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*The Mighty*: Film Analysis

**Literary:**

This film possesses many stereotypical archetypes; and with its adventurous plot and constant allusions to King Arthur of the Round Table, *The Mighty* equates to the ultimate action flick with a heart. The story begins with the protagonist Max, an overweight, friendless and insecure Junior High student. His ordinary world (Cincinnati) and the people in it are cruel to him; kids pick on him for his learning disability and his father's crime. The intrigue begins with Kevin, a boy with Morquio Syndrome, who moves in next door to Max. Kevin takes on the mentor role as he tries to tutor Max in reading skills- teaching Max about the knights of King Arthur and convincing him that he can read.

Then, we see vulnerability in the mentor, Kevin, as he too displays a need like Max- a need for a friend. Here we can see the formation of a bond between the two- both lonely outcasts. Max accompanies Kevin to the fireworks show, where the journey begins. The first shadow figure, the lead gang-member, taunts Max as usual- but now Kevin serves as a harold calling Max to adventure in defense of the teasing, but Max refuses the call. Thus Kevin responds to the bullies with a snide comment, which follows with a chase scene in which Kevin sits on Max's shoulders acting as "the brain" as Max serves as Kevin's feet. Max performs his first brave deed by wading into the pond to avoid the bullies. The police arrive and Max receives a reward in the form of praise for his bravery from his grandparents (who previously held low expectations of him). The

film heavily plays upon the symbolism of two outcasts becoming friends with complementing abilities for which the other lacks (*Wizard of Oz* – coincidence? ... I think not!) Kevin serves as the Harold again when he calls Max to another adventure – to downtown Cincinnati. They cross the threshold in the form of the bridge to the city – with multiple shots of horses and knights crossing as well – a sure tale sign of the scene’s significance and symbolism. The two boys represent the heroes when braving a fight in a diner; in addition Kevin simultaneously plays the role of Harold and mentor throughout- teaching Max about the code of chivalry for knights and the “duty” the two boys have to embark on new adventures.

The boys encounter the shapeshifter and ally incognito, Loretta, who dredges up Max’s fears of his father and the potential for Max to follow in his footsteps. Here Kevin counsels Max as a friend and mentor, and introduces a central theme – One’s true nature is reflected in what he does, not by who his father is. The pair adopt the names “Freak” (Kevin) and “the Mighty”(Max) in their adventures and establish a mission- to live as knights would, with honor and justice prevailing. Their bond deepens throughout the story with poignant scenes during Kevin’s sickness. But the climax occurs when the leading shadow figure, Killer Kane enters the scene and forces Max into the inmost cave for the central conflict – delving into his past and confronting his father about killing his mother. Loretta surprisingly tries to help Max escape although she appeared as a malevolent character originally. Kevin acts as a hero in traveling through the snow in his crutches to try to save Max. The two defeat Killer Kane and as their reward they return home for Christmas. At that dinner, Kevin’s mom gazes at him with a meaningful and symbolic gesture that she knows he will die. With that realization, Kevin gives Max a gift

as his last effort to mentor him- it is a blank book entitled “Freak the Mighty”, in which Max could write about their adventures and explore the world of knowledge and words.

Kevin, who appears to be the most mature and intellectually developed character in the film, not only plays the harold, mentor and fellow hero to Max, but in his death, he becomes a Christ figure as well. Sharon Stone, his mother, says that “his heart was just too big for his body” and Max refers to him as the “once and future King” and envisions a cross for his tombstone.

Max is lost without his mentor and thus ceases his growth as a character and slides into depression. Loretta now serves as a mentor when she encourages him to return to living his life. Thus he adheres to Kevin’s advice and discovers his “inner knight”. His final return with the elixir moment occurs in his classroom among his peers and tormentors. He says something profound about a novel he read and earns the respect he never had. This is his true moment of glory in the play in which he finds the self-confidence he never had – and completely by his own accord. Now if that is not a Wizard of Oz moment, I don’t know what is – Dorothy discovers that she had the power to return home the entire time, Max discovers that he had the power to comprehend literature the entire time. Knowledge as the Elixir! So much more profound than ruby slippers!

