned's chest, as if to hold him in his seat, but Ned dies and Steve's hope for a legacy is short lived

Jane's Rejection of Steve Leading to His Progression

I will show that Steve's transformation towards self-realization is clearly due to Jane's ability to resurrect his career. There is one scene that above all others explaining that Jane is responsible for Steve's transformation. It is arguable that Steve came to his realization at an earlier point in the film, such as the prior scene that I analyzed or when Steve tells Ned that he considers him his son, whether they are biologically related or not. Unlike those scenes, this scene is a better indicator of Steve's transformation, because Steve actually states that he did not want to admit that he acts the way that Jane described it in the article, but he will not deny it either. The scene begins with Jane sitting on a couch sulking after Ned's funeral and Steve sits down beside her.

Steve: "By the way, thanks for showing me the first draft."

Jane: "You read it? What did you think?"

Steve: "Well I was a little embarrassed at first. Obviously, people are going to think I'm a showboat and a little bit of a prick, but then I realized, that's me. I said those things. I did those things. I can live with that.

You're a good writer Jane."

Jane: "It's the F-ing cover."

Steve: "That a girl."

Jane is again at the epicenter of Steve's life as she is bringing much needed attention back to his name and livelihood. Steve read Jane's article leading him to finally confront reality and accept himself for who he is. Jane can see that Steve has changed for the better, leading her to respect his position and their shared loss. Steve has come to accept himself and others, but he mourns the loss of an heir, while Jane goes through her own progression of acceptance of herself, Ned's death, and Steve. By being able to accept Steve, flaws and all, she finds her unborn child's father figure in Steve, also granting Steve the chance to be a father and have an heir.

Jane's Ultimate Evolution

Like Steve and Ned, Jane also undergoes growth by the end of the film because of her actions, providing further evidence for her primacy in the erotic triangle. Although Jane is the character responsible for the men's transformation and progression of the film, she is also a character dealing with a false perception of herself and others. Her transformation begins because her married editor and father of her unborn child is unwilling to move forward with Jane and be an active father figure to their child. He ignores Jane and only communicates with her when it concerns a revision of her article. Jane, at first, is having trouble-trusting males, until she meets Ned, who is a genuine and kind man that finds Jane intriguing, since his mother was also single. During Ned and Jane's time together, Jane decided that Ned would be a suitable father figure and ended what was left of her relationship with her editor through a phone call that I explained in my description of the second triad. The phone call to end her relationship came about because she came to terms with the fact that her editor will never leave his family nor

admit that the child is his. Jane also comes to find that Ned is willing to be in a relationship with her and be a father figure for her child. After Ned's death, she realizes that Ned, although he also lacked a father figure, became a wonderful man that reveres women, but that still felt he was missing something by lacking a father figure.

The scene that shows Jane coming to her self-realization is near the very end of the film, after the cast in the submarine witnesses the existence and beauty of the elusive Jaguar shark. The characters are all amazed at its magnificence and surprised that it really exists and was not a fabrication or figment of Steve's imagination. The shark disappears into the darkness of the sea and Steve begins to ascend back to the *Belafonte*, but as they go, Steve emotionally says, "I wonder if it remembers me?" As the crew is comforting him, he places his hand on Jane's pregnant stomach. Jane is receptive to this and says, "In twelve years he'll be eleven and a half," right around the same age of Ned when he wrote his letter to Steve. Steve replies, "That was my favorite age." Jane is benevolent by insinuating that her child will be a rebirth for Ned and Steve and that Steve can be a father figure in her child's life leaving a legacy. Jane, up until this point, did not know that she was going to include Steve in her child's life, but understands that both Steve and her child can benefit from a relationship. Although the erotic triangle was no longer an issue, Jane still has the authority to allow Steve in her child's life, and allows Steve a second chance to be a father figure. Jane, after having her baby boy, is shown at the screening of Steve's documentary holding her sleeping child dressed in Team Zissou gear, a blue jumpsuit and a red stocking hat that, like Ned's, has a tag with what resembles a traffic light on it. Ned's hat was the only one to have the distinctive tag (no

explanation is given for the tag) before Jane's son, insinuating that Jane is raising her child with Steve being able to act as a father figure and therefore leave a legacy.

The relationships within *The Life Aquatic* are complex due to the erotic triangle's that form with Jane as the most powerful catalyst influencing the men due to her gender and what she represents to both Steve and Ned as well as they do to her. The purpose of Jane's character is to impose and create a conflict between Ned and Steve as well as to be an antagonist to Steve. The women that Anderson uses as catalysts in his films become stronger, more decisive and dominant forces as he experiments with audiences comfort levels. It is not historically common for the woman in a literature to be able to control the men or reject them without apology, although it is becoming more common in contemporary literature and film. Jane, in this film, does just that, influences the men and says what she means as she maneuvers the erotic triangle and strives towards accepting her own self-realization. My argument that Jane is the most influential character within *The Life Aquatic* is progressive in what I believe will become more of an accepted and understood role for women in literature and film as women continue to make advances in society.

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