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Love, Trauma, and Family-building in the Poetry Film, *The Myth*

Anthony S. Blacksher · Wednesday, September 25th, 2019

In the opening scene of *The Myth*, the camera follows a frantic woman, Kat, played by Chauntice Green, through a Los Angeles alley, up the stairs of a building, and onto a rooftop, where she finally exhales. As she reaches the rooftop, a melodic soloist from the a cappella group Bedlam Lullaby sings under the beginning of a poem. When this scene appears again as the film's climax, the poem and harmony has pushed audiences to an emotional crest. When she steps onto the ledge, a man suddenly grabs her hand. She turns and the camera shows a concern in his eyes that ends with him letting go. The poet speaks, "This ain't easy/Because it ain't supposed to be."

Told in four parts, *The Myth* moves audiences through processes of hurt, healing, and happiness. Director Darrin Bush moves between a surrealist and realist representation of the poetry written and performed by Kat Magill. Kat, the poet, serves as an omniscient narrator over the a capella harmonies that moves Kat, the character, through a process of healing from recent and past traumas. *The Myth* inverts the aesthetics of Beyoncé's visual album, *Lemonade*, foregrounding the poetry and using music to help transition from one act to the next.

The Myth offers itself as a showcase of women's power, when their voices are released from silence. While the themes of domestic violence, misogyny, and the effects of absent fathers are clearly illustrated, love and the pursuit of joy ultimately drive the emotionality. On its surface, the story is about the individual and the processes of healing for that individual. However, a deeper reading of the film invites audiences to consider the social nature of *The Myth* as a story of family-building. More specifically, *The Myth* illustrates the challenges of family-building for women without losing a sense of oneself.

One of the final scenes brilliantly captures the challenges of this family-building through a history of trauma. The character Kat and her second love, played by Tray Bain, stand face to face in front of a black background. The frames alternate between medium close-up and close-up shots as the two yell, cry, ball fists, and "toss bullets with a stare." When both bodies are in the frame, the tension serves as a third character. As the scene progresses, the two bodies find compassion. Tears are wiped. Bodies are held closely. Kisses are intercut with a montage from the film depicting Kat's disempowerment.

Unlike the cartoon fairytales and romance-comedy endings, where men either rescue women from their troubles or the pursuit of a relationship with a man frees women of those troubles, *The Myth* shows Kat finding love amidst her trauma. This scene allows her to struggle through the process of healing while finding the joy of partnership, rather than healing as precursor or obstacle in finding love. Moreover, the poem behind the scene leads audiences to consider how her partner might be similarly working through his own healing. The intensity in this scene reminds viewers of the anger, hurt, and coldness couples endure in the development of a relationship. More carefully stated, the trauma and disempowerment experienced as individuals become a necessary part of the family-building process in the way that couples share their experiences, express compassion, and even endure the non-linear process of healing. In light of this, *The Myth* is not merely about one woman or the empowerment of women. This film reveals the struggles of women to come into the family-building process in a culture that perpetually devalues and objectifies them.

Another subtle, yet poignant, moment of family-building in the film concerns the emerging topic of daughterhood. When Kat, the poet, narrates the life-long pain caused by her father's abandonment, the camera shows her hands dripping with blood. A young girl appears, leading Kat, the character, towards a river to wash the blood from her hands. The girl is Kat's daughter and a symbolic representation of Kat's younger self. While we've known for a while the expectation of daughters' roles as caretakers for aging mothers, *The Myth* shows audiences how soon the work of emotional caretaking begins, especially for young mothers experiencing family generated trauma. While the role of a daughter is contextual, complex, and constantly changing over one's lifespan, the film's representation of daughterhood contributes to the discourse of how significant the function of daughterhood is to a woman's role in family-building.

The film concludes with families. Families posed in their homes, in the parks, in front of their stoops. These families smile and pose for the camera. They play. They embrace. Most importantly, these diverse families look nothing like the families that have been historically represented on-screen. While the joy and connection in these families are quite distant from the violence and trauma we see in Kat's scenes, *The Myth* reminds us that family-building is a process. The love of family is not always built in the absence or in the overcoming of trauma, but rather, the love which grows from the process of family-building can often be a part of the healing process and the pursuit of joy.

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