

# **An American in Paris Film Summary**

**An American in Paris by Vincente Minnelli**

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## Context

*An American in Paris* is the fun, quirky story of a young artist who lives and loves in Paris. After fighting in World War II, Jerry decides to stay in Paris and pursue his love of painting. While selling his paintings on the street one day, Jerry meets Milo, a rich woman, who decides to be his patron. When they go to dinner that night, however, Jerry sees and becomes infatuated with the beautiful Lise.

After Jerry realizes that Milo's offers of help are not completely innocent, he tries to leave, but she begs him to let her help him. Jerry also chases Lise until she agrees to see him again. They fall in love, but Lise is also involved. Lise is engaged to Jerry's new friend, Henri. Just when it seems the young couple will not be able to stay together, everything works out, and we get a "happily ever after" feeling from the final scene.

Vincente Minnelli was the director for dozens of incredible films. In 1944, he directed an all-time favorite *Meet Me in St. Louis* starring Judy Garland. Minnelli also directed *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946), *Madame Bovary* (1949), and *Father of the Bride* (1950) before directing *An American in Paris*. In 1958, Minnelli directed Leslie Caron again in *Gigi*, a charming film that won the hearts of people everywhere. Minnelli also directed *Brigadoon* (1954), *Kismet* (1955), and *The Reluctant Debutante* (1958).

Gene Kelly began as a star on Broadway and came to Hollywood after acting in the hit show *Pal Joey*. After starring in *Me and My Gal* with Judy Garland in 1942, Kelly chose to stay and use his creative powers in Hollywood. Kelly also appeared in *Pilot #5* (1943), *DuBarry Was a Lady* (1943), *Cover Girl* (1944), *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), *The Three Musketeers* (1948), *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949), *On the Town* (1949), and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952).

Leslie Caron is a beautiful French woman who was discovered by Gene Kelly while he was visiting Paris with his wife in 1946. Kelly and his wife couldn't meet her after the show, though, because her mother made her leave the theatre immediately. After seeing Caron, Kelly chose her for the leading lady in *American in Paris*. Caron eventually became famous for her roles in *Lili* (1953), *Daddy Long Legs* (1955), *Gigi* (1958), *Is Paris Burning?* (1966), and *Funny Bones* (1995).

*An American in Paris* swept the nation; everyone loved it, including the critics. The film won six Academy Awards: Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Color for Cedric Gibbons, E. Preston Ames, Edwin B. Willis, and F. Keogh Gleason; Best Cinematography, Color for Alfred Gilks and John Alton; Best Costume Design, Color for Orry-Kelly, Walter Plunkett, and Irene Sharaff; Best Music, Scoring of a Musical Picture for Johnny Green and Saul Chaplin; Best Picture for Arthur Freed; Best Writing, Story and Screenplay for Alan Jay Lerner. The film was also nominated for Best Director for Vincente Minnelli and Best Film Editing for Adrienne Fazan.



## Summary and Analysis

*An American in Paris* begins with scenes of Paris, and the voice of Jerry Mulligan who says, "This is Paris, and I'm an American who lives here. My name is Jerry Mulligan, and I'm an ex G.I. In 1945 when the army told me to find my own job, I stayed on. And I'll tell you why: I'm a painter, and all my life that's all I've ever wanted to do." Paris is the only place for a painter. If one can't paint there, then one has no hope.

Jerry lives on the Left Bank and knows everyone on his block. In his small apartment, he is just waking up for the day. While he prepares for his day, he works on a painting and says, "Good morning." to the children who call up to him. Jerry then talks about the friends he has in Paris, and Adam Cook introduces himself as one of Jerry's best friends. Adam is an excellent musician, a former child prodigy, and he has been trying to avoid work his whole life, because he has an enormous lack of character. Adam then talks about his one other friend, composer, Henri Baurel. Henri is a fairly young man, but he feels old in years.

