

Roma: An Analysis of Cleo's Delivery

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Roma (2018), directed by Alfonso Cuarón, centers its story on the life of Cleo. She is an Indigenous Mixtec nanny who works with a white, affluent family in the Roma neighbourhood of Mexico City from 1970-1971. It was a time of political unrest caused by land disputes and the fight for democracy between the country and its people culminating in the Dirty War. Cleo, played by Yalitza Aparicio, becomes pregnant, and her boyfriend, Fermín (Jorge Antonio Guerrero), rejects both her and her pregnancy. Cleo has been left alone to handle all the traumatic events she and the family have experienced over the year. The delivery of her baby is no different.

The family Cleo works for has been abandoned by their father, and Cleo must comfort the children and keep them busy. At the same time, their mother (Marina de Tavira Servitje) attempts to carry on a normal life. Fermín abandoned her, then threatened to beat her and her baby if she came to him again. The country is in unrest and at war with itself. Her mother has lost her land, and Cleo cannot get to her. She is also scared and embarrassed about her family's reaction to her pregnancy. The four children she cares for show her love and affection, but she is constantly ignored by the adults she works for. During her first visit to the hospital for a check-up, she stands alone at the nursery watching the babies when an earthquake occurs. The building shakes, and the ceiling crumbles. She can see a baby in an incubator covered in ceiling debris, which acts as a visual for the entrapment Cleo feels by her pregnancy.

While on a shopping trip to get baby furniture, Cleo and Mrs. Teresa, the grandmother of the house (Verónica García), are caught amidst a riot and Cleo's water breaks. They make it safely to the hospital, where it is discovered that Cleo's baby is in distress, and the heartbeat cannot be detected. She is at this hospital because Antonio (Fernando Grediaga), the father of the family, works as a doctor there. Mrs. Teresa checks her in but does not have information on her except her first and last name, which reflects the lack of personal importance to the family. Antonio sees her and accompanies her in the elevator, holding her hand and reassuring her. He then abandons her when she goes into the delivery room, making excuses about why he cannot go with her, even

though he had previously said he would attend the birth if allowed to. She is alone, not with her family or community and is now in this emergent situation.

Upon closely watching the film's elements, the viewer can notice that the scene's purpose is to give Cleo the attention she has been lacking. This reminds the viewer that she is alone, even in a room of people. Through verisimilitude during her emergency birth, the viewer can attend to Cleo and her experience. She is finally not alone.

Cleo is wheeled into surgery (1:42:50) and is quickly transitioned from one stretcher to another. This shifts her from midground to foreground, and her body becomes the aperture through which the rest of the scene is framed. Her head is propped up on a pillow to the left, her chest and torso lower on the bed, and on the right, her legs are up in stirrups, enclosing the frame. Behind her, in the midground, there is often nothing seen. It is used only briefly to transition the baby from the foreground to the background later. In the background, the sight line seen directly behind Cleo's torso is a table on which doctors prepare for the baby. Attention is also drawn to this spot because an overhead light shines from the top of the shot, and a stainless-steel sink and backsplash reflect the light. The light and white sheets on the table juxtapose the dark bundle of supplies that are there in preparation for the baby's arrival. This also represents a visual foreshadowing of the darkness that will replace the bundle of supplies in just a few minutes.

Cleo's face is in shadow as the light source in the foreground is shining down on her legs. This creates a highlight on her legs throughout the scene as a white sheet covers her. This highlight starts in the bottom right corner of the shot and is in line at a 45-degree upward angle to meet the table upon which the baby will be taken. This creates a visible connection for the viewer of where the baby will come from and where it will go. It also draws attention to what is really the focus of the scene. As the scene progresses, the sheet on Cleo's legs gets pushed up higher on her torso so the viewer's eye is directed towards the lighting there.

Only a minute after we are brought into the delivery room (1:43:40), the camera pans to the right, and we see the three doctors delivering the baby. We see their full faces clearly, the only medical people in this scene where this is true.

The scene was filmed with a short, wide-angle lens as the depth of field is exaggerated. In the center of the shot, the doctor who takes the baby to the back of the room only takes five small, shuffled steps back from Cleo. However, he and the baby are very blurry for the viewer. This

makes it hard to see any details and creates a bigger illusion of space. This is likely to give a visual of the disconnection and distance Cleo is feeling with her baby.

Once the baby is delivered and carried to the back of the room (1:43:43), a split action occurs within the same frame. The baby is receiving care in the top center, while Cleo is delivering the afterbirth and being tended to by the doctor offscreen at the bottom right. Cleo's head is turned, and the viewer is visually directed to the attempts at resuscitation for the baby. Both the pediatrician and Cleo's doctors are speaking to their assistants and to Cleo, which makes it harder to know where to direct attention.

The scene is shot low, from the height of Cleo's table, with a short focal length. The exaggerated depth of field causes the doctors and nurses that appear outside of the foreground to be blurry. When they approach midground, we see only their torso, almost towering over Cleo. This shows how Cleo is beneath them both situationally and in status.

Throughout the scene, the only sound is diegetic; there is no music or other non-diegetic noise to distract the viewer. However, there is no need for music to intensify the chaotic feelings that Cleo or the viewer is experiencing. We begin the scene with calls for pediatrics, which drives home the emergency, combined with Cleo's laboured breathing. Her heavy deep breaths are the audio constant of the scene, acting as a sort of backing track to the dialogue taking part in the background and offscreen throughout. There is a flash of silence (1:45:44) when Cleo holds the baby. The baby girl and Cleo are well-lit and clear; the doctor tells her to say "goodbye."

Cleo has hardly had the opportunity to process the birth, let alone the death. They share only 32 precious seconds (1:45:30-1:46:02). Then the doctor tells Cleo he must prepare the baby but then passes that responsibility to a nurse in the background—the tone of the scene shifts from chaos and panic to slow and sombre. Finally, Cleo must watch as her baby is wrapped in a cloth like a gift at a birthday party which is even taped shut. Cleo is given no comfort by the six adults sharing the room with her.

The verisimilitude of what Cleo experiences mirrors the births that women experience daily, not just in 1970s Mexico but worldwide in modern times. The scene creates empathy for Cleo and immerses the viewer in her traumatic birthing experience. Without the scene's realism, she would be alone, but because of it, the viewer is at her side supporting her. This scene also acts as the beginning of a transition in the film for Cleo. Her loss foreshadows a near-miss tragedy that the mother of the family, Sofia, experiences at the end of the film while the family is at the beach.

Sofia, Cleo, and the four children go to the beach in what the mother says is a goodbye to the family car. It is, however, a coverup for Antonio moving all of his things from the family home. On the trip's final day, two of her children almost drown in the ocean, and Cleo risks her own life to save them. This creates a connection between Sofia and Cleo over the shared experience of loss. When the family returns from the beach, even Mrs. Teresa has a new appreciation of Cleo because of her selflessness.

References

Cuarón, A. (Director). (2018). *Roma*. [Film]. Netflix.