

American beauty
micro-analysis film
studies essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The way the first scene is shot also brings up other information about the first two characters, implied to be filmed from a shaky handheld camera; the engage girl speaks directly into the camera almost as if she were talking to the viewers, this almost brings us closer to her true feelings as if she were talking to a diary - but also implies she's comfortable with the male who's filming. The low-key, very artificial lighting suggests that they're in a living area and as she seems to be in a blanket or some kind of bedding, this could imply that the two characters are in a sort-of relationship where they're intimate with each other.

The next shot is the ' American Beauty' title card, meanwhile you hear the sound of the camera turning off, though this scene is over and very different from the next Ariel view scene of the suburban streets; you understand that the previous scene may have been out of place (or maybe from a different part of the plot line possibly hinting at future story-arcs) as its a different time of day to the next shot.

The shot zooms in closer to a particular road over a very sub-urban area of what seems like a city; the landscape appears large and very repetitive, with many of the houses and gardens appearing in very similar shapes as the camera gets further in. This establishing shot creates the idea that wherever the Amerada going could almost be directed into any of the houses on this road; this implies that though this film has a particular purpose, the viewer could ' drop' into any of these peoples houses and still find a similar, entertaining story about an average family.

We hear a voice-over of a man - Lester Burnham, a 42 year old male introducing his neighborhood, street and essentially life - as if he should be judged on where he lives. He then states that within the next year he'll die, therefore connecting him to the first scene implying that he may be the teenage girls father. This implies that though its the camera and therefore the viewers zooming in on Luster's life, Luster's knowledge of his own death could further imply that the voice over is the sort-of spirit of Lester; showing us his life and family like something important happens in his life at the point the film starts.

We then cut to a overhead shot of an almost symmetrical bedroom with a middle aged man in the bed, an alarm goes off and he turns around turning it off. Luster's voice over continues suggesting that this man is intact Lester Burnham, but the voice-over says that this version of himself doesn't know about his death. The placement of the shot almost forces the viewer to look down on the subject, as if to pity him.

The room is unusually plain and dull looking, it seems it could usually be neater, but its as if his placement on the left of the bed is unusual or messy in the shot. The light is coming from the right, and the lightness in the previous shot suggests that its morning, his placement; back to the ceiling and head facing away from the light implies that he could be avoiding or looking away from the truth or just resenting the fact that as his alarm has gone of- he may have to get out of bed.

This suggests that he resents his life, possibly spending as much time as he can in bed as to avoid the reality of his life. Then the camera appears closer

up as Lester turns around, his expression seems tired and bored as if he's had enough of the day already, this follows with the voice-over of Lester adding that he in this point in time may as well be dead. He wears a stereotypical plaid pajama set which creates the idea that he is a very average, generic middle-class man, following up on the idea of the 'American dream' referring to the title.

We then see him put on his slippers and the next shot he is in the shower. This close up of his head, eyes closed and looking upwards; there is a strong natural-seeming light coming from above him tinted white, this gives the impression that he may be praying- the white light implying a heavenly presence. The idea that he may be praying could suggest that he's tired of his unfulfilled life and may be asking for something good; This contrasts heavily with the next shot when he's MasturbatingMasturbating .

The shot opens up to a medium-long and you see his whole body in the shower blurred by the shower walls that almost imprison him in the white light, the shot pans towards the right and you see what he's ongoing, this contrasts as before he was implied to be praying for something good, and in the same situation he is doing something that would be against religion or frowned upon, as if he was too lazy to wait for his prayer to come so he'd pleasure himself another way. Meanwhile his voice-over notes that this is the highlight of his day and that it's 'all downhill from here'.

The shot quickly turns to the face of a rose looking down its stem, as if the camera was admiring it. Some pliers appear and cut off the flower from the stem leaving just part of the branch. This in a way implies that because roses

and the deep red color could suggest love and passion, the fact that this scene appears right after we meet Lester; it could imply that the rose represents his passion for life and that it's been cut off- connecting to the idea that inside he is 'already dead'. The shot changes to a woman holding the freshly cut rose, she looks down as she judges it, turning it in her gloves looking for thorns or blemishes.