**Dramatic:**

Set in a lower middle class area of Cincinnati, the surroundings are meant to come off as ruff around the edges. The clothes, housing and cars are pretty dingy – in stark contrast with King Arthur’s opulent and decorated knights and horses. The heroes, a crippled boy played by Kieran Culkin and an overweight boy played by Elden Henson

also contrast each other in every physical aspect, but have a touching onscreen chemistry which endears the audience to this courageous, yet awkward duo. Far from a knight in physical capabilities, Kieran Culkin plays the logical and profound character; for each of his words underlies a double meaning or allusion to King Arthur. His makes the most endearing facial expressions that the audience can almost forgive his made-for-movie comments, sometimes seeming contrived and saccharine.

Elden Henson plays a very realistic outcast and narrates the story as if he takes the audience along with him; he evokes a strong empathetic sentiment in his moment of reflection and desolation. The cinematography plays a huge role in developing Max's character and revealing his world to the audience. His Chicago Bulls hat serves as his principle costume item – similar to *Catcher in the Rye's* Holden Caulfield, perhaps to represent his safety blanket to protect him when he braves out into the world and encounters cruelty. He wears the hat in times when he feels vulnerable, such as the school hallways and the encounter with Kevin at Loretta's apartment. He doesn't, however wear the hat when he feels comfortable, such as in his bedroom and times with Kevin alone. But, his hat plays a significant role when his father kidnaps him - losing his only iota of protection for his challenge in the inmost cave versus his father.

### **Cinematic:**

Cinematography played a crucial role in *The Mighty* as much of its sentimental impact, and allusions to the hero's journey and King Arthur's knights depended upon the use of effective sound, camera angles, editing, and lighting techniques. In the film's opening scene, there is an Establishing Shot of Cincinnati and the non-diegetic theme

song to set the stage and prepare the audience for the story about to take place. Although Max towers over other's physically, his feelings of inferiority create a sense of vulnerability for which the camera captures high angles to make him appear weak and helpless in his ordinary world, such as on the bus when boys tease him. Similarly, the camera captures Kevin in High Angle when he struggles to see the fireworks; he has a physical disadvantage for which Max can help him- thus placing Max in the Low Angle for being powerful and tall. When he lifts Kevin up on his shoulders, Max reveals his feeling of compassion for Kevin in his narration. The camera does a close on Max during his insightful words and then shifts to include both of them as they beam with happiness. When Kevin is on Max's back, they are shown in Low Angle because they are the heroes, and the physically tallest and most powerful. When crossing the threshold (bridge), they are displayed in long shot to emphasize the "journey" into the new world. When the shadow figure Blade threatens the duo with a knife, the camera zooms in on the knife with dramatic non-diagetic music to intensify the fear factor for the audience. Another method to create a sense of fear comes with the low key lighting technique, namely in the scene when Killer Kane comes in Max's bedroom, and shadows dance around the room and the diagetic sounds of the wind blowing and window slamming creates a feeling of apprehension.

The flashback technique was used in editing for when Max relives then night his father killed his mother. Cross cutting appeared in the allusions to knights, especially with the horses crossing the bridge as the boys crossed the threshold. Finally, editing techniques helped the audience live in Max's perspective with the point of view shots looking around at the bullies or up into the sky. When lying under his bed, Max looks up

at the support beams, envisioning bars that trap him like a prison, but wishing to break free into the sky. We would not know that if we could not see through Max's vision, thus we gain an understanding of the character beyond words in this method. In dialogue between people, the shot-reverse shot was frequently used, especially between Freak and the Mighty at dinner, or between Ms. Addison and the mother in the meeting.

Overall, the cinematography was amazing and very complex – with the technology just a tad bit more sophisticated than say, *Wizard of Oz* in 1939...