

# Monstrous Reflections: The Babadook as a Metaphor for Psychological Turmoil

Parastuti Parastuti<sup>1</sup>, Suparji Suparji<sup>1</sup>, Tri Rijanto<sup>1</sup>, Suyami Suyami<sup>2</sup>, Hidayat Roch Aris<sup>2</sup>, Refisrul Refisrul<sup>2</sup>, Ajisman Ajisman<sup>2</sup>, Basori Basori<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Pusat Riset Manuskrip Literatur dan Tradisi Lisan, BRIN, Indonesia

Correspondence: Parastuti Parastuti, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia.

Received: August 30, 2024

Accepted: November 8, 2024

Online Published: December 30, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v15n3p194

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n3p194>

## Abstract

Jennifer Kent's "The Babadook" is famous for its portrayal of psychological horror and the complexities of grief. This study analyses the film through the lens of monster theory, focusing on the Babadook as a metaphor for psychological turmoil. Using psychoanalytic frameworks, the writers analyze the protagonist, Amelia's journey as she confronts her inner demons and symbolism within the film. The study examines how the Babadook symbolizes Amelia's repressed emotions and the manifestation of her grief over the loss of her husband. The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from monster theory, psychoanalysis, and gender studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of "The Babadook." The study uncovers layers of meaning beneath its surface-level horror elements. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how horror cinema can serve as a vehicle for exploring complex psychological themes and societal anxieties. The film portrays horror elements such as a monster as a metaphor, psychological dread and paranoia, mother-child tension, and unresolved ambiguity. The significance of this study extends beyond academic discourse, offering insights into the human experience of grief and trauma depicted in the film. The study provides a framework for understanding how individuals confront and overcome psychological struggles in the face of adversity. This study underscores the enduring relevance of "The Babadook" as a cinematic masterpiece that transcends its genre boundaries to offer profound insight into the human condition.

**Keywords:** The Babadook, Gender studies, Psychological Turmoil, Monster Theory, Horror Cinema

## 1. Introduction

*The Babadook* (2014) is Jennifer Kent's debut movie. It is notable for its explicit reference to early cinema films, referred to as the "cinema of attractions" (Gaunson, 2019; Gunning, 2013). It is known for its terrifying and child-snatching boogymen (Detweiler, 2020). It is grouped more into horror psychology, specifically the subgenre of traumatic bereavement (Ingham, 2015). Although it received less response from local audiences, *The Babadook* performed better at the international box office due to its demonic Babadook (Balanzategui, 2017; Middlemost, 2019). The Babadook's symbolism and allegory transform a conventional mainstream horror into a remarkable work that will persist in the audience's thoughts (Busgeet, 2016).

*The Babadook* portrays grief and repression through Amelia's rejection of a relationship and lack of maternal feelings, inverting the psychic narrative (Buerger, 2017). It shows a young mother who is having trouble coping with her terrible loss. The film also remarks on how gender affects one's grief after a catastrophe (Busgeet, 2016). It is a critical and speculative film that questions conventional mother-son relationships by focusing on the relationship between Amelia and her son, Samuel (Zhang, 2024). The film follows Amelia's struggles to establish a boundary between herself and her son, who reminds her of a car accident that took her husband's life. The film explores themes of self-surveillance and ambivalence (Konkle, 2019). The film is a brave and poignant account of the stress and anger experienced by mothers, particularly single parents, due to the tragic accident that led to their rage (Middleton & Bak, 2020; Raméz, 2018). The film explores grief, exhaustion, and motherhood through a heightened reality lens, highlighting Amelia's inner turmoil (Chusna et al., 2020). The movie encourages audiences to actively observe the unsettling effects of the protagonist's suffering on her life (Mitchell, 2023).

*The Babadook* is a film about a single mother who lost her husband in an accident when he was driving her to the hospital to give birth to her son. As a single mother, a widow will experience some difficulties or problems. Losing a spouse disrupts a person's life, impacting their self, social, and financial identities (Biever et al., 2021). The widow's sense of self, social relationships, and economic identity are affected. Losing a spouse is a stressful moment, causing adverse mental health outcomes like depression, anxiety, apathy, obsession with numerous thoughts and activities, and cognitive and behavioral reactions, increasing the risk of mood disorders (Beatrice, 2020; Holm et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020). Losing a spouse causes a period of deep mourning and has been linked to an increased risk of morbidity and mortality in older individuals (Lee et al., 2022). When women lose their spouses, their once optimistic outlooks on life shift to more negative ones (Barman, 2021; Mounisha & Vijayalakshmi, 2024).

This study uses psychoanalytic frameworks to explore the path of the main character, Amelia, to face her inner demons and the symbolism in the movie. The study examines how the Babadook represents Amelia's suppressed feelings and sadness over her husband's passing. This study explored how the film's complex psychological issues and societal worries advance our knowledge. This study is critical because it provides insights into the human experience of trauma and sorrow. This trauma and sorrow are portrayed in the movie, going beyond academic debate.