That same day, Henri and Adam meet for a meal. The people at the restaurant love him. Then, Henri tells about taking Lise to his show, and he shares her picture. Adam recognizes her and discovers that she is Jacques Bouvier's daughter. Henri describes Lise as an exciting, sweet woman, who could dance all night. They are then shown in a mirror which turns into a stage on which we see Lise dancing. Everything Adam believes about her on first description turns out to be wrong. Lise is charming, sophisticated, exciting, studious, and happy: everything a man could want.

At his place, Jerry tells his landlord that he needs money, while he rushes out the door to sell his paintings on the street. Jerry meets Adam and Henri, and he asks Adam for money. Adam doesn't have it, but Henri pays. Together, they sing a song and perform in the restaurant while spectators listen.

Jerry goes to Montmatre to sell his paintings and finds a great spot. This woman tries to discuss his work, but he doesn't want to hear anything unless she plans to buy. The third year art school students drive him crazy. Another woman comes over to look at his work. The woman likes his paintings and wants to buy them. Jerry is not sure how much they're worth, but she offers a huge price. The woman doesn't have all the money with her, and she invites him to her house to pick up the rest of the money. The woman's chauffer arrives, picks them up, and then they pull up to a beautiful apartment building.

At her building, she tells him that her father sells suntan oil, and she is very wealthy. Jerry helps her hang the paintings in her suite. The woman is thrilled with his work. Jerry admits that it's hard for him to sell his paintings. After the original is gone, it's out of his life for good. When the phone rings, the woman answers and she tells her friend to wait for her in the dining room. The woman asks about Jerry's plans for the evening. There will be an extra girl at her party, and the woman invites Jerry to come. Jerry heads home in her chauffeured car to the immense interest of the neighborhood.



While the children surround him, they convince him to teach them some English. Jerry then begins to sing one of the most popular songs from the film, *I Got Rhythm, I Got Music* while the adorable children sing along. That evening, Jerry arrives at the woman's apartment for what he thought was to be a party, but she is the only one there. We discover that the woman's name is Milo Roberts, and she tells him that she is amazed by the number of Americans in Paris. Milo then explains that the party is just for the two of them. Jerry returns her money, takes his pictures, and tells her he isn't an escort service. Milo explains that she likes his work and wants to get to know him. Since she doesn't believe he would have accepted a normal invitation, she had to be creative. Milo wants to help him, and they head out to dinner for somewhere he can afford.

After Milo tells Jerry about her marriage, he tells her she should remarry. Milo tells him that she is his new sponsor and wants to help him get known. Tommy Bordam shows up, and she introduces him to Jerry. The three of them join another group, and Jerry bumps into Lise on the way. Jerry is quite taken with her, and he asks Tommy about her. No one knows her, and Milo quickly changes the subject. Milo even tries to convince Tommy to put Jerry on the art page.

As Milo and Tommy dance, he reminds her that she will have trouble with Jerry. After her young artists become successful, they always leave. In the meantime, Jerry blatantly stares at Lise. Jerry interrupts Lise's conversation and pulls her onto the dance floor by pretending to know her. Lise is irritated by his advances, but he keeps her on the dance floor and sings to her. Tommy then tells Milo that Jerry will be gone even sooner than she expected. Lise wants to go back to her friends, and Jerry says that he is just trying to save her from boredom. Jerry follows her to the table and asks for her phone number for his "wife." Lise tries to give him a fake number, but one of her friends corrects her.

When they return to the table, Milo is ready to leave. On the way home, Milo looks teary-eyed, and she begins to lecture him on how and what to paint. Milo is disturbed that he rudely picked up women while with her. Jerry gets out of the car, and he apologizes about the pictures; she says she still likes them, and he leaves. The next day, Jerry calls Lise, but she becomes angry with him.

