

## **When Mars and Venus Collide:**

### **The Struggle for Power and Respect in Romance as told by The Carters**

In the wake of the recent public reconciliation of Beyonce and Jay-Z's marriage in their latest joint project, *Everything is Love*, we are reminded yet again of the cultural supremacy of The Carters as they continue to place themselves as the 'power couple' we can base our understandings of love and relationships upon.

While this current project lives on a cloud of renewed trust through forgiveness, it is still fresh in our mind the first gauntlet that was thrown by Beyonce through her hallmark *Lemonade* project, and its effect on our perception of The Carters and their place in our culture.

Renowned as an aesthetic and cultural tour de force, Beyoncé's visual album, *Lemonade* is an exposition of the emotional hardships women undergo in romantic relationships. The pop culture relevance of *Lemonade* is rooted in its ability to give rhetorical form to the experiences of women in relationships, thus validating and supporting these experiences. Specifically, Beyoncé shows the struggle for power and respect that often takes place in heterosexual romantic relationships is rooted in a patriarchal model of love and romance.

In this article I briefly analyze several poems from *Lemonade* that most saliently display its themes of love, womanhood, and the struggle for power and respect in relationships. To supplement my analysis I reference Bell Hooks's book, *All About Love*, because of its explicit discussion of the shifting state of power within male/female romantic relationships.

Bell Hooks as a feminist, social critic, and renowned author offers a number of insights that aid in understanding Beyoncé's work. Specifically, I believe Hooks's analysis on the struggle for power and respect in relationships is at the heart of *Lemonade*'s focus.

In her book, *All About Love*, Bell Hooks states, "In the Mars-and-Venus-gendered universe, men want power and women want emotional attachment and connection." (Hooks, 152) This Mar-Venus paradigm constructs relationships to be naturally imbalanced, whereby women are at a constant loss of power and respect because these things take a lesser role of importance than love and emotional attachment

#### **Intuition:**

In this first stage Beyoncé focuses on how this patriarchal paradigm has shaped her relationship and the ability for love to be fostered and maintained: "I tried to make a home out of you, but

doors lead to trap doors, a stairway leads to nothing. Unknown women wander the hallways at night. Where do you go when you go quiet?" (Lemonade)

The root of her issue is the lack of knowledge she has about her partner and their relationship. Just as a long term occupant becomes accustomed to the layout of a house, Beyoncé felt she had known the architecture of her partner and their relationship. However, she soon learns her knowledge is limited.

The primary knowledge Beyoncé has about being loved by a partner comes directly from prior male figures in her life: "You remind me of my father, a magician...able to exist in two places at once," she continues, "In the tradition of men in my blood, you come home at 3 a.m. and lie to me." (Lemonade)

The issues of fidelity and trust she has with her current partner was first shown to her by earlier male figures in her life. Beyoncé has been conditioned to remain in the Mars-Venus paradigm of subservience in exchange for emotional attachment. When this emotional care is withheld by her partner, she is placed in a struggle for power to maintain her partner's affection and commitment.

### **Denial:**

In the second stage Beyoncé details her attempts to regain this lost power by becoming the "ideal" woman for her partner: "I tried to change. Closed my mouth more, tried to be softer, prettier, less awake."

These actions fall in line with the patriarchal idea of the subservient role of women in relationships. Beyoncé is changing her behavior to be inline with the "ideal femininity" she believes her partner desires of her. However in the act of changing her behavior she knowingly hurts herself to please her partner: "I slept on a mat on the floor. I swallowed a sword...I whipped my own back and asked for dominion at your feet. I threw myself into a volcano."

The title of Denial is a summation of her actions. She is going above and beyond in loving and satisfying her partner to deny the possibility of infidelity. If she is able to be the perfect woman then there would be no reason for her partner to cheat.

There is a clear imbalance of power in this relationship. Beyoncé's actions are an attempt to regain the power and respect she has lost: "Women who give seemingly selfless adoration and care to the men in their lives appear to be obsessed with 'love,' but in actuality their actions are often a covert way to hold power." (Hooks, 152)

In changing who she is, Beyoncé attempts to satisfy her partner to regain the respect and control she has lost in the relationship. The act of denial is in her changing herself to resist reality. She becomes who she believes will make her partner happy to bend reality, and construct an image of perfect domesticity and love.

