Beautiful Necessities: American Beauty and the Idea of Freedom

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Abstract

A central theme of American Beauty is the disjunction between the quests for liberation undertaken by its characters and the discoveries at which a few of them arrive. The world of the film is carefully structured as a culturally deterministic system. Nevertheless, a kind of freedom - epitomized by the experience of beauty - becomes possible for some of the characters even in the grip of fatal necessities. The Buddhist concept of mushotoku (non-attainment) and Emerson's idea of Beautiful Necessity are used to explicate the film's complex exploration of freedom and fate.

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