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Daruma

William L. Blizek
University of Nebraska at Omaha, wblizek@unomaha.edu

Monica Blizek
mlblizek@unomaha.edu

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Daruma

Abstract

This is a film review of *Daruma* (2023), directed by Alexander Yellen.

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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).



Daruma (2023), dir. Alexander Yellen

This is a classic story of redemption. Patrick did something bad. The result was in part that Patrick is now confined to a wheelchair. Patrick is angry and feels sorry for himself. His response is destructive behavior toward himself and abusive behavior toward others. His life is spiraling out of control.

At this point in Patrick's life, he learns that he's the father of a four-year old girl, named Camilla. Patrick remembers almost nothing about Camilla's mother or the short, casual affair. But Camilla's mother has now died of cancer and she had asked social services to find Camilla's father, which they do. Patrick agrees to take custody of Camilla because there is money to support her and Patrick. He spends most of his benefits on alcohol and strippers and has very little money, so the monthly stipend is very attractive to Patrick. He goes so far as to tell the caseworkers that it was a pleasure doing business with them. After a while Patrick realizes that he is not capable of taking care of Camilla. He agrees to take Camilla to her maternal grandparents, who are more

capable of taking care of her. By this time, of course, Camilla has come to realize that Patrick is her father.

Patrick's neighbor, Robert, a crusty veteran, agrees to drive Camilla and Patrick to the home of Camilla's grandparents, where Patrick learns that Camilla's grandmother is suffering from dementia. Camilla's grandfather, however, wants to take care of Camilla, in part because her presence in the house might be helpful to his wife. As Patrick leaves the home of the grandparents, Camilla makes him promise to return for her fifth birthday.

During the cross-country drive, Patrick sees an unusual tattoo on Robert's right shoulder. It is a face with one eye colored in and the other eye left blank. Patrick is now introduced to the rich symbolism of a Daruma doll. Robert explains that the doll has two blank eyes. The owner sets a goal for himself or herself and then colors in one of the eyes. When the goal has been achieved, the second eye gets colored in. Robert set a goal to make amends for wrongs he has committed in his life. Without revealing his specific goal, Robert admits that he was not a good father and that he has not spoken with his daughter in years. Patrick seems to take this all in.

When Patrick returns home, we watch him sift through Camilla's drawings that were left on the kitchen table. Patrick thinks about Camilla and a part of him begins to open. The passage, "And a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6) seems appropriate to the situation as Patrick changes his life dramatically. He cleans up the house, eats better, quits drinking and going to strip clubs, and joins a gym. He even asks a woman he once rejected for a second chance. Even though she does not give him a second chance, he continues to improve his life and finally gets a job, something he had previously refused to do. As Patrick treats others better, so others begin to treat him better. When he visits Robert to pick up his mail, Robert shows him his Daruma doll with

both eyes colored in. Robert tells Patrick that his daughter has now forgiven him, and that Robert will now be moving closer to his daughter.

Camilla's birthday is coming up and Patrick must fly to visit her. He has not flown in years because of the way the airlines treated him. But now Patrick feels "seen" when a flight attendant assists him and assures him that his wheelchair will be safe. Patrick goes to Camilla's birthday party and discovers that her grandmother has had a stroke. Camilla's grandfather will no longer be able to take care of both his wife and Camilla. They agree that Patrick will take Camilla home.

As the film's credits roll, the director added a nice touch. The image of a Daruma doll appears on the screen with one eye colored in. When we see the credits leave the screen, the Daruma doll remains and just before it too leaves the screen, the second eye is colored in.

Daruma is part of the Slamdance Unstoppable program. The actors who play Patrick and Robert are both performers with actual disabilities. In the spirit of the Daruma, the entertainment industry goal should be to increase opportunities for actors with disabilities. We look forward to the time when the second eye is colored in.