

SHE'S GONE

A tale of anti-Oedipal terror unfolds in the Austrian thriller *Goodnight Mommy*

For the most part, the genre of horror has been a much-maligned cinematic ghetto populated almost exclusively by male directors, and God bless 'em all: They've titillated and tantalized and torn us apart to the best of their abilities over the years, some with more sophistication and some with less, mining every sexualized psychosis and reptilian yelp under the blood moon.

Of course, there have been notable exceptions to this geeky gender gap (Claire Denis, Kathryn Bigelow, Antonia Bird), but they've been so far and few between that they mostly serve to reinforce the brute dickishness of the genre. I don't mean that in a bad way; phallocentric visions of hyper-potency — from slasher flicks to monster mayhem — are legitimately terrifying, and they reveal an undercurrent of fear that delves into the violent, vulnerable core of masculinity.

Times change, however. The finest horror film of 2014, *The Babadook*, was by Australian director Jennifer Kent, and it was a doozy. Kent's film, about a single mother and her child being stalked by a shadow creature from a children's storybook, turned the tables on the classic theme of the demon seed, focusing on one woman's parental anxieties about protecting her kid, mostly from herself. The film was complex, emotionally resonant and deeply spooky.

And now there's *Goodnight Mommy*, an Austrian psycho-thriller written and directed by Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala. Much like *The Babadook*, this film burrows under the skin of the mother-child relationship to expose terrors that can only be called existential.

Returning home from plastic surgery after an accident, her face almost completely bandaged, convalescing Mother (Susanne Wuest) deals with her twin sons, Lukas and Elias (Lukas and Elias Schwarz), a pair of whispering confidants who grow increasingly suspicious that mom is not actually mom. A quietly bizarre and increasingly disturbing game of cat-and-mouse ensues, as the twins — isolated in a big house in the Austrian countryside — begin to interrogate the authenticity of their own parent, who spends most of her time in bed, behind closed doors.

Almost anything else I might say would spoil this film. In *Goodnight Mommy*, the Freudian paradigm is inverted and then smashed, with devastating results — call it anti-Oedipal terror. As Kent did in *The Babadook*, the directors here — channeling the chilly and menacing formalism of Stanley Kubrick and Michael Haneke — ratchet up the suspense by turning the (pro)creative instinct inside out, making a monster of nature and nurture both. (Bijou Metro)

DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL

As Minnie, the boldly curious, sexually precocious 15-year-old girl who inaugurates an affair with the roustabout boyfriend (Alexander Skarsgård) of her boho mother (Kristen Wiig) in *Diary of a Teenage Girl*, Bel Powley is a revelation. With her saucer eyes popping beneath dowdy bangs, Powley registers all the outsized emotions of a teen exploring the sticky chaos of adulthood. It's the performance of the year so far. Despite outward appearances, *Diary* is no *Lolita*-like tale of age-inappropriate perversion and objectification — quite the opposite. Director Marielle Heller keeps an intimate focus on Minnie's progress, neither demonizing nor romanticizing her situation, which is that of a young woman coming of age. By avoiding the bunk politics of resentment and blame, *Diary* proves itself, ironically, a feminist statement of the highest order, and a great piece of filmmaking. (Bijou Metro)

GRANDMA

Elle (Lily Tomlin), a misanthropic poet and recent widow, drives around town with her teenage granddaughter Sage (Julia Garner) as the unlikely pair attempts to scare up \$630 for Sage's abortion. This might be the least epic road movie of all time, but the results of the journey are nonetheless profound — hilarious, startling and moving. Paul Weitz's direction is gentle and intimate, focusing in close on the women's burgeoning relationship. Grandma feels like a really good short story — it unwinds itself in emotional shorthand, never wasting a moment on undue particulars. And Tomlin is at the top of her game here. As Grandma Elle, she is all piss and vinegar, an eccentric old lady given to smart, nasty outbursts, but her granddaughter's crisis brings her out of herself. (Bijou Art Cinemas)

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Fri-Sun	12:30, 2:45, 5:00, 7:15, 9:30
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COMING HOME

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