

AMERICAN BEAUTY

By
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Narrative

I've chosen almost the last scene on the end of the film. It is a bit longer than two minutes and half and it is an important turning point of the film.

The story is about a guy, Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), in his mid-life crisis. With his super perfect and always busy wife, Carolyn Burnham (Annette Bening), and a rebellious daughter, Jane Burnham (Thora Birch), they live normal life. Lester is bored with job, life, wife, family, their daily dinners are for him nightmares, but he doesn't say anything because he wants to be a perfect husband, as his wife wants.

The completely change occurs after attending cheerleader competition where he falls in love with Jane's best friend, Angela Hayes (Mena Suvari). He actually starts to flirt with her and working out due to become handsome and attractive.

He gives up his job, daughter hates him, his wife is cheating on him, everything is going wrong, but he says he is living better life than he has been before.

Burnham family gets new neighbours, a family where the father, Frank Fitts (Chris Cooper), is an ex-colonel general and he keeps army rules also at home. His son, Ricky Fitts (Wes Bentley), has just arrived from the reform school and he is terrorized by his father. He is filming moments on a tape and saving them to enjoy the beauty of the movements also after they are gone.

Ricky and Jane fall in love. There is very famous scene where he is filming her through the window into her room where she is striping. But Ricky wants to get out of father's control soon as possible and due to get money he is dealing with drugs. Since Jane's father is changing, he wants to try and do everything what is abolished. Ricky and Lester become friends and Ricky sales weed to Lester.

One night comes Angela to Burnham's house for sleepover. Carolyn is not at home and Lester takes a chance to flirt with Angela. As usually he is training on bars in the garage. He calls Ricky to bring him some weed to be more relaxed. While Ricky is rolling a joint his father is watching them trough the window of their house. Because Ricky is bent down and Lester is lying comfortable on his sofa, Frank thinks, that his son is doing blow job to Lester.

Frank is disappointed with his son and kicks him out of the house.

While Jane and Ricky are planning their escape, Angela is flirting with Lester. Angela tells Lester that she has never had sex before and suddenly all Lester's passion is gone. He can not do it anymore.

And here comes the scene that I've chosen. Lester and Angela are sitting in the kitchen. Lester's answer on the question:"How are you?" is, that he is great. Angela goes to the bathroom and he stays alone. He is slowly repeating that he is great and walking against the family picture. While he is watching the picture, smiling; a gun is slowly approaching to his head from behind. Suddenly we can se moving the picture from the Lester's head passing by huge flower vase with red roses to the white wall. He is slowly putting down the family picture. There is a loud gunshot and a huge red as roses, stain of blood.

Ricky and Jane arrive to the kitchen. The kitchen table, completely poured over with the blood and lying Lester, fascinates Ricky. He is watching the scene pure but cruel American beauty.

Here ends chosen sequence. Till the end of the movie there is a narration-voice-over. The protagonist tells us about the meaning of his life. There are very short flashbacks into his youth, memories (lying in the grass, Jane as a child, lovely and funny Carolyn, cousin's car,

waving leaves in the wind). Those memories are black and white and they are combined with the coloured flashbacks of how involved people reacted when they heard shotgun. Film ends as the camera slowly goes from the bottom of the town to clouds with the tilt movement. So it is going out of the Burnham's street, city, life...

Most of the story is told linear only on the end we have some flashbacks. The narrative starts with the narration-voice-over and ends with it, the narrator use it for introduce his introduction and ending of the story. So we can better understand his story. We have some diegetic sounds, for e.g. When Carolyn arrives home she is standing in the front of the doors, we see only rain and doors. Also the only sound we can here is sound of raining.

Also my sequence is one of the linear scenes and it is natural it is following the story and suits naturally in the timeline. The sequence is one hole and it can not be divided into individual segments. It also suits in certain time and it can not change the time or location. The film is connected with the following sequences and not with the intertitles.

Mise-en-scene

The scene is filmed on location in American city, LA. The scene is ordinary, not stylized. It presents the everyday life of Americans, huge house, small garden with roses in front of the house, big cars, and nice rich neighbourhood. People wear everyday clothes. I think that one of the symbols is rose. Roses are everywhere. They present beauty, sweetness, passion, love... They symbolize what is true beauty, even though roses are everywhere to show warmth of Burnham's house, their beauty looks in their house cold and snobby. The props and sets only want to show as the richness and wealthy of those people, who are actually unhappy. They have everything beautiful; they just can not see it. On the end when we see red roses in vase and red stain on the wall, there is pure beauty, well Ricky sees it so.

Space is empty, not really empty but everything is in order, balance, everything suits its Function. And it gives certain impression that those people are reserved and that they don't feel comfortable in their own homes, that they are unhappy. Also the Carolyn's extreme tidiness shows that everything what she cares about is her appearance and what others think about her.