In his disappointment, he sits down for some coffee and sees Milo's driver outside the café. Milo sits down next to him, and he offers her some breakfast. Milo tells him that she's been working for him and talking to an art dealer. One of the best dealers was impressed with his work and someone is coming the next day to see his pictures. Milo tries to convince Jerry to go with him, but he offers to meet her later. Milo apologizes for her performance the night before.

After breakfast, Jerry goes to the perfume store to see Lise. Jerry tries to talk to her, and he won't go away. An older lady is trying to choose a perfume while her husband is away, and he helps her to choose the perfect perfume. Jerry then asks Lise to go out with him, and he finally gets her to start laughing and agree. Jerry can't take her to lunch, and she has a dinner date; so, they make a date for after dinner.



In his apartment, Adam is working hard on his new composition, when Jerry interrupts. Jerry then tells him that he is in love by using a song and dance number. Later that evening, Adam calls Henri while he is with Lise. Henri says that the new dance number is going into the show that night, and they agree to meet later. Lise then agrees to go with Henri that night. At the café, Jerry seems discouraged when Lise arrives. Lise asks him to go for a walk so that they aren't seen.

While they walk down the street, Lise is very quiet. The two head down to the river. Jerry tells her that he is a painter, and he tells her that discouragement helps him. Jerry plans to be famous someday, but he admits it may take a while. They walk, hand in hand by the river, and Jerry gives her a piece of candy. Later, Jerry tells Lise about the weekends in America. Lise doesn't want to talk about herself, and he explains that since she is so beautiful, he wants to know more about her. Jerry is surprised to discover that she doesn't realize her beauty. Then, he begins to serenade her with the song they danced to the previous night. While he sings, he takes her in his arms, and they dance for a time, before embracing.

Suddenly, Lise remembers the time, and she starts to run away. Jerry says they must see each other again, and they try to find a time to meet. They decide on Saturday morning, kiss, and then Lise leaves. We then see Henri's brilliant, beautiful performance and hear the cheers of the crowd. Lise arrives just when the performance ends, and she begins to apologize for running late. Henri introduces John McDowd, an American theater agent, who wants him to go on tour. Henri has told John that Lise is the deciding factor, and Henri suggests that they get married before the tour. Lise appears uncomfortable with the entire discussion.

In Adam's apartment, Adam talks to Jerry. Milo's car arrives, and Adam makes it very clear that Milo expects more out of him than he seems to expect of himself. Even the housekeeper warns him when he leaves. While relaxing in bed, Adam creates a new masterpiece in his mind. We watch while he creates a part of a large symphony in which he serves as the piano player, the conductor, and any number of other musicians. Adam then gets out of bed and pours a glass of champagne.

On the other side of town, Milo and Jerry get out of Milo's car. The two arrive at a new studio that Milo has purchased for Jerry. Milo wants him to have more space, but he is happy with his place. Milo tells him that in three months, he will be able to pay her back. Milo is planning his exhibition for three months from then, but he doesn't feel like he will be ready yet. Jerry finally agrees and Milo embraces him.

Jerry then begins the work of painting numerous places and people in Paris for the show. Finally, Jerry paints Lise and prepares for his show. Lise and Jerry go to deliver his paintings. In the car, Lise tells him that they have so little time together. Lise doesn't want to talk about anything from when they are not together. Jerry agrees that might be better, and then Lise asks him to kiss her; he complies.

The car stops at the café, and Lise becomes upset. Adam asks Jerry to stop for coffee, but he refuses. When Lise forces the car to drive off, Adam sits down. A little boy brings



a note to him that she will be waiting at the normal place. Jerry tells him that he has terrible woman problems. Jerry admits that he doesn't know anything about the woman with whom he is deeply in love. When Adam hears Jerry say Lise's name, he spills his drink.

Henri then walks in and announces his wonderful news: he is getting married. Jerry then explains his situation to Henri. Henri tells him that there are no real problems, since they obviously both care for each other. The only real problem is when one is in love and the other isn't. Henri tells him to express his love and ask her to marry him. Adam, on the other hand, looks depressed, because he realizes the terrible situation in which them men find themselves. Henri and Jerry begin to sing of the wonders of having a woman love them. Dancing around the streets, they tell everyone about their feelings.

