



## FICTION SEEPS INTO REALITY: TRAUMATIC MEDIA TEXTS IN *THE BABADOOK* AND *THE RING*

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In *The Babadook* (directed by Jennifer Kent, 2014) and *The Ring* (directed by Gore Verbinski, 2002), seemingly fictional media texts—the *Mister Babadook* book and a mysterious VHS tape—move from the realm of apparent fiction into characters' material and psychological realities. The shift into reality is uncanny for adult characters, who continue to deny and repress the unleashed monstrosities. Their children, who have not yet repressed their animistic beliefs, recognize that the contents of each medium have always been real—an irrational truth the adults must learn in order to survive. In these films, concepts of “fictionality” or “impossibility” aren't enough to keep anyone safe. Each medium's seemingly fictional content increasingly overwhelms the characters' reality, becoming reality itself in the end.

Because these films are media texts themselves, they self-reflexively comment on the experience of viewing horror films. We as viewers might impulsively distance ourselves from their possible reality. Regardless, these films suggest that the media we create and consume has the power to shape our realities, even if the medium's monster doesn't literally appear before us.

*The Babadook* and *The Ring* further explore the role that creating and consuming media texts plays in dealing with real traumatic experiences. In each film, the text is created by a monster who is also portrayed as the victim of a traumatic event. Creating and disseminating media texts appears to be a compulsive response to these painful experiences, propagating the trauma to those who consume the texts. While sharing trauma may or may not alleviate or prevent further pain, the circle of creation, dissemination, and consumption is portrayed as impulsive and existentially necessary.

