



[We need to talk about Kevin](#)

Screened at [Cornerhouse, Manchester](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) October 2011

Reading Lionel Shriver's novel and now viewing this thought provoking film, I feel compelled to declare an interest, that like the author I am not a parent and I have always wondered about the central question of 'Kevin'; how does a woman raise a son?

Most viewers will not come to this film fresh; fortunately I had forgotten the final horrific twist, although, as with the novel, one always knows that something terrible will happen.

Rejecting the epistolary structure of the novel, where the central character Eva writes to her husband, Lynne Ramsay brings an artistic vision to a horror story, resulting in a series of memorable images. The film opens with Eva, Tilda Swinton, surrounded by people and covered in red liquid, echoing the blood that she will try to scrub from her hands, her home and her life throughout the story. We follow our unreliable narrator as she tries to impose an explanatory story on her fractured images.

To lovers of the novel, the film, particularly the casting, adds to its impact. Swinton is magnificent and her androgynous beauty contrasts with the round softness of John C Reilly, there are moments where her masculine hardness and role in the family place puts Reilly in the feminine role. The child actors are wonderful – even the baby looks at his mother with resentment and hatred. The series of Kevins culminates in an astonishing performance by Ezra Miller, whose sullen teenage beauty bears a strong family resemblance to the mother with whom he is bound by blood and hatred.

The central dilemma of the story is "What happens when a mother does not love her child?", and in Kevin this is a particularly unlovable child; he refuses to speak, to play or even to use the toilet, or perhaps this is only Eva's interpretation - the reaction of an inadequate mother. Eva, a former travel writer, sees her body and her life destroyed by a child she cannot understand. Even when she tries to play with her toddler son he reacts with sullen disdain and his continued nappy wearing physically highlights his genitals, even in his appearance he rejects his mother.

There are moments of humour when Kevin's behaviour and his mother's reactions are so extreme - and there was some guilty laughing in the screening.

This is a welcome return for Lynne Ramsay, skillfully producing a beautiful series of images on a tiny budget and a confirmation of Tilda Swinton's talent. In her Oscar winning performance in Michael Clayton she showed the emotional chaos behind a professional mask, here the chaos is truly laid bare.

I cannot recommend this film highly enough. I loved the book and was eagerly anticipating Ramsay's return and the work of Swinton – I was not disappointed.