Later that night, Jerry meets Lise by the river. Jerry runs to her and picks her up in his arms. Jerry tells her that he loves her, and she walks away, sadly. Lise admits that she can't see him anymore, because she's getting married. Lise tells him that her feelings don't matter, because she couldn't leave Henri. Jerry is astonished to hear the name. Lise tells him that Henri has taken care of her for so long that she feels that she owes him. They have loved each other for so long, and she begs him to understand. Jerry tells her that a woman is helping him a lot, and he doesn't want to lose her, since his work is important. Jerry wishes Lise luck and prepares to leave. Lise then calls out and says, "If it means anything to you, I love you." Then, he leaves.

Jerry goes to Milo's apartment and embraces him. Jerry tells her that they are going to a costume party, and she is excited about his change in attitude. At the party, everything is crazy and fun. Milo is carried in, and they watch while people jump from the balcony. Milo ends up talking to Adam, and they toast to Jerry's folly. Jerry is about to give a show for a sponsor. Milo introduces herself to Adam, and Adam responds by saying he knows exactly who she is.

When Jerry enters the party, he begins looking for Milo. They begin to dance, and she tells him that she just met Adam. Henri then spots him and introduces him to Lise. Henri says that it is their last night in Paris, and Jerry admits that their plans are very romantic. Henri asks how the advice worked out, and Jerry says that it worked just fine. Both Milo and Henri ask about Lise and Jerry. Jerry then tells Milo that he's not really happy and apologizes for bringing her. Milo then recognizes Lise from the nightclub, and he admits that he's in love with her. Milo leaves to get some champagne.

Jerry aimlessly wanders into the garden, sadly considering his fate. After finding a piece of paper and a pen, he begins to draw. Lise spots him and goes to him. Jerry reveals his surprise about the quick marriage, and she tells him that it was too hard to admit. Lise and Jerry both realize that they will never get over one another, and Jerry shows her his new drawing of the river. Lise hopes that Paris will let them forget, but Jerry knows better. Paris only lets you remember. Jerry says that something happened to him, like he expected, but he knows that, without Lise, all the beauty will only hurt more. The two embrace, and she runs away.



On the balcony, Jerry looks sadly toward the Eiffel Tower. Then, we see a puff of smoke from around the corner where Henri was smoking. Henri also looks sad and returns inside. When he and Lise leave, she looks back toward the balcony. On the way home, Lise cries and Henri looks sad. While Jerry stands alone, a wind begins to blow, and the picture he drew of the river, which he tore up while he talked to Lise, blows back together.

Suddenly, the picture becomes the background for a beautiful ballet number between Jerry and many women. Jerry finds a red rose in the street and picks it up. None of the women, however, are Lise. Jerry continues to run through the streets of Paris, dancing with those he meets, until he finally sees Lise. Lise keeps evading him, though, until the film moves to the flower market. Jerry finds another red rose, and Lise appears for another number. Lise disappears again and some soldiers greet Jerry. Then, we see the children from the neighborhood and many other people enjoying a carnival. Lise reappears there with a hat tied with a red bow, and Jerry greets her, while he is wearing a bright red jacket. The two share yet another wonderful dance. Finally, they end up against a red, foggy background, where they engage in a sensuous dance. The background eventually shows a beautiful fountain, and the colors constantly change while they dance. Finally, they kiss, and the dance returns to an amazing street scene, before Jerry begins his own ballet in a café, where Lise, in a red dress, performs the Can-Can with other girls. Then, they move to a beautiful ballroom where women wearing red dance around them, while Lise wears a beautiful white dress. Then all disappear but Jerry, who is still dancing on the fountain. We then return to the first scene of this dance section when he picks up the red rose. The background goes black, and the scene focuses on the red rose.

