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## The Babadook

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# The Babadook

## **Abstract**

This is a film review of *The Babadook* (2013), directed by Jennifer Kent.

## **Author Notes**

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.

**The Babadook**  
(2013)  
Directed by Jennifer Kent  
Midnight



Samuel is a six year old boy who suffers from a fear of monsters. He wakes up his mom, Amelia, nightly to check under the bed and in the closet for monsters.

But Sam is also proactive in his fear of monsters - he builds weapons to protect himself and his mom from the monsters that lurk in the shadows. One way Amelia helps Sam with his fear is to read him bedtime stories where the monster is killed. But we also realize that there is something wrong with Amelia: she also suffers from nightmares about her husband's death in a car accident and hates intimacy, even to the point where hugs from her son are too much for her to handle. Amelia and Samuel are deeply affected by death - Sam tells everyone that his dad died while his mom was on the way to the hospital to have Samuel.

*Babadook* is a story book, found on the shelf by Samuel. He asks his mom to read him the story, but it's not a monster conquering story - it's a tale where the monster gets you! Mr. Babadook will knock on your door, and if you let him in, you'll see him, and once you see what "lies underneath, you'll wish you were dead." Sam becomes obsessed with Babadook and wanting to

protect his mom from the monster. At this point, we start to wonder where the book came from, and why Sam is more worried about his mom than himself.

Amelia keeps finding the book, and eventually destroys it, only to find the book returned, with more pages filled out in the story - Amelia sees herself strangling her dog, her son and eventually killing herself. Amelia will become Babadook! Although Amelia destroys the book, Babadook still manages to find his way into the home and we truly begin to understand the anger and resentment Amelia has felt towards her son - she blames him for her husband's death. This movie makes us contemplate the idea of a mother who cannot love her son, cannot see the truth that she is the monster. Sam's love for his mother is the reason he can see the monster in her, and he saves her from herself. This act of unconditional love allows Amelia to stand up to Mr. Babadook - she is willing to sacrifice herself to protect her son. Although the monster within her cannot be truly destroyed, Amelia learns to trap it and feed it, while learning to see her son for who he is - an innocent child who has suffered for his father's death. They both find happiness with each other - Samuel gets to celebrate his birthday for the first time even though it is a reminder of the day his dad died - that monster gets fed and kept in the basement. Mother and child can now forge a relationship based on intimacy and love, rather than the monstrous specter of death dividing them.

— Ruby Ramji