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psychiatry in the movies

The Babadook

Jayesh Busgeet

'Ba-ba-ba . . . dook! Dook! DOOOOOKH!'

The Babadook, debut of writer-director Jennifer Kent, was released in late 2014. It paints a horror story where the source of the fear has a particular familiarity. *The Babadook* portrays itself as a dark children's story but in true Grimm's fairy tale fashion with a Jungian twist that creates more terror than the brothers Grimm could ever imagine. With the predictable paranormal shocks and demonic activity that the movie industry continues to churn out, *The Babadook* is a dark gem that not only has you biting your nails but draws you into its emotional engagement with its characters.

It tells a fairy tale of a single mother, Amelia, starring fantastic Essie Davis who is haunted by the violent death of her husband and who battles with her son's terror of a monster known only as the Babadook. Kent's writing throughout expertly reminds her viewers of *We Need to Talk about Kevin* and *The Omen* that similarly enters the taboo realm of paedophobia, which employs a disturbing tale with the fear of parenting as a psychological vessel.

Our journey begins with a conflicted Amelia and her struggle in a mundane life. We can sense her exhaustion and burden at taking care of her son, Samuel, who presents at the least with difficult behavioural problems. Her husband has died many years ago while driving her to hospital pregnant with Sam – a painful birthday reminder that repeatedly forces her not to celebrate this impending occasion. Thus, we are introduced to Amelia – a once happily married and successful children's writer now driven down by grief, pain and something darker lurking underneath.

When Samuel asks his mother to read a mysterious black book, *Mister Babadook*, that scares us more than the *The Evil Dead's Necronomicon*, she thinks nothing much of it until the story's darker features insidiously unfold. Amelia and Sam's terror soon leads to the destruction of the book only for it to eerily show up again on her doorstep with frightening charcoal crafted pictures akin to nightmarish Tim Burton animations.

Amelia, who began this journey with our sympathy, slowly begins to claw at our fear as an intense anger grows towards her son while being trapped in a maelstrom of grief and guilt. As the malevolent entity attempts to scare with a 'BANG!', Freud's *Return of the Repressed* is whispering behind our ear urging us to dive deeper underneath Amelia's hidden iceberg. We are rewarded with the image of the Babadook but the true terror at the heart of this tale is its grim reality and not the entity with the top hat and Freddy Krueger's claws.

Kent's unique Grimm-Jungian fairy tale continues to shock throughout and ends with a final peculiar scene that appears to resonate well with Carl Jung's quote: 'To confront a person with his own Shadow is to show him his own light'. *The Babadook's* sheer symbolism and metaphor turns a clichéd mainstream horror into a masterful terror that will linger long after you cuddle your children into bed, for 'if it's in a word, or it's in a look, you can't get rid of the Babadook . . .'

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