After this section, the film returns to the party. When Jerry walks away from the balcony, he hears a horn honking. Jerry returns to the edge and sees Henri helping Lise out of the car. Jerry runs downstairs, and he and Lise meet on the front steps and passionately embrace. Then, they walk down the steps, hand in hand, while the camera pans to show the lights of Paris.





# Characters

## Jerry Mulligan, played by Gene Kelly

### Description

Jerry Mulligan is a young American who fought in France during World War II. After the War ended, Jerry decided to stay in Paris and pursue his true passion - painting. Although Jerry does not sell many paintings, he is happy living in his small apartment next to his friend, Adam. Jerry is also a favorite of the neighborhood children.

One day, while selling his paintings, Jerry meets a woman named Milo Roberts, who asks to buy two of his paintings. Jerry agrees to go with her to drop them off, and she offers to sponsor him. Milo's sponsorship, however, comes with a price: him. Though he rejects her, she comes back and begs him to let her help. Jerry eventually agrees.

Soon after meeting Milo, Jerry also meets Lise Bouvier and falls in love. Although they do not know everything about one another, he is certain that she is the woman for him. Sadly, Lise is already engaged to Jerry's new friend, Henri. Jerry is heartbroken when Lise leaves him, but quickly recovers when she returns.

### Analysis

Jerry is a carefree, spirited young man. Jerry is full of life, and he wants to live out his dream of becoming a great artist. Although he is not having a lot of luck selling his paintings on the Paris streets he remains hopeful that someday he will be discovered. When he meets Milo, it seems that his dreams are coming true.

Although Jerry quickly discovers Milo's ulterior motives, he finally agrees to let her continue sponsoring him. With her help and prodding, he creates many fine works to display at his show. One of his greatest inspirations is his new love, Lise. We learn that Jerry is a very persistent man, partially because he is willing to do whatever it takes, not only to be a success as an artist, but also to win Lise's heart.

Jerry's life suddenly becomes richer after he meets Lise. Young and in love, he cannot imagine his life without her. When Lise finally explains her predicament, Jerry is heartbroken but tries desperately to play it off well. After she returns, Jerry can finally show his true feelings in front of the entire world.



## **Lise Bouvier, played by Leslie Caron**

### **Description**

Lise Bouvier is a beautiful young woman who is the love of two men. Both Henri and Jerry have fallen in love with the same woman, but she is scared to let either know of the other. Lise finds herself caught in the middle of a love triangle with no way to get out.

Lise has loved Henri for years because of his kindness to her after her parents died. Henri has cared for her and protected her, so she feels that she owes him her life. On the other hand, she is madly in love with Jerry, but she feels she must sacrifice him for Henri's sake.

### **Analysis**

Lise is an honest and caring woman who has gotten stuck in a terrible predicament. On the eve of her wedding to Henri, she has realized a more intense love for Jerry. Although Lise tried to avoid Jerry, his persistence won her over, and once with him, she has trouble imagining being without him forever.

Lise tries to do the right thing in all that she does. Thus, she decides to marry Henri and forget about Jerry. When Henri learns about the situation, he frees her to go with her true love, Jerry, while he goes to America, alone. Lise is finally able to love fully and completely.

## **Adam Cook, played by Oscar Levant**

### **Description**

Adam Cook is Jerry's best friend in Paris. Adam is a concert pianist and a composer. Adam is young and talented and has taken to Paris, because of the atmosphere. Adam lives in the apartment over from Jerry, and they share many conversations about life and love.

Adam is also one of Henri's best friends. Adam is always listening to Henri's stories about his career and his beautiful girlfriend, Lise. Adam is the first to realize that both Henri and Jerry are in love with the same woman.

### **Analysis**

Adam is the stereotypical, moody, and unorganized composer, but he is also very talented. Adam often plays in the café below his apartment so that the entire neighborhood can enjoy the sound. When Adam realizes that Jerry and Henri are both



in love with Lise, he finds himself caught in a bind, but he has no opportunity to let either man know about the situation.