## 2. Literature Review

*The Babadook* is a modern horror metaphor for fears associated with children and parenthood, especially those involving single parenting under challenging situations. Metaphor is the phenomenon in which people discuss and consider a subject in terms of another (Qiu et al., 2024; Semino, 2008). Metaphors facilitate the transposition of names corresponding to distinct concepts, thus describing ideas or objects by implying analogies with other things, generating new understanding (Livingstone & Harrison, 2010; Parse, 2022). Metaphors use a variety of media in addition to words, including images, sounds, gestures, and tactile experiences (Wei, 2024). Metaphor activates secondary senses in expressions, generating new extensions and enhancing their meaning, serving as a standard method for achieving new meaning (Neimeyer, 1998). Metaphor offers a means of communicating abstract or complex concepts by drawing more concrete comparisons, thereby providing a pathway to understanding and conveying aspects of human experience that may otherwise defy straightforward description. (Buchanan-Barker & Baker, 2005; Holm et al., 2019).

Horror films are distinguished by gory revenge, provoking a strange combination of pleasurable terror and revulsion (Pascale, 2023; Reyes, 2016). Horror films serve as a vehicle for expressing universal anxieties about moral deterioration, future worries, fear of those who belong to the other group, and spiritual uncertainty (Huft, 2022). Fear and disgust are the two primary emotions that horror film aims to arouse in viewers (Gaut, 1993; Hanich, 2010). Thus, horror is suited to discuss and represent social and psychological themes connected to these feelings (Millar & Lee, 2021). Horror films aim to evoke fear, shock, dismay, and disgust through visual and auditory leitmotifs, referencing supernatural, abnormal, and extreme human deformities (Adiprasetyo, 2023; Cherry, 2009; Martin, 2019).

The writers refer to the monster theory to better understand *The Babadook*. Monster theory examines how a culture constructs monsters, revealing anxieties and using them to interpret monsters as representations of chaos, trauma, and unstable boundaries between the monster and self (Grafius, 2017). The monster theory holds that society creates monsters out of anxiety or fear of something or someone who defies social norms (Callan, 2023). These creatures are famous in our civilization because of our dread of them. Refusing to engage with the categorizing order of things is characteristic of monsters; they are unsettling hybrids whose outwardly contradictory bodies defy efforts to include them in any systematic structuring (Cohen, 2018; Coughlin, 2023). Monsters are reflections of the ideals and issues of the culture that created them (Wright, 2013). The monster is a dangerous boundary-dwelling entity that is inherently unknown (Saunders, 2023).

The writers refer to some previous studies to better understand the film. Riggs (2018) studied *The Babadook* by focusing on visual and narrative elements. He concluded that the film had a premise: a mother grappling with mental illness, which manifests in a threat to her son. The film was suggested to have depth in portraying maternal guilt and depression. The protagonist is portrayed as suffering from single parenting. She refuses to discuss her husband or "move on." She rejects a love suitor, and her son's solitude contributes to *The Babadook's* potency.

Mitchell (2019) stated that *The Babadook* depicted maternity within a sociopolitical context. His study proposes a reading of the film as a trauma narrative, focusing on the protagonist and her harrowing experience following her husband's death in a car accident. His study explores how Kent portrays posttraumatic stress disorder as both a visceral and material phenomenon, imbuing the film's cinematic texture with themes of absence and loss. He concluded that *The Babadook* serves as a medium for her process of recuperation. Quigley (2016) emphasizes the bond between Amelia and Samuel while delving into Amelia's contradictory motherhood experience. Quigley studies Amelia's broken subjectivity, allowing viewers to witness the horror of a mother's hatred for her son under the guise of maternal sentiments.

## 3. Methodology

The writers used qualitative data collection methods to extract pertinent scenes and dialogue contributing to the film's psychological horror and grief portrayal. The analysis begins with a thorough literature review, examining the film, monster theory, psychoanalysis, and gender studies to establish a robust theoretical foundation. Monster theory was developed by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, who said there are seven theses of monster theory: monsters always disappear, always return, cannot be categorized, indigenous, forbidden desires, and monsters are man-made. This theory offers a unique perspective in uncovering layers of deeper meaning. This theory allows the author to see monsters as terrifying figures and cultural symbols reflecting fear, trauma, and latent desires. This theory is so relevant for *The Babadook* because monsters are a symbol of trauma and depressed emotions, relevant to psychological fear and mental health. The main character in *The Babadook* fights against monsters that make him reconcile and maintain emotional peace. Also, the monsters in the film reflect the characteristics of trauma.

