

## Outline

Thesis: behind such visually overwhelming depiction, Luhrmann desired to portray the futility of material wealth and thus the deconstruction of the American Dream through its implementation of computer graphics, a defeated protagonist and symbolism.

### I. Introduction

A. The World War 1 of 1914 left the world in ruins.

1. The dead were piled up high and the living struggled to find the meaning of living.

B. Nonetheless, as is the way of the world, there were those who gained while others suffered in their losses.

C. In the aftermath of war, America experienced an economic upheaval unheard of in its size and abundance.

1. Stocks reached record highs and Wall Street boomed along in a steady golden roll.

D. Reckless consumerism powered by an infinite flow of capital sounded the advent of an age that is coined for its sheer splendor, the Jazz Age.

E. An era of such abundant wealth acted as a perfect foothold for realizing the dreams of those who sought to climb the social ladder to a better life.

F. Hence the term “American Dream” was born; a notion referring to the possibility of self-achievement through self-endeavor.

G. Directed by the master of visualization, Baz Luhrmann, the film *The Great Gatsby* seems at first glance to be solely dedicated to introducing the audience to the splendid riches of the Jazz Age.

H. On more close examination however, it becomes clear that behind such visually overwhelming depiction, Luhrmann desired to portray the futility of material wealth and thus the deconstruction of the American Dream through its implementation of computer graphics, a defeated protagonist and symbolism.

### II. First Body Paragraph

A. Because the film is an adapted version of one of the most famous literatures of all time, it is only natural that the director faced some restrictions in altering the plot of the film: thus the more important messages were conveyed not through the story itself but through the way it is told, the computer graphics.

B. Luhrmann tried to reflect upon his own interpretation of the story by implementing his artistic vision via technical aspects.

C. The original literary work by Scott Fitzgerald tells the splendor of the Jazz age with a more poetic grace than with heavy-handed pomp and circumstance.

- D. The film adaptation however, dazzles the audience with its visual flourishes in each and every frame.
  - 1. It is almost as if the director wished to overpower the plotline with his zest for theatricality.
  - 2. Almost one third of the running time is devoted to depicting the inhumane splendors of Gatsby's party and his majestic mansion.
  - 3. Such extravagance can also be seen in Myrtle Wilson and Tom Buchanan's lushly decorated apartment.
  - 4. The views of New York are no exception.
  - 5. The magnificent skyscrapers, intricate assemblies of automobiles and freight trains all come together to create a staggering sight.
  - 6. In short, the film visually overwhelms the audience in every way possible throughout the full extent of its 142 minutes.
- E. However the message Luhrmann intends for the audience is not conveyed through this height of visuality itself but rather through how such visuality is created.
  - 1. In the process of production, nothing in the film was left to reality.
  - 2. From Gatsby's grand mansion to the staggering sights of New York, everything was created via computer graphics.
  - 3. Such method was used not because the production lacked technology or resources to actually build the sets but rather because Luhrmann wished to convey enlightenment through such manner of design.
- F. It seems that through such deliberate abundance of computer graphics, Luhrmann wanted to convey a message that secular magnificence is nothing but a mere delusion.
  - 1. An indication to the uncomfortable fact that all materialistic splendors are nothing more than an illusion that can disappear with only a simple tap of the keyboard.
- G. Luhrmann, by selecting computer graphics as the chief method in constructing his film, enlightens the audience to the futility of material wealth, a much cherished object of the American Dream.

### III. Second Body Paragraph

- A. Defeat of the virtuous protagonist who symbolizes the American Dream also plays a pivotal role in dismantling the ideals behind such dream.
- B. Tom Buchanan's statement to Gatsby "We were born different" implies an uncodified yet firm hierarchy dominating the American society of the Jazz age.