## **Henri Baurel, played by Georges Guétary**

### **Description**

Henri Baurel is a famous singer in Paris, and he is also Lise's fiancé. When John Dowden asks him to come to America, Henri must first ask Lise's opinion. Henri talks about her to everyone and shares his love with all those he meets.

Henri has taken care of Lise since her parents died, when she was a young girl. Over the years, he has come to love her very much, and she feels that she somehow owes him for the time and attention he has given her.

Henri meets Jerry through their mutual friend, Adam, and has a lot of respect for him. When he realizes that Jerry and Lise have fallen in love, Henri steps out of the way so that they can be together. Henri loves Lise enough that he wants her to be happy first and foremost.

### **Analysis**

Henri is an upstanding citizen of Paris. Everyone knows, loves, and respects him. Henri always shows that he is a gentleman in everything that he does. When he first meets Jerry, he treats him as an equal, although Jerry is poor, and Henri is rich and famous.

Henri also shows his character by letting Lise go so that she can marry Jerry. Henri realizes that he loves her enough to set her free. Henri's gesture shows that he is a man to be respected and followed. Of all the characters in the film, Henri may be the best example of a loving, courageous, and selfless person.

## **Milo Roberts, played by Nina Foch**

### **Description**

Milo is a lonely, older woman, who is always looking for younger men to squire her around Paris. Milo is primarily attracted young artists, actors, and musicians. Milo takes a liking to Jerry when she meets him, and he is selling his paintings on Montmartre.

Milo decides to help Jerry become famous by using her connections to set up a showing for his work. Jerry realizes that she is also interested in a romantic relationship with him and bails, but she decides to help him anyway. Milo still hopes for more, but she is happy with their relationship.



## **Analysis**

Milo simply wants to be adored. Milo spent many years being the "belle of the ball," and she is having difficulty adjusting to her new role of being an older, single woman. Milo sees Jerry and finds that he will be a good person to take under her wing. Because of her money, she can temporarily win the affections of young men by helping launch their careers. Milo does her best to win Jerry, but his heart is with Lise from the first moment he sees her.

## **John McDowd, played by Paul Maxey**

### **Description**

John McDowd is the man from the United States who is trying to convince Henri to come to the States to perform. When Lise meets John, he already knows all about her because Henri has gushed about her.

### **Analysis**

John helps us see how much Henri loves Lise, and we also see her guilt over her feelings for Jerry. John gives us a look into their lives.

## **Therese, played by Ann Codee**

### **Description**

Therese, the cleaning lady, is always on the stairs when Jerry leaves his building. The two talk every time he runs downstairs. Therese always has something to say to him about his life.

### **Analysis**

Therese introduces us to the average people in Paris who clean the buildings and live the normal life. We are able to see an unromanticized life through her.

## **Tommy Baldwin, played by Hayden Rorke**

### **Description**

Tommy Baldwin is Milo's friend in the art industry. The first night Jerry spends with Milo, they go out to eat with Tommy. Tommy knows Milo well and warns her that Jerry will be gone within just a few months. At the same time, though, he is still willing to help Milo and Jerry.

## **Analysis**

Tommy understands Milo better than anyone else in the film, but he also understands a man's nature and quickly realizes that Jerry will not do everything Milo wants. Tommy warns her about his suspicions and is supportive when he is right.



# Themes

## Love versus Duty

Choosing between love and duty may be one of the oldest and most difficult decisions that any person must make. When Lise and Jerry first meet, they would never have guessed that such difficult decisions would lie ahead of them. For one thing, Lise didn't even want to talk to Jerry.

After Lise and Jerry fall in love and have spent a lot of time together, each realizes that he or she must reveal their secrets to the other. Lise is finally forced to tell Jerry about her engagement to Henri and her feeling of duty toward him, since he cared for her for so many years. Jerry, in kind, must tell of Milo's patronage and his dedication to her.