Psychoanalytic theories focus on the subconscious, defense mechanisms, and internal conflicts, allowing authors to understand how the psychological elements in the main character contribute to the horror in the film. Psychoanalytic theory is used to analyze how trauma and emotional repression affect the protagonist negatively and how he uses defense mechanisms to deal with emotional pain. In psychoanalysis, the conflict between the id, the ego, and the superego can create tension in a person. This theory analyzes the conflict

between the main character's id, ego, and superego in dealing with the problem. This theory helps uncover the complex psychological themes in this film. Gender studies are used because they can provide insight into how the film critiques excessive gender expectations, especially in single mothers, and offers a reflection on women's difficulties in roles burdened by stereotypes and social pressures.

The writers used monster theory, psychoanalysis, and gender studies as the primary analytical framework due to their alignment with the film's thematic intricacies. The writers also apply subsequent applications of analytical tools involving the analysis of *the Babadook* as a symbolic representation of internal turmoil, drawing on psychoanalytic concepts such as depression and trauma while also considering gendered perspectives on femininity and motherhood. This analysis is woven into an in-depth analysis of protagonist Amelia's journey, highlighting her psychological transformation and the evolution of the Babadook as a manifestation of her grief. Synthesizing these insights yields a comprehensive understanding of the film's narrative and thematic layers, ultimately emphasizing its enduring relevance as a cinematic masterpiece that transcends genre boundaries to offer profound insights into the human condition.

#### 4. Finding and Discussion

*The Babadook* is the manifestation of sadness and trauma, the personification of repressed emotions, the process of acceptance and management of trauma carried out by Amelia, criticism of mental health stigma, and reflection of gender expectations. This study found that the character of Babadook is a symbol that represents the sadness and trauma of the protagonist, Amelia, after being abandoned by her husband due to an accident. This monster is not only a supernatural threat but also a physical manifestation of Amelia's depressed feelings and the psychological disorder she suffers. The study highlights how the monster causes fear of inner pain, making its grief even more frightening.

The study also identified how Babadook functions as a personification of repressed anger, sadness, and frustration. The study used psychoanalytic theory to find that the monster represents the potential for unconscious emotions to bring damage, illustrating how grief, when left untreated, can turn into a monster that impacts not only Amelia but also the people around her, including her child. This study also opens up Amelia's journey in confronting and fighting against the monster, symbolizing the psychological process of facing and dealing with grief and trauma. Instead of eliminating the monster, Amelia learned how to deal with the presence of the monster, which illustrates that trauma is not something that can be erased but must be realized and controlled. These findings suggest that psychological healing involves the ability to coexist with the trauma rather than erasing the trauma from memory.

The study also found that *The Babadook* film criticizes people's attitudes and behaviors towards mental health and stigmatizes psychological sadness and anxiety. The Babadook highlights how society fails to provide support to individuals who are experiencing stress over their mental health by allowing them to fight their monsters in silence. The study also found that the gender expectations imposed on Amelia as a mother, in particular, societal pressure on women to suppress personal pain in favor of nurturing others.

##### *The Babadook as a Metaphor for Psychological Turmoil*

*The Babadook* is a horror film that serves as a metaphor for the psychological turmoil experienced by the main character, Amelia, a single mother who struggles to overcome grief and trauma over the death of her husband. Her husband died in a car accident while he was driving her to the hospital to give birth to their son, Samuel. This incident left a deep forgetfulness that made her feel guilty and sad for a long time. She has experienced it for almost 7 years but still cannot move on. She never mentioned and talked about him. It illustrates that she tried to forget and ignored that moment. The more she tried to forget and ignore it, the more difficult she coped with it.

**Amelia** They feel sorry for me, Claire. There's a big difference.

**Claire** God, Amelia, as soon as anyone mentions Oscar, you can't cope. It'll be seven years. Isn't it time you moved on?

**Amelia** I have moved on. I don't mention him. I don't talk about him. What strain is that on you, Claire? I listen to your life day in, day out, and you never stop to ask me anything about mine (Kent, 2014: 30:39-31:03).

Cohen said that monsters are a reflection of cultural anxiety. The Babadook embodies the emotional stress and sadness that is resolved in Amelia's life, magnified by social expectations to be able to change. Claire's statement reflects society's discomfort and continuous sadness. Amelia's failure to overcome her grief makes her inner struggle feel scary, both for herself and for others. At the same time, Amelia experiences deep inner pressure by turning her sadness into something that cannot be expressed in words. Amelia's rejection of the natural world manifests as a physical monster, which must be noted for its existence. Amelia experiences an inner turmoil that can destroy her life when her existence is not acknowledged and becomes invasive and uncontrollable like Babadook itself, which cannot be destroyed or eliminated but must be managed. Claire believes that Amelia should not have carried out her protracted sadness. The sadness must be faced. The monster has forced her to acknowledge the liminality of grief as something that is neither entirely within nor beyond her control.

