

Dr. David Dawson on Spider

Jan 2004

Re: Cronenberg's SPIDER
To: Wendy Douglas Ontario Schizophrenia Society

Hi there, I read with interest your endorsement of SPIDER as a film that has something positive to offer the mental health community. Feb /03

I really disliked the film and couldn't understand that it had anything at all to offer except "This is what might happen to you if you don't take your meds." or "Aren't we lucky it's not the bad old days." Not a really helpful message for most people who believe the worst anyway of everybody who may be diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Here's what someone I've been corresponding with has to say. I'd be pleased to follow up with more takes on the film if you're interested.

Sincerely,
Bruce Saunders - MOVIE MONDAY SOCIETY and
REEL MADNESS FILM FESTIVALS www.islandnet.com/mm

from Dr David Dawson*

.....Meanwhile I finally watched Spider.

I was surprised. That is, I was surprised about Spider as a movie, let alone message and content.

It is incredibly bleak and depressing. Not a single light tone in the whole thing. I guess that is Cronenberg. But I also found it boring in places, especially the first 30 minutes. Although I would love to have his budget and his cinematographer.

The main character, in shuffling, stupifying, mutterings has got to epitomize or symbolize the depth of human despair and degradation. Totally without hope, humour, warmth of any kind.

As bleak and hopeless a message about mental illness as ever there was. It really is simply a horror movie.

As for accuracy... Well, the kid seems to decide his mother has been replaced by a whore before he reaches puberty, maybe what? 11 years old?

A few young men with schizophrenia do kill their mothers. But always, as far as I can tell, between the ages of 18 and 30 after several years of severe illness and dependency on mother. These are young men who are delusional at the same time as resenting their ongoing child-like dependency. Mom becomes the source of evil and pain, even a witch or devil, occasionally with overtones of immorality and whoreishness. Then, trapped in this relationship, they lash out. It can be the father or another member of the family targeted but usually the mother because she is most likely the one always there. And of course I don't think they physically see the mother differently, just experience her differently, begin to believe she is controlling them with something, from vibes to spells to rays. When they do lash out it is with hands, fire or knife (unfortunately one I know with an axe) but never some clever Rube Goldberg plan.

A tiny percentage of people with schizophrenia may do this, and always, today, when not taking their medication.

I think, against Spider, Walter* is full of hope and dignity, and Drummer Boy, despite the ending, is full of warmth, humour, and alternate paths and endings. I can see some Cronenberg fans liking Spider. I have trouble understanding anyone associated with the illness liking Spider.

David

*David presented his MY NAME IS WALTER JAMES CROSS at MM Aug 25 /03

