

INTRO:

RIFF: (intro ben to the concept - ex. What do you know about memes specific to gay culture or do you know any gay specific memes? Do you use them/have they ever been shared with you?)

Welcome to the Yassification, the Memefication of Babadook. That's right - say it correctly - like the "ook" in look, not the "uke" in duke. IPA wise, it's - bɑ:bɑ:dʊk

Stemming from the 2014 film "The Babadook" (which is a story about a mother struggling with the loss of her husband and attempting to navigate her relationship with her equally distraught son) the titular Mister Babadook is an entity fit for your nightmares but also your instagram feed, bestie!

Mister Babadook takes form in an all black ensemble: a stylish long black trench coat with a little top hat. Unfortunately, for all the short kings in the audience, Mister B is towering - over your bed, behind you, and in the corner of your bedroom. Let's get to know this stunning bachelor!

ORIGIN:

The Babadook first got everyone BABASHOOK in October 2016 when user IANSTAGRAM on Tumblr commented "whenever someone says the babadook isn't openly gay it's like?? Did you even watch the movie". And as it is the nature of Tumblr, people started to riff - and boy did they riff. Follow up comments then supported the case - whether it be b/c of the love of drama, the top hat, and the idea of tormenting a white family from outside of the closet - people ate that shit up.

You know, Tumblr - the place I was on from 6th grade to Freshman year of college. The place where I can unironically say that COOL RANCH DORITOS is FOR THE GAYS and someone will riff on it til we actually realise that - yes... COOL RANCH DORITOS *is* for the gays.

Later in December, good ole BBD ended up in the LGBT category on Netflix. Though, Alex Abad-Santos (VOX) wasn't able to actually figure out if it was photoshopped or the genuine thing, as Netflix has yet to respond to their inquiries.

It was generally a Tumblr thing until PRIDE came and it really blasted off on twitter, instagram, and even on the BBD movie page. People were coming to pride dressed as the BBD. Miles Jai showed up to the s9 finale of RuPaul's Drag Race dressed as the BBD. Essentially, everyone was putting their whole BABADUSSY into it.

This meme had a stronghold with the LGBT community, but as sure as taxes and death - corporate twitter/accounts got a hold of it - showing the life and trajectory of a meme all the way to its death in corporate hands.

HOW DID WE GET HERE:

So, now that you know how it started - let's talk about how it stayed afloat. How did that random post from IANSTAGRAM grow into an almost earnest reading of the BBD as a queer icon?

Well let's talk about the director's intent - Jennifer Kent's intent, wasn't to make a gay icon - it was to represent a "need to face the darkness in ourselves and in our lives", according to an interview with Fred Topel. The story is about this: a mother having to cope with the loss of her husband, dealing with her son who is exhibiting 'strange' behaviors, and this sudden assault from an innocuous book character. It was never about the 'Gays' until it was.

If you're at all familiar with the concept of Queer Reading or Queering in combination with Horror/Sci-fi, you might be aware of the presence of several parallels with the treatment and experience of LGBT people and iconic Creatures/Monsters. For example, you might have had a queer reading of Frankenstein or the Phantom (Phantom of the Opera) before.

In Jessica Roy of LATimes's discussion with Michael Bronski (Professor of the Practice in Media and Activism in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality.) points out that: "Frankenstein or The Creature has been read as an allegory for a gay man, hunted down and ostracized by his community for who he is. The Phantom of the Opera hides both himself and his forbidden, unrequitable love."

This queer reading happens outside, for the most part, of all the heinous shit that the BBD does in the book and in 'real life'. It's more a direct reading of the character and *some* of his actions. Karen Tongson of USC states that there was an easy answer to the question of how the Babadook could even be a part of this narrative. She says "He lives in a basement, he's weird and flamboyant, he's living adjacently to a single mother in this kind of queer kinship structure." [...]

In addition to this, the treatment of the Babadook as a concept true to the movie (*grief*) is that he is ignored, relegated to the darkness/closet, pushed away, and fought back against. Karen continues to state that: "For many LGBT people, that's what it feels like to be in your own families sometimes,".

Outside of Queer reading - there is also just the idea that LGBT people have claimed the BBD solely bc of the lack of representation - We don't exist here, so we are going to claim something: we're going to say something is one of us.

I think Erin Orbey puts it together well: pushing this narrative into this random ass space that might not even be relevant to the story itself is fun/funny. J. Bryan Lowder also puts it nicely: "it's "queer cultural terrorism: the aggressive hijacking or cooption of straight culture in a manner meant to tweak or antagonize". It's funny to just insist that the BBD is gay - it doesn't hurt anyone but it sure does piss off Straight people who insist that he couldn't possibly - or that it's not relevant. So what if the BBD's gayness is irrelevant to the story.

But it also kind of makes sense, right? The Babadook is a monster - you run from him, you hide from him, you fight back. You do not want him around b/c he is a monster. You hide him away in your basement and pretend he doesn't exist: closely aligned with the experiences of a lot of gay people, as pointed out by Dean Eastwood of HISKIND magazine.

Basically - even with all the poking fun and the silliness of saying that this fucking terror is GAY - it still rings true somehow with some people - this is the experience of gay men.

Of course - we do need to acknowledge that perhaps this may lead to some feelings of vilification. The Babadook after all is a monster - he's done terrible shit in the movie. He manipulates things physically and mentally - he is literally grief. There's also like... the whole thing where people shipped him with PENNYWISE - you know the clown that terrorises children. The one that's done real deal bad stuff (yes, he's made up).

There's the queer coding of villains which can negatively equate queerness to... well - villainy, evil shit, being monsters. It's the idea of going "this bad person seems gay, so that must mean that gay equals bad" and running wild with it. Is that what the Yassification of the BBD can lead to? Unclear.

The babadook got us all babashook with the babadiscourse.

But anyway - what do I think about all of this? Well - I get it. In a place where you don't see yourself, sometimes you might grasp at straws and just do a little bit of self-inserting. At the same time, if you see a lick of yourself in a character, even in unexpected places it feels good. It feels good to feel included and seen, even if it's representing the parts that you'd like to think less about. If I big brain it - it's about putting yourself where you don't see yourself. If I small brain it... well - god isn't it just funny to say that Godzilla is actually non-binary and dating lesbian icon Mother?

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