

## Women in TV and Film - BLACK PANTHER (USA 2018)

Once again, a SciFi movie - or rather writer-director Ryan Coogler and his team - shows that the world could be better than it is today, and at the same time they do their part. In the postmodern film "Black Panther", which is wonderfully entertaining for me as a dramaturge and film scholar, the author/director Ryan Coogler and his co-author Joe Robert Cole have created an interesting construction for their ensemble arranged around a central figure. The central character is a prince, T'Challa/Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman), whose becoming a king leads as well onto a kind of world rain. This character is very skilfully led by a group of women, without whom he would not have survived nor never made it to the top of power.

In this narrative, the women of clever military men, spies, advisors as figures in the ensemble are of decisive importance for action, most of all the character of his little sister going with the name Shuri (Letitia Wright). This character is the scientific superbrain, a Q<sup>1</sup> of the future. Yes, all this is already laid out in the comics, but nevertheless, it is a transformation into a cinema film, to which my attention is directed here.

Ryan Coogler and his team will present traditional patterns of filmic narration in the Hollywood-influenced space of experience with a postmodern wink of the eye. The plot around the king's question provides the impetus for action, establishes the conflict because the change on the throne is triggered by mishandling in the family (classic American dramaturgy)<sup>2</sup> and must be atoned for before the country and the world can be healed - as already in the Grail myth.

Epic and classical American dramaturgy are interwoven here, the basic patterns of myth-based tragedy and Christian worldviews serve as a basic structure that conveys a sense of familiarity to the audience.<sup>3</sup>

In the centre there is a male hero who is responsible for the welfare of the country and the world. Here, he is following advice by his female company. That is, of course, first his mother, then the woman he loves, Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o). Then it is General Okoye (Danai Gurira) and last but not least his little sister who secures his survival more than once. Of course, like "The Student of Prague" (Wegener and Rye D 1913), he has to face the embodiment of his negative reflection, his cousin going with the name Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Morgan) in a direct battle. At first he becomes defieted; because as a good man he hesitates to kill his cousin who was unfairly left behind when T'Challa's father killed his own brother. That cousin, angry and trained by the CIA/ American military to be a fighting machine, does not hesitate to kill to get onto the throne. The character T'Challa still is being saved. First by a fisherman – with reference to the Christian tradition, then by his first contender, whose life Black Panther spared during the earlier "Challenge". But the actual rescue happens through the Trinity of Mother, Beloved, and Little Sister, who guide this character of T'Challa/Black Panther through the plot and ensure his progress/survival. The young king thus represents a postmodern central figure by embodying the typical male hero, who also is a variant of the split hero by being inseparable from the character of the sister to get through the action. The little sister and the king are an inseparable unit, neither could develop their abilities without the other. They form a variant of a split main character.

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<sup>1</sup> The technician of the James Bond universe.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. (Stutterheim 2015)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. (Stutterheim 2019)

In this context, the male figure, on whom our emotional interest is directed as well as the narrative tradition, is designed in such a way that he apparently experiences a so-called 'journey of the hero' and emerges from the adventure as supposedly stronger and more knowledgeable. He's definitely improved his duel technique. On this 'journey', in the course of the arguments, he learned to listen above all to what the character of Nakia tells him, to whom the authors conceded the statesman's thoughts.

In this film, as already mentioned, the female characters are those who dramaturgically advance the plot and, to put it another way, are equipped with agency.

There is more to discover and describe in the more wide-ranging dramaturgy of this postmodern film, such as references to many well-known feature film scenes, such as from "Metropolis" (Lang, D 1927), the Fifth Element (Besson F 1997) and "Game of Thrones" (Benioff and Weiss, USA 2011-2019) analogies, whose analysis may be presented elsewhere or in a later blog entry.

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