In my sequence the light is very dim. The scene is going on during the night and that is why it is dark. Only the faces are a bit lighter and the light is coming from the kitchen light or through the window. Actually you feel a bit unfriendly atmosphere.

Also the roses and the blood stain are very red. Everything is dark even the picture is white and black only roses and blood are red. And this is a contrast and actually it is very beautiful, that is the beauty, beauty in the dark atmosphere.

Cinematography

1. Photography

Film length (metres): 3332 m (Germany)

Film negative format (mm/video inches):35 mm (Eastman)

Cinematographic process: Super 35

Printed film format: 35 mm (anamorphic)

Aspect ratio/Widescreen Anamorphic: 2.35:1

It is coloured film; just on the end has some flashbacks in black and white but really short ones.

When Lester is sitting in the kitchen and answering to Angela there is a medium-close-up and the lens are normal. The camera focuses on his face with shallow focus and the field is shallow, we can see his face closely and behind him is only dark kitchen. It is the same when Lester is holding picture in his hands and there is a shallow focus, we can see his head from left and an enlighten gun which is coming from behind.

It is also interesting when Ricky and Jane enter the Kitchen. First we see closed doors very closely with telephoto lens and shallow field and we actually don't really recognize doors because the shape is very dim. Doors are opening slowly and suddenly there is completely clearly seen red blood poured over the desk and the field is deepen.

There is no special effects accept shotgun, which also occurs naturally. The director doesn't put many effects to show the reality of the scene. There are some lights but those are from the lamps and those give natural light.

The photographic manipulations allow as getting accustomed to the story, to their lives. Also in this scene the shots are slow and quite long just to show the importance of the scene and to keep watchers in the anticipation. Also the photography emphasizes the beauty of the scene. This scene is the peak of the whole movie and because of that also the photography is very well considered and well done.

2. Camera/ Framing

When Lester is sitting and talking with Angela there is a medium close-up on Lester. And the camera is in the same level as they are (eye level); we see them directly in upper part of the body. The camera is not moving, stays on object but there are reaction shots. We can hear Lester's answer but we are watching medium-close-up of Angela's reactions.

While Lester is moving from the kitchen desk to the small table with the family picture, the camera is following him with the Pan Movement and horizontal shot. Than is Lester coming closer and closer to the camera and he passes by. When Lester sits down the camera is in high level and he is filmed with medium-close-up from the high angle.

Then we see extra-close-up of the picture which is Lester holding in his hands; the picture is seen from his point-of-view; and then is close-up of his face and we observe reactions on it.

Close-up shot of his hands with holding picture, his head and gun from behind, and than the camera is slowly moving, passing by a vase of roses (still close-up shot) to the white wall and than the final close-up of blood stain.

Than the camera changes it position on the top of the stairs in the corridor and from the bird's eye view is moving down the stairs. It stays in low position and from the bottom of the stairs it is filming Jane and Ricky coming down the stairs.

There is extreme-close-up of doors and when they open we see the medium-close-up of Jane and Ricky and their reactions. Here comes the eyeline match. Jane and Ricky are watching in one object (blood) and than it is shown what are they watching.

When Ricky comes close to the desk; the camera is all the time in the stable position on the table and Ricky slowly goes down and we see close-up of his face and his reactions. There is also the close-up of Lester's bloodstained face exchanging with Ricky's reactions.

3. Editing

In my opinion editing is nothing special till it doesn't reaches almost the end of the film. The scenes are following one after another. But this scene is edited a bit different. The shots are exchanging all the time, we see a lot of different reactions on people's faces. Also some objects are more enlighten then others, for e.g. roses, blood stain, picture, his face. Immediately after this scene clouds and sky are slowly fading in and Lester's face in blood is fading out.

Also flashbacks are exchanging with fading in and out.

The film has continuity editing with thematic montage and invisible cutting. So the story is running smoothly, we don't need to think about it or combine it together.

In the start of the film have shots normal duration between 3-6 seconds. But in chosen scene the shots are long and slow around 8-10. They are following each other in order but very slowly and carefully. It gives an impression that director wants us to enjoy beauty slowly, each movement by itself.

4. Sound

In the film is used everyday music from American authors and singers. But there is one main music theme which is repeating when someone is thinking, remembering, dreaming (falling roses from the sky) or watching something (family picture). There is a certain soft piano sound, which is repeating all the time. There is also lively music in the start of the film, which presents Lester's everyday life. This music is repeating till the last night, when it silences and replaced with sound of rain and piano music; the atmosphere becomes dark.

In the chosen scene all we can her of diegetic sounds is falling rain outside and noise of shotgun. There is added piano music. On the end of the scene speaks the protagonist's voice-over, who finishes off the story talking about beauty.

Most of the film story is told in dialogue but also the narration is present. The language is colloquial English and it doesn't play very important role in the film.