The Babadook first mysteriously appeared from a children's storybook on Amelia's bookshelf. Kent did not explain where the book came from, whether Amelia bought it at a bookstore or her work. It seemed that Kent wanted to say that the book did not come from anywhere but from Amelia's house. The book suddenly appears unexpectedly, just as trauma and sadness suddenly appear in one's mind. Amelia had no intention of picking up and reading the book for Samuel, symbolizing that the trauma was not something she wanted to deal with but something that was interfering with her life.

**Amelia** (reading the book) You can't get rid of the Babadook. If you're really a clever one and you know what it is to see, then you

can make friends with a special one, a friend of you and me. His name is Mister Babadook and this is his book. ...We might read another one tonight, hey?

When Amelia read the book to Samuel for the first time, she was disturbed by its dark contents. Amelia's reaction shows her uncomfortable feelings in dealing with the psychological aspects that bother her, namely the sadness and trauma of losing her husband. It seems that Kent wants to show that feelings of repression and trauma can arise at any time. The entry of Babadook into Amelia's life symbolizes nightmares and disturbances in Amelia's mind, who has severe sadness or trauma. Amelia's deteriorating mental state leads to more intense disturbances, showing how trauma can attack a person's peace of mind.

The impact of the entry of Babadook's influence on Amelia's life caused Amelia's fear and paranoia caused by the tension between her and her son, Samuel. Her inability to cope with his grief manifested as a form of frustration and aggression towards Samuel. It symbolizes that when trauma is not handled correctly, it can harm a person's relationships and ability to act as a caregiver. Another consequence is that Amelia becomes a person who tries to withdraw from real life. She tends to isolate herself from society. She withdraws from good association with her friends and relatives, showing that trauma and depression can cause a person to become self-isolating and withdraw from the support system that exists in society.

Amelia's attempt to break free from the book's influence has similarities to her efforts to suppress her grief and trauma. To free herself from the negative influence of the book, Amelia tries to destroy it by tearing it up and throwing it away. This action symbolizes that Amelia wants to eliminate the source of her fear and discomfort, as well as her efforts to erase her memories and feelings related to her husband's death. No different from the goal of tearing the book apart as her last resort, she hoped that ignoring her grief could cause it to disappear. The book she had destroyed turned out to be reappeared; it appeared suddenly at the door of her house, where the contents were even more terrifying than the previous one. It symbolizes that trauma and sadness cannot go away on their own. Feelings of stress can trigger the reappearance of trauma and sadness to the surface, which sometimes is even worse than before.

**Amelia** A book turned up at our place. I threw it away, but somebody glued it back together and put it on our doorstep (Kent, 2014; 37:58-38:05).

With the return of the book, Amelia's fear and paranoia increased, which led to her becoming even more depressed and desperate. It shows how feelings of continued trauma can increase a person's psychological impact. The harder she tried to get rid of the book, the worse her mental state became as she tried to avoid facing her feelings of sadness and grief. Her growing depression and despair are illustrated by her attempts to burn the book (Kent, 2014; 39:02). The effort is an even more extreme effort as she needs to obliterate her traumatic memories and the associated pain. The reappearance of the book symbolizes the reappearance of traumatic feelings. Every time the book reappears, its content changes, which is increasingly scary. It symbolizes the worsening feelings of grief and trauma that can arise over time. Amelia's involvement with the book *The Babadook* reflects her internal transformation process. At first, she resisted and avoided it, then she tried to suppress and destroy it, and in the end, she learned to face and handle it. This transformation process is visually and thematically depicted through the change in her relationship with Babadook's character and with the book.

#### *Psychoanalysis of Trauma and Grief of Amelia*

Freud's psychoanalytic theory, especially the concepts of id, ego, and superego, provides a framework that can be used to understand Amelia's trauma and grief in *The Babadook*. The Id is a prime, instinctual part of the psyche that fulfills an essential human (Colin & Vives, 2020; Sumarsono, 2022; Sumarsono et al., 2022). It works on the pleasure principle, avoiding suffering and obtaining pleasure without considering reality and social norms. The ego is a rational part of human psychology that mediates between the id and the outside world (Pierlejewski, 2020). The ego works on the principle of reality by considering the demands of the id, the constraints of reality, and the norms of the superego. Meanwhile, the superego is a psychological component that prioritizes morals and social ethics (Chen et al., 2024; Liu, 2021; Sumarsono, 2019). The superego works on perfection and decides on actions based on moral values.

According to psychoanalysis, *The Babadook* is a manifestation of Amelia's psychic part, namely her id, which represents her latent desires and fears. Amelia's id, without filtering her emotions, including her grief, anger, guilt, and maybe also her subconscious expectations, cannot be accepted by her social environment, such as her frustration with her son, Samuel. The entry of the influence of the Babadook character into Amelia's life symbolizes the influence of the id on her mind, which she has tried to suppress. Amelia's fear and anxiety, which are the central part of her instinct, arise without control because her id controls her in expressing her depressed feelings.

