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The Monstrous Masculine: Abjection And Todd Solondz's Happiness

Adam P Wadenius

Abstract

Horror films often use the male as monster, though conventional ideology says that it is not his masculine characteristics that make him monstrous. Barbara Creed writes that in the horror film, the male body is represented as monstrous "because it assumes characteristics usually associated with the female body." The thematic thread of Todd Solondz's Happiness, beneath its facade of domestic anxiety, is that of deviant masculinity. In mapping Billy's horrific trajectory towards maturity, the film's project is an abject representation of the specific rites of passage that he must undergo in order to accede to manhood. Masculinity in the film is constructed as monstrous via the very characteristics that are inherent to his experience of becoming a man. While at face value Happiness would seem to elude classification as a horror film, it addresses these issues through the generic conventions of the horror film, employing many of the codes and conventions of horror, evoking an effect on the body of the spectator that is in keeping with the traditional appeal of the genre. Where these films traditionally work to annihilate the threat to patriarchy and repress the abject, Happiness concludes with images of the paternal order in crisis. Billy comes to embody the monstrous masculine, his semen marking the collapse of symbolic law, illustrated by the failure of the paternal figure to prohibit the incestuous bond that is established between mother and child.

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