1-28-2015

Knock Knock

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol19/iss1/11
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Abstract
This is a film review of Knock Knock (2015), directed by Eli Roth.

Author Notes
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This sundance film festival review is available in Journal of Religion & Film: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol19/iss1/11
Knock Knock
(2015)
Directed by Eli Roth

Knock Knock is a departure from director Eli Roth’s previous films. Roth is known for the Hostel series and others in the horror genre. He has also acted in Inglourious Basterds in the role of the “Bear Jew” and has collaborated with Quentin Tarantino in the Grindhouse series as well.

The film opens with shots of sweeping Hollywood hills vistas, quiet, perfect neighbourhoods, and a house filled with pictures of a seemingly ideal family. There’s a surreal quality to the cinematography, creating a sense that this film is allegorical or a modern parable. At one point in the film, a character wears a shirt saying “it was all a dream,” while later she writes in lipstick on a mirror “it is not a dream,” adding to this fairytale quality.
A father, played by Keanu Reeves, finds himself alone for the weekend when his family goes to the beach to allow him to finish some work. That evening (during an extreme rainstorm) two young women show up on his doorstep, and use a premise to gain access to the house. Once inside, there is a cat-and-mouse tension which causes the audience to laugh at times. The young women talk about sexual topics and flirt openly with Reeves, who discourages their advances and is flustered by the attention. Reeves (ever the gentleman), is still reluctant to kick them out before their taxi arrives.

Later, the young women sexually assault Reeves. After an evening of sex, the women use their newfound power over Reeves’—due to their threat to expose his sexual activity—to manipulate him and cause havoc in his life. The women behave as sociopaths might, citing Reeves as a perpetrator of pedophilia when they reveal to him that they might be under the age of sexual consent. The women torture him physically and psychologically, eventually revealing that they stalked him previous to their knock on his door. At this point he is subjected to their whims as he bids for his freedom, and the tensions rise as the women reveal they have played this game a number of times before.

When watching films like these and considering gender, it is an interesting thought experiment to reverse the gender of the characters. A film made with a woman as the victim of two home invaders would be a very different film. There would be outrage about her assault and torture. But in this film the audience laughed, perhaps uncomfortably, at times.

The film explores what it is to be male; family pictures show a protector, or suggest a dominant husband or father, while others show Reeves engaging in play. But the women who assault Reeves’ character show how fragile all these social constructions are. And the laughter of the audience shows how uncomfortable we are with male victims of sexual assault and violence.
While this film does not confront the topic of religion head on, it does suggest an assault on the institution of the family. It portrays social and cultural challenges which may result in a disenfranchised youth, and it raises many questions of morality and ethics.