



Journal of Religion & Film

Volume 7
Issue 1 April 2003

Article 19

12-16-2016

Daredevil

Julien R. Fielding
University of Nebraska at Omaha, jfielding@unomaha.edu

Recommended Citation

Fielding, Julien R. (2016) "Daredevil," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol7/iss1/19>

This Film Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion & Film by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

Daredevil

Abstract

This is a review of *Daredevil* (2003).

He is the man without fear. By day he is Matthew Murdock (Ben Affleck), a blind attorney seeking justice for society's downtrodden. By night he is Daredevil, a red leather garbed and masked avenger meting out vigilante equity with his fists and specially designed billy club.

The son of prize fighter Jack "The Devil" Murdock (David Keith), Matthew grew up in New York City's toughest neighborhood, Hell's Kitchen. Encouraged by his father to solve problems with his mind rather than his fists, the teen becomes an introverted bookworm who frequently gets picked on. His life changes forever when biohazard from a ruptured drum sprays him in the eyes. As he recovers in the hospital he realizes that this accident not only has sharpened his other four senses but also that he has developed a kind of sonar. Not willing to become a victim, he trains his body and mind so that the rooftops become his industrial playground. And when his father is murdered, he transforms himself into an avenging angel.

Based on the Marvel Comics 1960s creation, "Daredevil" is more than just another Hollywood adaptation of an illustrated superhero. Writer and director Mark Steven Johnson interprets Hell's Kitchen quite literally as a place where evil reigns supreme under the commanding hand of Kingpin (Michael Clarke Duncan), a cigar chomping, colossus of a man. With an innate sense of truth and justice, Murdock does not get rich by protecting the guilty. Instead he dedicates himself to pro bono cases, helping the poor, the weak and the outcasts. The one time we see him in court - with "In God We Trust" in big letters behind him - he's championing the

innocence of a rape victim, while her assailant Quesada (Paul Ben-Victor) sneers "she wanted it." If the court system won't give the innocent his or her due, then Daredevil will.

What's most intriguing about this film is that instead of simply offering its audience exciting fight sequences, complete with ripping bullets and pummeling fists, although one finds those also, it questions the ethics of "an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth." For example, the first time Murdock encounters Kingpin the latter explains he is always on the lookout for new lawyers. With a defiant air, Murdock explains he cannot possibly represent him, he only takes on clients who are innocent. Kingpin replies that in his business he has learned that no one is innocent. This exchange encapsulates Murdock's psychological and spiritual angst: he is the good guy, the protector of the weak. But he, too, resorts to violence, something his father told him not to do. Even the kindly priest, and Murdock's surrogate father figure, Father Everett (Derrick O'Connor) warns, "Vengeance is a sin. Violence begets violence." This is a lesson that Murdock and his girlfriend Elektra (Jennifer Garner) have and will learn only too well. Several times in the film, Daredevil reminds others (and himself?), "I'm not the bad guy."

Murdock's moral ambivalence carries over to his red-horned costume, which contains all those elements Christians associate with Satan. The first time we see Daredevil, he is lurking in the shadows in the rafters of a bar. When he comes into the light, his goggles are briefly illuminated, making his eyes appear demonic.

And when he speaks, his voice takes on an unearthly growl. When the bar fight ends, the flame-covered billiard tables frame our hero before he continues his pursuit of Quesada into the subway, but not before some steam swirls under his feet. Finally, Daredevil's last words to Quesada are "that light at the end of the tunnel isn't heaven it's the C-train."

These are not isolated instances of religious reference. In fact, religious iconography pervades practically every frame of *Daredevil*. From shots in which the superhero cradles a cross atop a cathedral to scenes in a confession booth. Images of Mary, Jesus, a cross or stone angels often populate the background. The showdown between Bullseye (Colin Farrell) and Daredevil, which takes place in a church, is particularly interesting in that not only does this merciless villain give Father Everett a warning shot so he can get away, something unheard of from his character, but the Irish rogue also crosses himself upon entrance. This is a sanctified place.

Moviegoers still want their superheroes but they no longer get ones placed in a world of black-and-white dualism. *Daredevil* reminds its audience that no one is innocent, but whether that is because of "original sin," it does not say. What it does tell us, though, is that "revenge won't make the pain go away" and that "a man without fear is also one without hope." Murdock sets out to save the city but with Elektra's love also saves himself. Sometimes, he says, faith is all you need.