



April 2022

The Multi

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Recommended Citation

Blizek, William L. and Blizek, Monica (2022) "The Multi," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 46.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.26.01.046>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol26/iss1/46>

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The Multi

Abstract

This is a film review of *The Multi* (2022), directed by Storm S. Smith and Mikhail Chowdhury.

Keywords

Deaf, Hard of Hearing, American Sign Language, Dissociative Identity Disorder

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Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the *Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (2009). Monica Blizek is a retired mental health professional.



The Multi (2021), dir. Storm S. Smith and Mikail Chowdhury

Forgiveness is a major theme in many religions, and many films have taken this up. It often arises in situations where religion asks that someone forgive the unforgiveable.

In Natasha Ofili's *The Multi*, forgiveness is a crucial theme in the film. Amara is a serious, successful, self-controlled professional who, as a child had a very traumatic experience with her father. The film is ambiguous about the nature of the trauma, but all signs point to sexual abuse. Now her sister Anu is getting married and she very much wants Amara to attend.

Amara has already accepted the fact that her father has been invited to the wedding. Because of a change in circumstances, however, Anu now wants to hold the wedding in their father's backyard. Because of Amara's childhood trauma, dealing with her father again will be a very painful experience, and to do so in his own backyard will make it even more painful, more difficult. Amara is angry with her sister and has not forgiven her father. When she reads a letter from her father, she shouts, "You are not forgiven. You are not forgiven."

Throughout the film we begin to see another side of Amara. There is the Amara that is serious, in charge, and in control. But there is a side to Amara that is playful, saucy, even sexual—

something of a free spirit. This Amara regularly puts her finger to her lips in a suggestive manner, wears more casual and colorful clothes, dances—swirling around the room—and even tries on a new shade of lipstick. This side of Amara is named Sade.

Finally, Amara has a conversation with Sade, the image of herself in the mirror. Since Amara is deaf, this conversation is carried out in sign language. Amara tells Sade that she has to go. She accuses Sade of setting her up with strange men and of telling Anu Amara's secret. Sade tells Amara that Amara needs Sade and that Amara has excluded Sade and Sade's feelings from her life. Sade complains that Amara does not even acknowledge Sade's existence. And here we discover that Amara does not forgive herself for excluding and ignoring Sade. Until Amara can forgive herself for rejecting Sade, she will not be able to be her authentic self. And this is why forgiveness is so important. Until we are able to forgive ourselves it is difficult to become a whole person.

In the last scene of the film, we see Amara looking directly into the camera holding up a tube of lipstick. Will she apply the lipstick or not? That is, will she be able to forgive herself and accept/receive Sade as part of herself? A good French ending—ambiguous.

The Multi is a part of the Slamdance Unstoppable Program. Unstoppable is designed to give artists with visible and nonvisible disabilities the opportunity to express themselves through film without the prejudice and gate keeping that have historically kept disabled filmmakers from being represented in the entertainment industry. This film was created and written by Natasha Ofili, who is deaf; an interview with her follows this review. Ofili is also the star of the film and one of its producers. A majority of the cast and crew were deaf or hard of hearing.