

How This Church-Raised Director Used His Latest Project to Mock Christianity

The Shape of Water won this year's Oscar for Best Picture, and was released this week on DVD. Writer/director Guillermo del Toro has said the inspiration for his "fairy tale for troubled times" first struck at age 6.

On Sunday mornings he would attend church and in the afternoon watch movies. One of these was the 1954 classic, *Creature From the Black Lagoon*. Indignant that love didn't conquer all in that story, he decided to make a film where it did.

Bible Misrepresented

The Shape of Water sees Elisa—a lonely, mute woman—employed as a cleaner at a secret U.S. government facility during the Cold War. When a dangerous "merman" is brought from the Amazon River to be examined by the military, Elisa embarks on a romantic and subsequently physical relationship with it. When it is set to be killed, Elisa must risk everything to save her amphibious lover.

The pantomime villain of the piece is a "Scripture-quoting sadist" called Strickland. He mistreats the creature and calls it an "affront," because it isn't made in the image of God. Strickland has many monstrous qualities. But instead of simply denouncing them, del Toro chooses to equate them with Christian values. The Bible is misrepresented as brutal and judgmental, lacking any compassion or empathy.

In a parallel story, we meet Giles, Elisa's gay next-door neighbor. He attempts to pick up a waiter at a family restaurant and is thrown out. The persecution he experiences

is supposed to mirror the creature's suffering at the hands of Strickland.

Humanist Values

In an interview following the film's release, the director was open about his agenda: "The antidote to hatred is understanding. Simple." And del Toro wants filmgoers to believe that Christians harbor hatred for anyone who is different, whether merman or homosexual.

But *The Shape of Water* presents an even more simplistic "us and them" scenario than the one del Toro is railing against. The good guys have the monopoly on love and understanding, while the inhuman bad guys flinch at blasphemy. Love trumps everything, no matter how unnatural the relationship. It is the characters who follow their feelings and reject conventional morality who are the heroes.

Del Toro is clearly a master of his art. The tragedy is that he is using his God-given talents to defy his Maker. No attempt is made to disguise the director's warped view of Christian beliefs. The result is a glib tale of humanist values versus a facile caricature of Christianity. {eo}

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