Amelia's ego seeks to mediate between the demands of her id, her sadness, anger, fear, and the reality in society; in this case, it is her duty as a mother, the hope of the social environment. Amelia's ego tries to maintain balance and control, but the end depends on how strong the id is in her. Amelia, through her ego, uses various survival mechanisms to cope with her stress, such as trying to forget the book and its contents, refusing to admit how severe the psychological disorder she is experiencing, and diverting her problems by venting her anger on Samuel.

Amelia's superego is heavily influenced by Amelia's guilt over her husband's death and her failure to be an excellent mother to her only child. Her superego makes Amelia feel very guilty and fails as a mother, further worsening her psychological condition. The conflict between the id and the superego, contrary to the id, gives rise to severe inner conflicts. Her superego blames her for her anger at Samuel and her attempts to escape the fact that her husband has died, causing her to feel even more guilty. The Babadook represents the feeling of trauma that cannot be resolved, where the ego fails to control and control the id. This trauma causes a psychological imbalance, which

causes the ego to be defeated by the power of the id. The climax is when Amelia confronts the Babadook directly, representing the ego's efforts to control her depressed feelings. By acknowledging the existence of Babadook, Amelia's ego begins to manage to control the conflict between her id and superego effectively. Amelia eventually limits Babadook's territory to the basement and feeds her periodically, illustrating that the ego has accepted the presence of the id. She did not destroy Babadook, acknowledging that traumatic feelings and memories were part of her psyche. Instead, she seeks to confront it, balancing the demands of her id by adjusting to society's reality and moral standards.

#### *Monster Theory and Amelia's Trauma and Grief*

Based on Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's monster theory, monsters are cultural symbols that describe fears, worries, and taboo things that occur in society (Beggiora, 2022). According to Cohen, monsters often emerge from the margins to challenge the boundaries of something society does not know and accept. The appearance of Babadook from a children's storybook and in Amelia's life signifies an overflow of her depressed feelings in her consciousness. It aligns with the view that the monster represents the most profound, distressed aspect of human life experience. The Babadook forces Amelia to overcome her long-harboring grief, signaling her deep fears and psychological turmoil that she has long ignored.

The influence of Babadook on Amelia's life can be analyzed using the Monster Theory, which examines the disorder of normalcy and order. Babadook enters Amelia's house, which is traditionally considered a sanctuary, symbolizing how her sadness and trauma interfere with her daily life. This disorder causes her to be unable to carry out her functions as a good mother and live an everyday life. Although Amelia has tried to destroy the book, Babadook does not stop appearing in her life, depicting the existence of Amelia's trauma. The existence of this monster illustrates that the concept of monsters, seemingly like an unsolved psychiatric problem, cannot be ignored. On the contrary, existence demands recognition and resistance. Through the Babadook, the film depicts how trauma can interfere with the reality of life, causing something familiar and safe to seem scary and unfamiliar, so it is necessary to distinguish between the known and the unknown.

The confrontation between Amelia and Babadook symbolizes the process of integrating and managing trauma, not an effort to eliminate her trauma. It aligns with Monster Theory, which states that monsters can reflect aspects of the self that must be acknowledged and integrated. By confining Babadook in the basement and feeding him, Amelia accepts that her grief and trauma are an integral part of her psyche. It shows psychological integration, where the harmful aspects of the experience are no longer depressed but can instead be consciously controlled. This resolution shows that monsters are not external entities that must be destroyed but internal entities that must be managed. Babadook becomes a symbol of Amelia's struggle with her grief, illustrating the need to deal with her demonic nature to achieve a regular and balanced psychological state.

#### *Amelia's Trauma and Gender Studies*

Based on traditional gender roles, women face two things, namely social expectations and pressure, primarily related to the context of motherhood and widowhood (Bjarnegård et al., 2019; Brounús et al., 2024; Sarker et al., 2023). Gender studies explain how social expectations of motherhood have contributed to the trauma experienced by Amelia. An ideal mother can take care of her family, is willing to sacrifice, and has unconditional love and support for her children. Amelia's struggle after her husband's death to raise her child alone puts her in a difficult position where she feels pressure to meet the standards set by society. Her failure to meet social expectations due to her grief made her feel guilty. Kent describes Amelia's frustration and anger at Samuel, contrary to the image of a perfect mother. It shows how the stress makes the trauma she is experiencing worse, making it more difficult for her to seek help and validate her emotional needs.

Amelia's status as a widow is another layer that adds to the severity of her trauma. Widows often experience marginalization in life and a lack of support from the surrounding environment as they must cope with their grief on their own while maintaining their outward responsibilities. Amelia withdraws from her environment because she does not have the understanding and support of her environment, including her sister and neighbors, who fail to realize Amelia's suffering.

