Uptown Girls

Yasmin Dolman

“Slaps and Hugs”

Uptown girls is one of the best comedy-drama films to ever be produced. Before watching the film, anyone would expect a simple, unrealistic drama that will make them happy for the 92 minutes duration without much substance. That is where most people are wrong. Death, love, loss, family and adulthood are just some of the topics that Uptown Girls touches on brilliantly.

One of the fantastic main characters is Ray Schleine (Dakota Fanning), an eight year old germaphobe who has been in therapy since she was three years old. While Ray has grown up all too quickly, at 22 Molly Gunn (Brittany Murphy) has successfully delayed adulthood. It's only when their paths cross that each is able to teach the other what it's like to finally act their age. Molly is the carefree partying shopaholic daughter of a famous rock star who died, along with her mother, when Molly was eight, leaving her an orphan and wealthy. But when her accountant disappears with her inheritance, the ill-prepared Molly has to find a job. The precocious brat Ray burns through nannies, but when Molly takes the job, despite appearances and a few battles, the two turn out to have a lot in common.

It’s their relationship that forms the film’s emotional core, something which is shown perfectly in one particular scene.

After Ray goes missing due to the death of her father, Molly goes in search for her knowing the one place she would be; Coney Island. Earlier on in the film we see a clip of Molly as a child at Coney Island, sitting alone on the teacup ride when her Dad passed away. Now, we see the same scene and the same scenario, however Ray is the one on the teacups as they share a bittersweet moment.

The poignant scene starts with a smooth, slow piano piece playing in the background as the shot shows the back of Molly looking onto the teacups. We cannot see Ray yet but we know that Molly can. This is the first moment we realise that Ray is following in Molly’s footsteps. The variation between the happiness of the people at Coney Island enjoying the rides and the deeply upsetting emotions of Ray create a great impact on the audience. The contrast in the shot shows the teacups being the brightest area in the frame, focusing our eyes on that particular spot.

Next we see a cut-in where the camera shows us a closer view of Ray. Slowly zooming in, Ray is sat on her own with little expression. The mise-en-scene is used in costume primarily, Ray is wearing her school uniform which emphasizes her age and the fact that she is alone in such a big place. The shot then switches directly infront of Ray and closer to show her face. This long-take stays in the same position for twelve seconds allowing the audience to soak in Rays emotions.

During this shot, Molly joins Ray on the teacup. Ray finally looks up one time to see Molly then retracts back to her usual position, showing no phase.

Throughout the scene there is no talking. The only sound we can hear is a subtle direct sound from the background of Coney Island and the piano piece which is gradually getting louder as the scene progresses.

As the ride begins to start, the shot switches to a birds eye view, starting from an extreme close up of both Molly and Ray’s hands, then zooming out to show a birds eye view of the whole teacup ride.

Mollys point of view follows next as the music quickly changes to a more upbeat, dramatic piece. With it, our attention is at its highest. The point of view switches numerous times between Molly and Ray. Both staring at eachother they can portray their emotions with just their eyes, showing their amazing level of acting in this scene.

As the music draws to its final dramatic point, the shot reverses back to show the both of them vigorously using all their force to spin the teacup. Both of them are letting out their upset and anger.

As the music comes to an end, and all we can hear is the direct sound, the shot abruptly cuts to a medium close up of Ray throwing up into a bin and then switches to a wider shot to show Molly with her hand on Rays back as she is being sick. In the same shot, Ray turns around as Molly offers her a drink and Ray knocks it out of her hand aggressively. A despondent Ray slaps Molly, something no ordinary eight year old girl would do, showing just how grown up she is and how she deals with anger and upset so differently from others her age. In return, Molly slaps her back. Ray slaps and punches Molly, angered by the fact that Molly got her hopes up about her father staying alive, before melting into a hug, unable to express vulnerability without mixing it with anger and hostility.

The scene ends with a wide shot of Molly and Ray hugging each other, finally Ray is showing that she is coming to terms with her grief which is what we’ve been waiting for. The music sets in again with long-held piano notes to draw the scene to a close. The whole scene makes me admire

Fanning’s acting in the ending to this scene is something so captivating, the level of performance from such a young actress is fantastic.

The majority of the film was captured in New York City, the usual setting in films for shopping obsessed women with a lot of money, like Molly Gunn.

The director is Boaz Yakin, who also produced the incredible movie “Remember the Titans” in 2000 and “Fresh” in 1994. That one was also about a young child with a lot of adult wisdom and underlying sadness. "Uptown Girls," suggests some of the same undertones. The screenplay, by [Julia Dahl](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/julia-dahl), [Mo Ogrodnik](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/mo-ogrodnik) and [Lisa Davidowitz](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/lisa-davidowitz), based on a story written by co-producer [Allison Jacobs](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/allison-jacobs), takes what we might expect and rotates it into a slightly darker dimension.

The cinematography in this scene, by Michael Ballhaus, in my opinion is amazing. The way a lot of Coney Island, a happy theme park, is shown in the shots in contrast with the conflict between Molly and Ray makes it a great scene. The way each actresses faces are shown in the shots means no speech is required and the audience is fully enticed by the pure talent shown by both Fanning and Murphy.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer is a huge independent production and distribution company in America, involved mainly with films and television. This company is what produced Uptown Girls and so many other great films, like “Skyfall” and “Robocop”. They had a budget of $20 million to produce the film.

This funny and beautiful film is one I recommend to everyone and holds one of the greatest film scenes ever.