

Raging Bull-1980: Where you can almost feel the anger of this very angry fighter.

Discussion – and argument – will no doubt persist about “so-and-so is the greatest fighter of all time.” Does it make any sense, except perhaps to stimulate conversation, to keep comparing prize fighters? The only certainty, in this context, is this: if you like boxing and want to see one of the best films ever made about the business, then this is for you.

Because, not only will you hear one of the best scripts put to film, see some of the finest acting on film and watch scenes from the explosive career of a boxing legend, you’ll also see another of Martin Scorsese’s expert work as director. If you shy away from truly crude language, however, you probably won’t abide the continual use of the F-word and the sexually explicit language between husbands and wives, and particularly that between Jake (Robert de Niro) and Vicky (Cathy Moriarty).

It’s all in context, though, and realistically portrays the culture of New York of the 1940s and 1950s. Anyway, for today’s younger audience, it’s no big deal, that’s for sure, to hear such language all the time, just about anywhere now.

Jake, as many know, was a hard-headed man: hard in the ring, and hard on his women (and men) with whom he dealt. So, yes, there is much domestic violence that serves as a mirror for the violence that continues in the ring; and where Jake can obviously work off a lot of that anger, a dominant aspect throughout the story, together with Jake’s insecurities that feed his jealousies. Robert de Niro is probably the only actor at that time who could have performed the role. So, like *Casablanca* (1942), *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Hud* (1963) and a few others, I wouldn’t expect anybody to ever attempt a remake of this masterpiece.

Mention must be made of Joe Pesci as Jake’s brother, Joey, and his manager for much of his boxing career. Joe Pesci is so natural and powerful an actor, I think he is the only one, I think, who can steal a scene from de Niro. For example, have a look at *Goodfellas* (1990), one of the greatest gangster flicks ever made (from Scorsese, again).

Back to *The Bull*, however...

The rest of the supporting cast is without fault. The photography – black and white, my favorite – editing and sound are superb; and the sound track with much classical music is the cherry on top (for me).

For an interesting comparison, try *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956) with Paul Newman portraying Rocky Graziano, another middleweight fighter who was a contemporary of Jake LaMotta’s. It’s almost amazing to me that the two fighters never had a bout together, but they both fought – and lost – against the same man: Sugar Ray Robinson, still the only fighter to win world welter and middle weight titles. Robinson, for the record, is also still regarded as the greatest boxer of all time (so far).

Even more interesting is that, according to one online source, Jake LaMotta and Rocky Graziano were boyhood friends and both spent time at the same correctional facility.

I recommend Raging Bull as the better, and more gritty movie, but Paul Newman's effort still stands up to scrutiny.

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Rating: 9

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