**Amelia** you don't come around to our house anymore.

**Claire** Because I can't stand being around your son.

**Amelia** I can't believe you just said that.

**Claire** you can't stand being around him yourself. (Kent, 2014: 31:09-31:19).

The dialogue above portrays an underlying expectation that Amanda should be welcoming and receptive to guests. This visit is an effort to continue to build relationships between friends and family. It is in line with the general view of the position of women as caregivers and social contributors. From the perspective of gender studies, Amelia tries to fulfill the social role expected by society as a mother who tries to be in an active relationship despite facing obstacles. However, she received unpleasant treatment from his younger brother, who felt uncomfortable being close to his son, Samuel. Indirectly, this shows that there is an assumption that something is wrong with the way Amelia educated Samuel. It implies that her position and role as a mother are questionable, which casts doubt on her effectiveness as a caregiver that society usually assigns to a woman. Claire's criticism of Amelia's parenting reflects the community's belief that women's primary responsibility is to shape children's personalities and behaviors.

Gender studies show that social norms can render widows invisible, their sadness overrepresented or underestimated. The film depicts

Amelia's isolation because she must struggle alone to overcome her trauma and her son's behavior. This isolation reflects the social tendency to marginalize widows, thus further increasing the psychological burden and hindering the healing process. Gender studies also look at the concept of emotional labor and its effects on women. Emotional labor involves handling a person's emotions while she tends to be concerned about the emotional needs of others, sometimes having to sacrifice her feelings. Amelia had a double burden; she had to overcome her grief, and she also had to deal with Samuel's fears and sometimes irritating behavior. The community expects women to be able to overcome the mental burden of being a single parent without complaining, which is a source of problems for Amelia. Her efforts to overcome her trauma to protect and care for Samuel illustrate the toll of her unrecognized labor. Gender studies emphasize that acknowledging this emotional labor is very important in understanding the trauma experienced by women and the need for society to support their mental health.

## 5. Conclusion

*The Babadook* is a metaphor for Amelia's psychological problems. From the presence and impact of Babadook in Amelia's life, the film explores the themes of sadness, trauma, and difficulties in accepting reality and Amelia's psychological healing. The film's narrative shows that trauma cannot be completely eradicated. However, it can be controlled and managed, which can lead to a healthier mental state and the possibility of being able to move on. Amelia's attempt to get rid of the book parallels her efforts to suppress her grief and trauma. The film illustrates the importance of fighting and regulating the devil within oneself through the book's repeated appearances. The film's narrative says that there is only one way to overcome trauma and fear: to face and accept their existence to provide healing and control over their lives.

Psychoanalytic theories with the concepts of id, ego, and superego show how complex Amelia's psychological turmoil is, where her id clashes with her superego while her ego struggles to control and achieve psychological equilibrium. The film's narrative reflects the psychoanalytic process of transforming depressed feelings into self-awareness, integrating all, and achieving a more stable mental state.

The monster in *The Babadook* proves to be a metaphor for Amelia's repressed grief and trauma, depicting pent-up emotions and forcing resistance. The appearance of Babadook in Amelia's life illustrates how the effects of trauma are in distorting and invading real life. Monster theory suggests that integrating trauma is a better approach to coping with trauma than trying to eliminate it. By accepting the existence of the monster, Amelia experienced psychological improvement, showing that acknowledging the existence and managing fear and trauma is essential to healing.

By analyzing the trauma experienced by Amelia using gender studies, the film not only highlights the personal struggles of the protagonist but also criticizes the wider society, which contributes to the closure and marginalization of women's suffering, especially widows.

## Acknowledgments

Not applicable

## Authors' contributions

Parastuti, Suparji, and Tri Rijanto contributed to conceptualize, develop the literature review, present the argument, edition and revision of the paper. Suyami and Roch Aris Hidayat conceptualized and developed the literature review and objective of the study, collected data, analysed data, interpreted data, and wrote the manuscript. Refisrul, Ajisman, and Basori contributed to edition and revision of the paper, provide critical insights and ensured the overall clarity of the paper. We, authors, discussed the research findings, contributed to the interpretation of the results, reviews and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## Funding

Not Applicable

## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Informed consent

Obtained.

## Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

## Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

**Open access**

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Copyrights**

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

**References**

- Adiprasetyo, J. (2023). Deconstructing fear in Indonesian cinema: Diachronic analysis of antagonist representations in half a century of Indonesian horror films 1970-2020. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2268396>
- Balanzategui, J. (2017). The Babadook and the Haunted Space between High and Low Genres in the Australian Horror Tradition. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 11(1), 18-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503175.2017.1308907>
- Barman, R. (2021). Widowhood: Reflection on Oppression And Societal Dilemma As Illustrated In Indira Goswami's Text. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 9(6). <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2106263.pdf>
- Beatrice, M. M. (2020). Loss and grief counseling as a coping mechanism of widowhood: A comparative study of widowers and widows in Meru County Kenya. *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling*, 12(4), 109–114. <https://doi.org/10.5897/ijpc2019.0572>
- Beggiora, S. (2022). Aquatic " Mythologies " Divine, liminal, and fantastic creatures in the Indian tradition. *Shima*, 16(2), 143-159. <https://doi.org/110.21463/shima.181>
- Biever, D. F., Patel, N., Agnew, A., Kopp, D., Krausman, J., & McCoy, M. A. (2021). When Money Can't Be Avoided: Helping Money-Avoidant Widows Using the Changes and Grief Model. *Journal of Financial Therapy*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.4148/1944-9771.1292>
- Bjarnegård, E., Brounús, K., & Melander, E. (2019). Violent Boyhoods, Masculine Honor Ideology, and Political Violence: Survey Findings From Thailand. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(15). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519832926>
- Brounús, K., Forsberg, E., Höglund, K., & Lonergan, K. (2024). The burden of war widows: gendered consequences of war and peace-building in Sri Lanka. *Third World Quarterly*, 45(3), 458-474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2250727>
- Buchanan-Barker, P., & Baker, P. (2005). Observation: The original sin of mental health nursing? *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 12(5), 541-549. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2850.2005.00876.x>
- Buerger, S. (2017). The beak that grips: maternal indifference, ambivalence and the abject in The Babadook. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 11(1), 33-44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503175.2017.1308903>
- Busgeet, J. (2016). The Babadook. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 208(3), 212-212. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.114.168740>
- Callan, W. (2023). The new "Law of the land": The Monster in No Country for Old Men. *Digital Literature Review*, 10(1), 86-94. <https://doi.org/10.33043/DLR.10.1.86-94>
- Chen, S., Yu, R., Zou, Y., Yu, X., Liu, C., Hu, Y., Guo, T., & Chen, H. (2024). Artificial morality basic device: transistor for mimicking morality logics. *Science China Materials*, 67(2), 608–618. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40843-023-2710-0>
- Cherry, B. (2009). *Horror* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203882184>
- Chusna, I., Anasyahputri, A. R., Fikri, A. A., & Rafli, M. (2020). The Manifestation of Monster and the Emotional Repression in Jennifer Kent's The Babadook (2013). *Insaniyat Journal of Islam and Humanities*, 4(2), 123-132. <https://doi.org/10.15408/insaniyat.v4i2.14453>
- Cohen, J. (2018). Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." In: Mittman AS, Hensel M, eds. Classic Readings on Monster Theory. In *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)* (pp. 61-76). Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781942401209.006>
- Colin, M., & Vives, J. M. (2020). Laughing at ourselves: A study of the Contortionist Ego. *Evolution Psychiatrique*, 85(3), 399–406. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evopsy.2020.04.005>
- Coughlin, M. (2023). Why look at dead animals? *Curator*, 66(3), 413-418. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12566>
- Detweiler, C. (2020). Holy Terror: Confronting Our Fears and Loving Our Movie Monsters. *Interpretation (United Kingdom)*, 74(2), 171-182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964319896310>
- Gaunson, S. (2019). Spirits Do Come Back: Bunyips and the European Gothic in The Babadook. *A Companion to Australian Cinema*, 355-369. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118942567.ch17>
- Gaut, B. (1993). The Paradox of Horror. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 33(4), 333-345. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/33.4.333>
- Grafius, B. R. (2017). Text and Terror: Monster Theory and the Hebrew Bible. *Currents in Biblical Research*, 16(1), 34-49.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993x17699548>