Although Jerry is easily able to lose Milo, since his situation has been going on for a much shorter amount of time, Lise finds it difficult to imagine turning away from Henri. Finally she makes the difficult decision to stay with Henri, for duty's sake instead of following her heart. Thankfully, Henri sees her pain and out of his love for her, Henri sends her back to Jerry.

## Finding Oneself Abroad

For millions of years, people have traveled to far off places in order to find themselves and make their dreams come true. Although they may simply seem like optimists who believe the grass is greener on the other side, there is something to be said for finding oneself abroad.

After serving in the War, Jerry was fascinated by Paris and decided to stay so that he could lose himself in his painting. Like he says, there is no better place to find inspiration for painting than Paris. Thus, Jerry spends his time trying to master his art and find himself while he lives in Paris.

While Jerry searches to reach his goals and dreams, he also falls in love with Lise, a young Parisian girl who, oddly enough, is engaged to his new friend, Henri. Lise and Jerry learn about life and love in the streets of Paris, and finally, Jerry finds not only himself but also Lise, while making his new home abroad.

## Dedication to the Arts

At various times, interest in the arts becomes greater or lesser in the public eye, but there are those who are always dedicated to their craft and to the arts in general. Gene Kelly, the main actor and co-director of this film, was always dedicated to the arts during his career, and *An American in Paris* shows his dedication.

While Kelly plays the young painter, Jerry, we see that Jerry can also sing and dance, while his friend Adam is an excellent composer; there is also Henri, the famous singer, who comes into the mix. The trio's dedication to pursuing the arts is evident while they work to keep their art true to their ideals and to keep their audiences, when there are any, entertained.

*An American in Paris* seeks not only to show the dedication of these young artists but also to inspire a love of the arts in viewers everywhere. While we watch the men and women sing, dance, and paint, viewers are expected to become more interested and aware of the arts around them each day.

## Style and Cinematography

Song and dance is always a primary focus in Gene Kelly movies, and *An American in Paris* is no exception. Everywhere possible, there is a song and dance number to keep the viewer on their toes and enjoying this lighthearted comedy. We become entranced by the characters and their lives while they relate to us using dialogue, song, and dance.

Unlike many Gene Kelly movies, however, this film gives prominence to ballet numbers. Although *Singin' in the Rain* and other films may have one short ballet section, *An American in Paris* has several. From the time we hear about Lise from Henri, and she twirls across our screen, to the end when Jerry imagines dancing in a ballet across Paris, chasing Lise, a ballet scene is never long in appearing.

Because of the ballet scenes and the other song and dance numbers, *An American in Paris* retains a primarily artsy style that highlights the importance of song and dance in life and in love. Emotions, actions, and desires are communicated to the audience more through song and the movement of bodies dancing on the screen than through standard dialogue and acting.





# Motifs

## Song and Dance

Like with so many old musicals, especially Gene Kelly musicals, *An American in Paris* uses song and dance to tell the story of the characters. From the first moments of the film, we see Gene Kelly burst into song while he celebrates his wonderful life, living in a small apartment in Paris and selling his paintings.

All of the characters in the film are introduced through song. Jerry is first introduced to us through his song in the morning, and we meet Adam during the same time through song and music. When Henri appears, he also has an introduction through song. One of the best introductions is Henri's song about Lise, who performs small ballet dances during his descriptions.

Although some of the selections seem a bit long and contrived, they do help to reveal the feelings and stories of the characters. Lise and Jerry's relationship is shown well through the final song and dance number where he chases the constantly disappearing Lise through the streets of Paris.

## The Café Scenes

*An American in Paris* uses scenes at the local café between Adam, Henri, and Jerry to keep viewers updated on the changing feelings and events in the lives of the characters. There is also a café scene between Jerry and Lise.

