

MariCarmen Mosso

14 October 2021

Intro to Film Production

### The Complexity of the Simple Cinematography in *Ladybird*

Making an intriguing film that leaves viewers wondering about the real meaning and message it is trying to portray, requires numerous techniques that are integrated and weaved throughout the film. One of these techniques is the use of cinematography to depict the feeling and meaning that a scene represents. Cinematography is the art of the use of the camera in motion pictures. Every film uses cinematography to convey and emphasize different aspects of the film. Within the film *Ladybird*, a 2017 film directed by Greta Gerwig, the complex use of the relationship between the cinematography and the editing is used to emphasize the simplicity of life itself. In particular, the ending scene of the film's (1:25:30 → end) use of cinematography, is used to bring *Ladybird*'s story full circle in order to close the old chapter in her life and begin her new chapter.

*Ladybird* is a film about a high school senior named Christine, but she goes by the name Ladybird, a detail that is never explained. Throughout the film, Ladybird's story of her senior year is told: her family has financial problems, she is still trying to fit in at her private catholic school, and most importantly, she has a very complicated and raw relationship dynamic with her mother. Leading up to the end sequence, Ladybird moves to New York for college after her mother failed to give her a proper goodbye before she got on the plane from Sacramento to New York. During her first night at college, Ladybird gets drunk and ends up in the hospital, waking up the next morning and starting to walk the streets of the city, which is where our scene begins.

Every satisfying scene uses cinematography to establish an arc to the storyline of the scene, which allows for the scene to be able to stand on its feet alone. The ending scene begins with Ladybird walking as the camera uses a wider full-body shot to follow her from the side, moving with her as she moves. In this full-body shot from the side walking sequence, the camera cuts three times to show Ladybird walking in three different areas. The camera does this to show that time has passed and that she has been walking for a while. Another thing to note within these beginning shots of the scene is that the camera moves slightly quicker than Ladybird, but it never lets her get completely out of the shot. This is done in order to emphasize the notion that Ladybird is moving into different stages of her life, and even though she had trouble getting to where she is now and feels beat up by life, life never left her behind, always giving her time to catch up.

The next shot cuts to Ladybird walking to a church after dialogue is used to confirm to her that it is Sunday. When walking to the church, she breaks the line within the shot, as the viewers now see her on the right side walking instead of the focus of her being on the left side, alluding to her almost walking in a different direction. This breaking-the-line shot is used to signify how she is reflecting on her past because she went to a private Catholic school. This shot is further used to exemplify how Ladybird is not going back and finding God, rather it has nothing to do with religion itself. Ladybird was never a religious character, and the breaking the line shot followed by her feet walking up the church stairs is used to show the meaning of how she is connecting with her old self, and finding her true self. She no longer wants to let go of her past in Sacramento, rather she wants to connect with her past and she reminisces in the memories of Sacramento.

After Ladybird crosses the line in the shot walking to the church, the following shots have her centered in the middle, alluding to how she has now found a calm middle ground between her new life in New York, and her old life in Sacramento. Ladybird walks out of the church and calls her mom. The call goes to voicemail, and the shot is still centered on Ladybird. As Ladybird begins to leave the voicemail for her parents, a medium shot is used to capture her from the waist up, providing the viewers with a personal, but not an intimate shot. This gives a sense of relatability and connection between the viewer and Ladybird. As Ladybird begins talking, the scene cuts to flashbacks of Sacramento. Ladybird is driving in this scene and the scenes we do not see her because she is not in the shot, the camera seems to be moving backward in the car signifying how Ladybird is reminiscing back to her life in Sacramento. When we do see Ladybird in the shot, it is a close-medium shot, in order to give a more intimate feeling. We now see the memories inside of Ladybird's mind as she reconnects with her past. The editing in this sequence of shots is fast and simple, a choice that is made to show how life at times can be so simple and quiet, especially in the peace of our mind and memories of home.

One of the most important shots in the scene is the medium close-up shots and the back and forth edits between Ladybird and her mom driving. The shot goes from Ladybird to her mom in a blink of an eye, as Ladybird now understands her mother. She understands how her mother tried her best and even after all their fighting, Ladybird forgives not only her mother, but herself in this scene as the quick simple editing shows Ladybird finding peace in Sacramento with herself, and with her mother, even though she is in New York. In the medium close up shots of Ladybird and her mother, the camera is moving forward, rather than back as it did when they were not in the shot, signifying how Ladybird and her mother are now able to move forward into a new chapter of their lives without bad blood in Sacramento. The last shot is a medium close-up

shot of Ladybird as she hangs up the phone. She looks to the left, as if she is going to walk that way, but does not, and the film ends there. This is done to signify how she must move forward now but is bringing the lessons of her past with her. Between the editing and the simplicity of the cinematography, the scene as a whole conveys meaning to moving forward in life but needing to connect and embrace our past in order to do so.