- Gunning, T. (2013). *Hand and Eye: Excavating a New Technology of the Image in the Victorian Era*. 54(3), 495-516. <https://doi.org/10.2979/victorianstudies.54.3.495>
- Hanich, J. (2010). The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear. In *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers* (p. 314). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203854587>
- Holm, A. L., Severinsson, E., & Berland, A. K. (2019). The Meaning of Bereavement Following Spousal Loss: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Older Adults. *SAGE Open*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019894273>
- Huft, J. (2022). Monsters, Michael Myers, and the Macabre as Tools to Explain Ideological Framing. *Teaching Sociology*, 50(4), 372-383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X22112086>
- Ingham, T. (2015). The Babadook (2014, directed by Jennifer Kent) – A film review from a psychoanalytic psychotherapy perspective. *Psychodynamic Practice*, 21(3), 269-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14753634.2015.1005485>
- Konkle, A. (2019). Mothering by the Book: Horror and Maternal Ambivalence in The Babadook (2014). *Feminist Encounters*, 3(1-2), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/5910>
- Lee, H. J., Han, S. H., & Boerner, K. (2022). Psychological and Physical Health in Widowhood: Does Marital Quality Make a Difference? *Research on Aging*, 44(1), 54-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027521989083>
- Liu, L. (2021). An analysis on the pursuit of happiness in the lord of the rings. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 11(12), 1676-1683. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1112.21>
- Livingstone, D. N., & Harrison, R. T. (2010). Meaning Through Metaphor: Analogy as Epistemology. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 71(1), 95-107. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1981.tb01343.x>
- Martin, G. N. (2019). (Why) Do You Like Scary Movies? A Review of the Empirical Research on Psychological Responses to Horror Films. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02298>
- Middlemost, R. (2019). Babashook: The Babadook, gay iconography and Internet cultures. *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 8(1), 7-26. [https://doi.org/10.1386/AJPC.8.1.7\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/AJPC.8.1.7_1)
- Middleton, J., & Bak, M. A. (2020). Struggling for Recognition: Intensive Mothering's "Practical Effects" in The Babadook. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 37(3), 203-226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2019.1633169>
- Millar, B., & Lee, J. (2021). Horror Films and Grief. *Emotion Review*, 13(3), 171-182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17540739211022815>
- Mitchell, P. (2023). Seeing Horror through the Lens of Health: Embodying Dissociative Identity Disorder in The Babadook. *Literature and Medicine*, 41(1), 123-144. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2023.a911447>
- Mounisha, N., & Vijayalakshmi, V. (2024). Exposing Widow's Psyche in a Fine Balance: A Study of Rohinton Mistry's Widow Characters. *World Journal of English Language*, 14(4), 51-57. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n4p51>
- Neimeyer, G. J. (1998). Metaphor and Meaning. *Contemporary Psychology: A Journal of Reviews*, 43(10), 682-682. <https://doi.org/10.1037/001797>
- Parse, R. R. (2022). Metaphor: Meanings and Humanbecoming Metaphorical Truths. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 35(1), 15-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08943184211051343>
- Pascale, M. A. (2023). Horror cinema and sadistic spectacle: A further defense of gorefeasts. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2268391>
- Pierlejewski, M. (2020). The data-doppelganger and the cyborg-self: theorising the datafication of education. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 28(3), 463-475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2019.1653357>
- Qiu, A. H., Tay, D., & Watson, B. (2024). Metaphorical language and psychopathological symptoms: a case study of trauma victims' metaphor use. *BMC Psychology*, 12(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01492-w>
- Quigley, P. (2016). When good mothers go bad: genre and gender in The Babadook. *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 15, 57-75.
- Ramírez, F. J. de L. (2018). Certain aesthetics of horror, certain horrors of aesthetics. *Brunal*, 6(2), 229-247. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/brumal.496>
- Reyes, X. A. (2016). *Horror Film and Affect Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315795850>
- Riggs, E. E. (2018). Mental Illness and the Monstrous Mother: A Comparison of Representation in The Babadook and Lights Out. *Film Matters*, 9(1). [https://doi.org/10.1386/fm.9.1.30\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/fm.9.1.30_1)
- Sarker, M. R., Rouf Sarkar, M. A., Alam, M. J., Begum, I. A., & Bhandari, H. (2023). Systems thinking on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 in Bangladesh: A systematic review. *Heliyon*, 9(2), e13773. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e13773>



- Saunders, R. (2023). Here be monsters: monster porn and the crisis of masculinity. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(5), 2085-2101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2022.2041253>
- Semino, E. (2008). *Metaphor in discourse*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511816802.015>
- Sumarsono, I. (2019). The Psychoanalytic Study of Emma Bovary in Gustave Falubert'S Madame Bovary. *Lingua*, 15(2), 180-194.
- Sumarsono, I. (2022). Fetishism Reflected in Sam Mendes's American Beauty. *World Journal of English Language*, 12(5), 102-107. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v12n5p102>
- Sumarsono, I., Fanani, A., & Masofa, I. (2022). The Oedipus Complex in Eugene O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms. *Lire Journal (Journal of Linguistics and Literature)*, 6(2), 199-208. <https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v6i2.157>
- Wei, X. (2024). Multimodal metaphors in a Sino-British co-produced documentary. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02739-6>
- Wright, A. (2013). *Monstrosity: The Human Monster in Visual Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755603503>
- Xu, J., Wu, Z., Schimmele, C. M., & Li, S. (2020). Widowhood and depression: a longitudinal study of older persons in rural China. *Aging and Mental Health*, 24(6), 914-922. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2019.1571016>
- Zhang, Q. (2024). It' s All About Repetition : Maternal Time in Horror from Jeanne Dielman ( 1975 ) to The Babadook ( 2014 ). *Monstrum*, 5(1), 46-65. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.7202/1102425ar>