### **Accountability:**

In this stage Beyoncé addresses how power is stripped from women in relationships. She states that power and respect are inherent to womanhood: “Your mother is a woman and women like her cannot be contained.”

The woman in her natural state has power and self-respect, however, Beyoncé continues to account how these are lost in a romantic partnership: “Did he bend your reflection? Did he make you forget your own name? Did he convince you he was a god?” Beyoncé speaks to her mother confused over the level of investment she placed in loving the men in her life. In the act of loving this partner her mother lost the power she previously held as “a woman.” As stated in Denial, Beyoncé herself has undergone a similar transformation.

Bell Hooks states, “Women have endeavored to guide men to love because patriarchal thinking has sanctioned this work...” (Hooks, 160) Under this model of patriarchy the emotional burden is placed on the woman to care for both herself and the man. Bell Hooks states this “sets up a gendered arrangement in which men are more likely to get their emotional needs met while women will be deprived.” (Hooks, 161)

In this poem the act of loving for the mother is described as a chore and burden she endures altruistically. However, in doing so she loses sight of her intrinsic worth by giving greater value to her partner.

The consequences the woman receives from loving the man show there is an imbalance of power as a result of the disproportionate give-and-take relationship. To this point Beyoncé implies it is women who become depleted and damaged in the process of loving.

Love, while given and desired by the woman, is continually denied by the man, or only given conditionally. As a result, the woman labors endlessly to receive the same love she puts forth. In this exposition Beyoncé gives voice to the invisible pain faced by women forced to shoulder the emotional burden of their romantic relationship.

### **Redemption:**

The final stage of the album; Beyoncé describes the process of reconciliation of her broken relationship. Beyoncé recalls learned lessons from previous generations: “Grandmother, the

alchemist, you spun gold out of this hard life... You passed these instructions down to your daughter who then passed it down to her daughter.” The idea of spinning gold out of life’s hardships speaks to the core theme of the album.

The title of the album, *Lemonade*, and the stage of Redemption encapsulates the album’s overarching lesson of the transformative power of love and pain: “I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons, but I made lemonade... True love brought salvation back into me.”

She ends the poem in address to her partner: “You’re the magician. Pull me back together again, the way you cut me in half.” She is tasking her partner with the same burden of emotional responsibility she herself endured during the other’s infidelity.

He has broken her, and if he wants her and the relationship to be whole again he must put forth greater effort in loving her. In this demand, Beyoncé forces him to seek redemption by relinquishing his power through supporting her just as she has for him.

According to Bell Hooks, making mutuality the basis of bonds is a requirement for ending the gender struggle for power in relationships. (Hooks, 164) This process of redemption is not just for Beyoncé’s partner’s infidelity, but for her to regain the control and respect she willingly gave up to her partner. She finds redemption in her relationship by breaking free of the Mars-Venus paradigm, thus, showing romance and love is best fostered and sustained when partners respond in equilibrium to each other’s desires and needs.

*Lemonade* is culturally significant for its ability to give rhetorical form to the female experience in relationships and love. The album’s use of poetry constructs a surreal narrative of womanhood to bring forth issues that are often ignored in popular discourse. Each of the discussed stages and their poems describe a trial of hardship and the resulting change that takes place within the women enduring this pain.

The root of this pain is in Hook’s concept of the Mars-Venus paradigm of romance, where women are subservient to male dominance in exchange for emotional attachment.

The poems illustrate that under this paradigm the act of loving becomes a burden for women. They are conditioned to disproportionately give to their partner in order to receive, while the man is able to assume the position as the dominant in accepting this adoration. Beyoncé had to break out of this paradigm she saw her mother fall victim to in order to reclaim the power and respect she desperately desired.

As a monolith in pop culture Beyoncé's work on *Lemonade* validates the pain women feel in romance, and gives a voice to the maelstrom of emotions and actions that come from such pain. *Lemonade* is important to understanding, and creating a truthful account of the female experience in popular discourse.

As we take time to vicariously immerse ourselves in the shared love of the Carters, we will always remember the heartbroken tale of Beyoncé's *Lemonade* that set in motion the reinforcement of Beyoncé and Jay-Z's cultural supremacy as pop culture's favorite couple. From smashing cars to dancing in the Louvre, Beyoncé continues to push the bar of what an artist can accomplish in their craft through her masterful explication of love and heartbreak.

## Works Cited

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