

In the opening paragraph of Chapter Two of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses figurative imagery and a variety of syntactical strategies in order to argue that the American dream of prosperity covers up the grim reality of industrial work.

The contrast between fantasy and reality emerges through the metaphor comparing the valley of ashes to an agricultural setting. Agricultural work is normally associated with the natural world, and Fitzgerald elicits this association through his description of the industrial setting as a “fantastic farm.” The alliteration emphasizes the element of fantasy that accompanies both the image of the farm and underscores the fact that industrial work replaced agricultural work as a means of production. Instead of crops, it is ashes that “grow like wheat.” The irony is that ashes are associated with death, whereas wheat and farms are associated with food and life. Fitzgerald continues to use alliterative and figurative imagery to develop this contrast when he describes the ashes as “grotesque gardens.” This image extends the comparison beyond the agricultural and into the realm of beauty and decoration. Instead of flowers, the ashes create a landscape that hides, rather than reveals, humanity. While a farm and garden normally reveal man’s control over nature, the description of the valley of the ashes depicts an environment where “ash-grey men” are covered by the pollutants of their work. These men are both defined and hidden by the “impenetrable cloud” created by their labor. Through these evocative images related to nature and agriculture, Fitzgerald emphasizes the unnatural and grim reality of the industrial setting and its negative effect on the men who work there.