

Review – Grand Budapest Hotel – Peter Bradshaw (from the Guardian, UK)

This delirious operetta-farce is an eerily detailed and very funny work from the savant virtuoso of American indie cinema, [Wes Anderson](#). It is set in the fading grandeur of a preposterous luxury hotel in an equally preposterous pre-war central European country, the fictional Zubrowka. This kind of milieu – the hotel spa or sanatorium occupied by mysterious invalids, chancers or impoverished White Russians – was loved by Thomas Mann and Vladimir Nabokov, but the closing credits reveal that the director has been specifically inspired by [Stefan Zweig](#), author of *Beware of Pity* and *The Post Office Girl*. In fact, the movie's moustachioed star Ralph Fiennes does rather resemble Zweig.

Stefan Zweig, never entirely happy with movie adaptations of his work, might however have been baffled by this personal homage, just as [Roald Dahl](#) might have been by [Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr Fox*](#). The way that Anderson saturates every square inch of his film's intricate fabric, every sofa covering, every snow-capped peak, every word of every sans-serif lettered notice, with loving comedy is something that the author might not have understood or cared for. But Anderson's brilliantly crafted forms are something other and something better than pastiche.

Ralph Fiennes is on glorious form as Monsieur Gustave, the legendary concierge of the Grand Budapest Hotel in the early 1930s: a gigantic edifice in the mountains. It's a cross between [Nicolae Ceausescu's](#) presidential palace in Bucharest and the [Overlook Hotel in Kubrick's *The Shining*](#). In fact, the huge and staggeringly realised interiors of the Grand Budapest really have given Kubrick's place a run for its money. It is a superb cathedral of eccentricity, with a gorgeous dining hall the size of a football field, a gasp-inducing canyon of a lobby area, with corridors and rooms encircling an exquisitely ornate galleried central space which is to be the location of an extraordinary gunfight. The hotel looks like something a very lonely, clever 13-year-old boy might have designed while never leaving his bedroom.

Gustave is energetic and exacting, taking a passionate pride in the high standards of his establishment and ruling the staff with a rod of iron. Like them, he is kitted out in a Ruritanian purple livery which matches the hotel's decor. Gustave affects an air of genial worldliness and deferential intimacy with the hotel's grander clientele, and despite the quasi-military correctness of his bearing in dealing with his subordinates, Gustave can also lapse into high-camp familiarity with the guests. Fiennes is absolutely brilliant in all this. I can imagine [Christoph Waltz](#) or Dirk Bogarde in the role, but neither would have been as good.

For reasons best known to himself, Gustave decides to mentor the hotel's vulnerable lobby boy, orphan immigrant [Zero Moustafa, played by 17-year-old Tony Revolori](#). It is to Zero that Gustave reveals the engine that drives his hotel's wellbeing: his ready, enthusiastic appetite for servicing the intimate needs of thousands of aristocratic old ladies who come back every year. (In choosing to call his lobby boy "Zero", Anderson may have been subconsciously influenced by [Zero Mostel](#), a great pleaser of little old ladies in *The Producers*.)

END OF WORK ON 23.3.15

cantankerous

Gustave's greatest amour is the [ancient and cantankerous Madame D](#), played by [Tilda Swinton](#) with [wrinkly](#) prosthetics and strange [pale-blue](#) contacts to show her near astigmatic blindness. The [infatuated](#) Madame D infuriates her [sinister](#) son [Dmitri \(Adrien Brody\)](#) by leaving Gustave, in her [will](#), a [priceless](#) Renaissance portrait belonging to her family. Gustave is [thus](#) to face the family's fanatical attempts to [disinherit](#) this [counter](#) jumper, involving her [butler](#), Serge (Mathieu Amalric) and Zero's courageous fiancée, Agatha (Saoirse Ronan), who works in the local Viennese-style patisserie. Gustave calls on the assistance of a secret professional society, a bit like Jeeves in [The Code of the Woosters](#). There are numerous [cameos](#) for all Anderson's [repertory players](#), and many more.

As ever, Anderson's world is created like the most magnificent full-scale doll's house; his incredible locations, interiors and old-fashioned [matte-painting backdrops](#) sometimes give the film a look of a magic-lantern display or an illustrated plate from a book. He and the [cinematographer](#) Robert D Yeoman [contrive](#) the characteristic rectilinear camera movements and tableaux photographed head-on. The film has been compared to Hitchcock and Lubitsch; I kept thinking of Peter Greenaway. It makes the audience feel like giants [bending down](#) to admire a superbly detailed little universe: I can't think of any film-maker who brings such [overwhelming](#) control to his films. Alexandre Desplat's [score](#) keeps the picture moving at an [exhilarating canter](#), and the script, co-written by Anderson and his longtime collaborator Hugo Guinness is an intelligent treat. Watching this is like taking the waters in Zubrowka. A deeply pleasurable [immersion](#).