The voice-over is Lester stating that this is his wife Carolyn, she immediately is presented to be a perfectionist in many aspects of her life, even risking her implied work clothes and pearls to do some early morning gardening. You notice her garden is almost pristine, the bright white house behind her with blue shutters, bright against the perfect green grass and deep red rose all suggest a perfect life, and the white picket fence adds to the idea that this is supposed to be almost an embodiment of the American dream.

Lester's voice-over notes that her color coordinated outfit isn't an accident further adding to the idea that her life is almost tailored by herself to appear perfect. The next shots are their next-door neighbors talking about their dog as Lester adds that they live next to a gay couple, Jim and Jim. As you hear Carolyn greet them as they compliment on each other; her on his tie and him on her roses, you see Lester coming into focus between them as he peers through the window of their house. His voice-over saying that she wasn't always like she is now, suggesting that he misses the 'old times' when he might have enjoyed his life.

The medium shot slowly zooms in as you see Carolyn talking to one of the Jims and Lester in between, the camera focuses on him and his expression

seems lost and motionless looking at his the people talking, the window panes narrowly appearing like prison bars as he seems trapped in the house which also seems darker and duller then the vibrant rent of the house. This implies that this ' perfect', ' American dream' lifestyle could be a facade to cover up the truth of this unhappy family situation, and Carolina's need for perfection possibly drawing from the fact that her life is in reality very imperfect.

The next shot is a medium close up of the teenage girl from the previous scene proving that she is intact his daughter and further creates the idea that her and the boy she was with may be suspects, or responsible for the death of Lester. His voice-over notes that the teenage girl is his only child, Jane. You see her looking t something off scene, and the camera follows her eye-line to a computer screen where she's looking up woman's breast enlargement surgeries. This implies that she, like a stereotypical teenage girl; isn't happy with her own body and maybe wants to be more attractive and feminine, an ' American beauty'.

He notes that she's a typical insecure teenage girl as she closes her laptop and after hearing a car horn walks to the mirror and in the medium shot you can see her and her reflection as she looks at he body with a dies-pleased look. Lester adds that he wants to tell his daughter that she won't always be insecure, but ads that if e did he'd be lying to her; this implies that they aren't close as Lester doesn't seem to understand his daughter and sympathies with her situation, for her to be wanting to change her body permanently only in her teens suggests that she may have a dysfunctional relationship with her parents.

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The reflection sort-of implies that there may be a different side to her character we haven't seen, as in this scene she seems to be uncomfortable with herself - however in the scene before the title card she seems quite comfortable with her body and quite open with this other male character.

The shot returns to out the front of the house and follows the beeping sound to the car where Carolyn is waiting for her family impatiently, Jane exits the house and in the long shot you see its pristine white front and symmetrically with the addition to perfectly shaped bushes by the front door.

Carolyn mentions that Jane may purposefully looking 'UN-attractive' and is succeeding at it; further adding to the idea that Jane isn't confident and quite insecure because of her negative relationship with her parents, especially her mother who seems to only care for her perfect appearance and not the actual emotions of her daughter. Lester exits soon after with the same long shot, with the a-pop of the car in the corner.

Carolyn also adds that he is making her later than she already is, and sarcastically asks if he could possibly make her any more late; this is followed by Lester indistinct mumbles as his briefcase flies open with work and sheets of paper flying about. This seems to reflect his sheer imperfection in the eyes of his wife as the second they're in the same shot he seems to ruin the appearance of his family.

This clumsiness contrasts with the background of the perfect house and Lester picks up his fallen papers as his family sigh in his expense, as if his lumpiness isn't funny to them as much as it bores them- this implies that he is constantly like this. His voice-over states that his family think of him as a '

'gigantic loser' as he shares eye contact with his wife getting into the car, his hopeless face suggests that though it's a mistake, he may uncontrollably be doing it just to upset his wife as he seems to almost grin at her afterwards.

The last shot is you see the three members of the Burnham family all in the car, Jane and Carolyn in the front and Lester sleeping in the back as if he were a pet or child, his voice-over admits that he is infantile the 'gigantic loser' his family see him as, and that he may have lost something during his life that he wants to get back, noting that his current state is 'sedated'.