1. In light of such social background, the cast of *The Great Gatsby* is split into two sides of clashing social order: the “old-money” types born with silver spoons and the “new-money” types, subjects of the American Dream who achieved wealth through self-endeavor.
- C. Though both classes are similar in that they value money above all else, Luhrmann prescribes a moral distinction between these two types.
1. This is most apparent in the film’s conflicting portrayal of Gatsby, the heroic protagonist who represents the American Dream, and Tom Buchanan his immoral foil of the old money.
  2. Gatsby’s actions, even when similar to those of Tom are always cast in a much more flattering light.
  3. For example, even though the love affair between Gatsby and Daisy is no different from the adultery of Myrtle and Tom, the film describes Gatsby’s love as sublime and Tom’s affair as vulgar.
  4. The film legitimizes Gatsby’s obsession towards a married woman with carefully package lines such as, “I knew that when I kissed this girl, I would be forever wed to her.”
  5. Gatsby’s legitimacy over Tom and other old-money types is further substantiated when Nick Carraway, the narrator and thus the authoritative voice of the film, claims him to be the “one man who was exempt from my disgust.”
  6. Gatsby, a symbolic figure of the American Dream, is thus depicted as an emblem of hope and virtue throughout the course of the film.
- D. However, we soon learn that such characterization was only a setup for an impending fall.
1. Harsh social reality drives Daisy back into the arms of her upper class husband while Gatsby falsely accused of Tom and Daisy’s doing, is faced with a most tragic death.
- E. Thus, through Gatsby’s defeat, the movie is ultimately claiming that love and wealth, contrary to what the American Dream would have us believe, cannot be achieved by mere individual exertion.
1. That the ideal of the American Dream, self-made, meritorious, and opposing the stale hierarchy of the old-money has collapsed.
- F. Through interpreting Gatsby as an emblem of virtue and presenting such figure with a catastrophic end while the symbol of the corrupted old money escapes unscathed, Luhrmann goes further to not only declare the American Dream superficial but dead.

#### IV. Third Body Paragraph

- A. The film also employs symbolism to effectively depict how the American Dream is nothing more than a mere delusion.
- B. The film focuses on two major symbols in order to cast light upon such enlightenment.
- C. The first symbol is the Valley of Ashes situated between Long Island and the city of New York.
  - 1. The Valley of Ashes, as the name itself implies, is a grotesque place filled to the brim with burnt out coal that once powered the booming golden city.
  - 2. As New York's dumping ground, such wastes are discarded here by men who are soaked both body and soul in the blackness of the coal.
  - 3. The very existence of such a desolate place implies the duplicity of the economic boom and casts light upon the terrible dark side which is hidden behind the shimmering glitter of gold.
  - 4. Through such symbolization of duplicity, Luhrmann conveys the deteriorated nature of the American Dream.
- D. Along with the valley of ashes, the billboard eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg also act as an important symbol in the film.
  - 1. The watchful glance that grimly roams over the valley symbolizes the inanity of the American Dream.
  - 2. A narration by Nick equates the eyes to that of the God's and by doing so he implies that God has abandoned the corrupted America leaving behind only Dr. T. J. Eckleburg to frown down on those who have completely lost sight of their moral values in the quest for material success.
  - 3. Such equation can further be interpreted as indication that to the people of New York, the righteous moral of God has become as meaningful as that of a beat up billboard sign.
  - 4. As the only witness to all sorts of corruptions committed in the name of desire, the stare of the eyes conveys a message that the American Dream is nothing more than an illusion that feeds off the hideous greed of mankind.

## V. Conclusion

- A. In conclusion, the film *The Great Gatsby* successfully portrays the destruction of the American Dream through implementation of computer graphics, defeat of the protagonist and symbolism.
- B. "All the bright precious things fade so fast, and they never come back."
  - 1. These were the words of Daisy Buchanan to Nick, as she lamented over her life that was abundant with riches but wanting in spiritual contentment.

- C. Mankind has always strived to grasp things out of its reach and such greed, no doubt, has sometimes resulted in the shape of development propelling the evolution of mankind.
- D. However in the process of such ardent quest mankind has proven liable to lose sight of the truly important matters in life.
  - 1. Innocent dreams became greed, passion became obsession and soon men were ruled by an illusion with no substance, money.
  - 2. What should have been the spoils of mankind's achievements become ironically the conqueror of its master.
- E. Today's society is no different from that of the Jazz Age in which the film is situated.
- F. In a society granted both the gift of materialistic affluence and the curse of mental inanity, we too are ceaselessly tempted by the pleasures of wealth.
- G. Through a modernistic interpretation of a classic masterpiece, Luhrmann sounds a warning towards the audience living out such an age in which materialistic values has overpowered the morals of man.