

MARY GOES ROUND

(Dir. Molly McGlynn, 2017 – 84mins)

By Manuela Lazic

In Molly McGlynn's film, *Mary Goes Round* – and in circles. Whatever new hardship she faces, the 30-something substance abuse counsellor always reaches for the bottle as a temporary solution to a string of short-term problems. The irony of the situation isn't lost on her, and it soon becomes clear that what really pushes her to drink isn't that she's recently been dumped, or that her friends' baby showers are ridiculously bourgeois, or even that she's in financial difficulties. The long term, constantly spiralling issue she struggles with is a sense of shame and unworthiness.

But Mary is smart and experienced – she is a specialist in addiction, after all. Despite the pathetic particulars of the situation, McGlynn doesn't make her heroine pitiful but instead charming, funny and strong-minded. American actress Aya Cash brings some Holly-Hunter-in-*Broadcast-News* energy to her character, replacing the older actress' Southern accent with the correctly Canadian pronunciation of 'Toronto' (the second 't', as all locals know, is silent). Like Hunter in James L. Brooks' classic, Cash manages to convey her character's discomfort in the world as a by-product of her self-awareness. Deep down, she isn't as miserable and stupid as she must seem.

One day, however, someone from the outside tries to reach Mary. Her estranged father Walt (John Ralston), who she was certain had never thought about her since walking out of her life fifteen years prior, keeps trying to contact her. More unbelievable yet, he claims that Mary's teenage half-sister Robyn (Sara Waisglass) wants to finally meet her. His motivations are less than pure however, and once the three characters come together in a wintry Ontario suburb, they're forced to confront the many elephants in the rooms of Mary's childhood home. Walt won't tell Robyn the tragic reason why Mary is here, Mary won't be open about her difficult circumstances, and Robyn refuses to get to know her sister; again, circles within circles.

Because of her problems, Mary has no choice but to stay at home – back in her teenage bedroom – while illness gives Walt a now-or-never timeline to try and reconnect. These unwanted new living arrangements help everyone get out of their ruts, and *Mary Goes Round* is ultimately a film about shaking away our most damaging habits. It doesn't come as a surprise that Walter too is an alcoholic, and although she's only 17, Robyn is old enough to start developing pernicious coping mechanisms as well.

McGlynn manages to avoid the cliches of addiction and teenage rebellion by focusing on the relationships between these characters, rather than on the damage they cause to themselves and others. With a flowing camera progressing from isolating close-ups to group shots allowing for more skillful ensemble acting, she discreetly but effectively reveals that it is in each other that Mary and her relatives find the solution to their feelings of never being good enough.

Unlike most overwrought homecoming movies, *Mary Goes Round* reaches its optimism naturally. McGlynn trusts that in times of need, the goodness at the centre of people's vicious circles will find a way to break the pattern. The giant ring Mary watches at the end is a beautiful, sparkling Ferris wheel, but she isn't on it: she's free to start a new trajectory of her own.