When we first see Jerry's corner, we see people from the local area and meet Adam and Henri. There is a piano downstairs, and Adam plays his new songs for Henri and Jerry; the local population also gets to enjoy them. Later, while they are discussing their love lives in the café, Adam realizes that both Henri and Jerry are in love with the same woman.

Jerry and Lise also meet at a café one night. They meet at a café near the river after Jerry shows Lise that he refuses to give up on their love. Lise is nervous about meeting in such an obvious place, so they saunter down to the river and enjoy time alone together.

## Night and Day

Night and day are common motifs in literature and film. The time represents different moods and events. Night generally represents danger and intrigue, while days represent honesty and openness. The events that happen during these times reflect the moods often suggested by these times.



Jerry and Lise first meet at night in a club. Jerry pretends to know her so that he can get her away from her friends without her being able to refuse. Then, she tries to give him a fake phone number, before her friend reveals the true number. At the same time, Milo's deceit continues, until she finally reveals it by being upset.

Most of the time we see Jerry and Lise meet during the day. Jerry and Lise can both keep their secrets at night, and they enjoy the intrigue and danger of the situation. Eventually though, they meet during the day and feel that they must tell the truth to one another about their situations.



# Symbols

## Jerry's Art

After serving in the War, Jerry stayed in Paris so that he could perfect the art of painting. Jerry had enjoyed the hobby for years, and he has finally decided to make it into a profession. Jerry's art is symbolic of his passion and willingness to pursue his dreams.

Jerry loves his profession and works hard at it. We see him painting all over Paris and trying to sell his paintings on the street. When he meets Milo, he has never sold a painting, and he sends customers away if he doesn't like them. Jerry is so attached to his art that it has become a part of him.

Because of his profession, Milo is interested in Jerry, and their friendship begins a whole new part of his life. When Jerry is first out with Milo, he meets Lise and decides that she is the woman for him. Jerry's art not only fulfills him, but it also helps him to meet the woman of his dreams.

## The Perfume Shop

Jerry's trip to the perfume shop is symbolic of his great persistence. When he meets Lise the previous night at the restaurant, she very clearly states that she does not want to see him again. Nonetheless, Jerry is able to get her phone number, by chance, and he then goes to find her when she won't talk to him on the phone.

In the perfume shop, Jerry charms an old woman so that she will buy perfume from Lise. Jerry tells the woman which scent he prefers and lets her know that her husband will be absolutely crazy about the scent. Jerry does a favor for Lise in the hope that she will then agree to see him.

Finally, Jerry's persistence pays off, and Lise agrees to meet him, just once, at a coffee shop near the river. After they meet, though, she falls in love with him as well. The perfume shop episode is just the beginning of their relationship, while they try to work out other relationships so that they can be together.

## The Red Rose

In the final dance number, Jerry is dancing through Paris when he finds a bright red rose lying in the middle of the street. Unable to help himself, Jerry picks up the rose and smells it. Jerry realizes that the rose has been dropped by Lise, the woman of his dreams, and he sets out to find her.



While Jerry dances through the streets of Paris, he finds red roses in every scene. Jerry picks up the rose each time and begins to look around for Lise. Jerry then proceeds to chase her through the streets, but she always seems to be just out of reach.

The red rose is symbolic of the love between Jerry and Lise, as well as their difficulties in finding one another and celebrating their love. When Jerry finally seems to give up hope during the dance, we move back to real life, where Jerry is watching the street on which Lise had just drove away. Lise suddenly reappears and the promise of the rose, their love, blossoms.



## Essay Questions

Describe Paris through Jerry's eyes.

What do Jerry and Adam do while in Paris?

Who is the beautiful girl that Henri describes to Adam?

How do Jerry and Milo meet?

On their first night together, why does Milo become angry?

What does Milo want out of Jerry for his troubles?

How does Jerry chase Lise?

Describe Jerry and Lise's relationship?

How does Adam realize the problem with the love lives of Henri and Jerry?

How does the story resolve itself?