

## Blu-ray Review: Tilda Swinton Captivates in ‘We Need to Talk About Kevin’

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on June 1, 2012 - 8:22am

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CHICAGO – Many critics failed to take Lynne Ramsay’s “We Need to Talk About Kevin” seriously, dismissing it as an art house retread of “The Omen.” Such a simplistic label fails to take into account the film’s carefully textured portrait of a deeply fractured mother-son relationship. Though the film takes its premise to melodramatic extremes, it does harbor considerable insight into the repercussions of a disconnect between parent and child.

Eva (Tilda Swinton) is the sort of mother who causes strangers to wince while passing her in the supermarket. She can barely contain the intense dislike that she feels for her child. Motherhood is a form of entrapment in her eyes, and her attempts to care for her young son lack any sense of genuine compassion. When she snaps on a hollow smile to calm her crying son, the moment is both chilling and darkly funny. It only gets funnier and more disturbing when Eva finds momentary peace when her child’s incessant screams are drowned out by the sound of street drills.



Blu-ray Rating: **4.0/5.0**

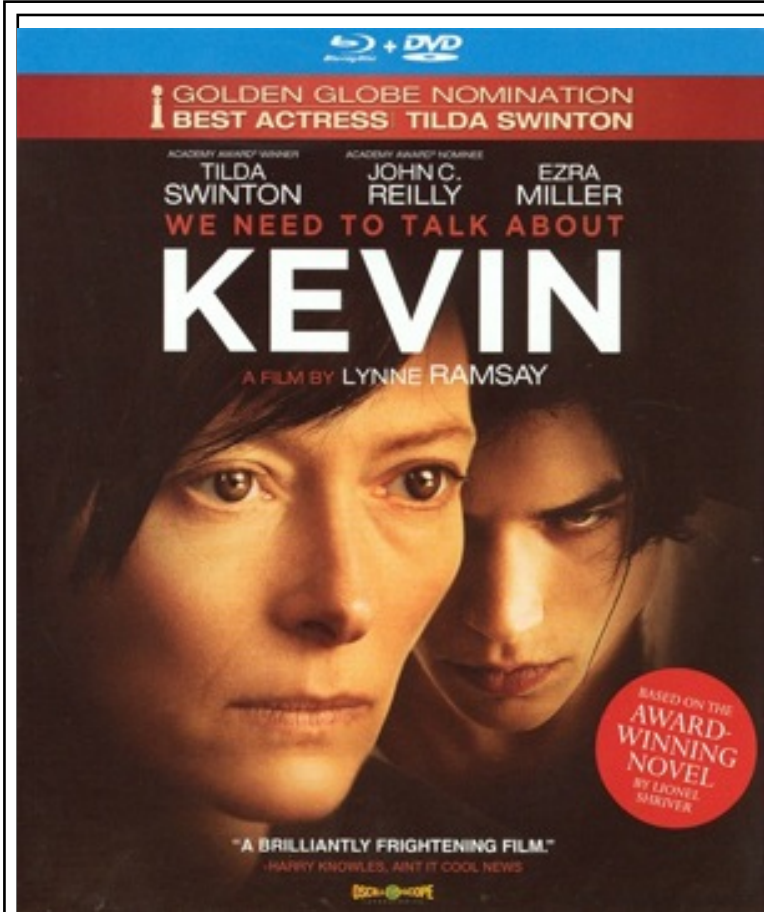
Yes, “Kevin” is over-the-top, but that is its precise intention. There isn’t a frame in the picture that’s meant to take place in a grounded reality. Time doesn’t exist in this heightened vacuum, as evidenced by the repeated image of a clock blinking 12:00. For the entire film, we are lost in the mind of Eva as she struggles to come to terms with a devastating tragedy for which she feels complicit. There’s little suspense as to what tragedy eventually befalls her—it’s clear that her son, Kevin, is a ticking time bomb. What makes the film so riveting is its psychological battle between an unwanted son and his perpetually aloof mother. The film’s use of surrealistic metaphors is reminiscent of Darren Aronofsky’s “Black Swan,” but Ramsay and her cinematographer Seamus McGarvey (“Atonement,” “The Avengers”) have a greater gift for visual poetry.

Some of the most striking imagery draws provocative parallels between Eva and Kevin, such as how the boy’s habit of biting his nails is directly reflected in his mother’s curious disposal of egg shells. A shot aligning Eva’s reflected face with that of her son pays homage to Ingmar Bergman’s depiction of blurred identities in his great 1966 masterpiece, “Persona.” Indeed, as Kevin grows into a teenager (played by Ezra Miller) he starts to resemble a mirror image of his mother. Though the film contains no onscreen violence, the color red is prevalent throughout—witnessed in everything from jam and tomatoes to the splashes of paint that vandalize Eva’s house. When Eva encounters someone whose life was shattered by Kevin’s reprehensible deeds, it’s no coincidence that she chooses to hide behind a shelf stocked with tomato soup. Wherever she goes, the color of blood marks her like a scarlet letter.

Tilda Swinton stars in Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*.*Photo credit: Oscilloscope Laboratories*

What Swinton has done here is provide audiences with a brilliant complement to her work in Luca Guadagnino's captivating 2009 romance, "I Am Love." In both films, she plays a woman desperate to escape her suffocating domestic life at the expense of her family (in both cases, her son suffers the worst). Emma in "Love" and Eva in "Kevin" experience such overwhelming emotions that it's difficult for them to differentiate between their dreams and reality. Whereas "Love" is fueled by Emma's mounting exhilaration as her senses are reawakened to the possibilities of life, "Kevin" reverberates with brooding unease as Eva comes to the sickening realization that she has created a monster. The ravishing beauty and grace of Swinton's features that lit up the screen in "Love" are entirely drained of their vitality in "Kevin." It's as astonishing an immersion as any in Swinton's magnificent career. When two men with briefcases knock on Eva's door to ask where she's spending the afterlife, she replies with matter-of-fact assurance that she's going "straight to hell." Though it's one of the film's funniest lines, the caustic self-loathing in Swinton's deadpan delivery causes any potential laughter to become lodged in viewers' throats.

The film's weakest link is Miller, who's proven in the past to be a tremendously gifted actor, but here overplays his character's diabolical nuances to a near-fatal degree. This is especially disappointing since Miller's debut performance as a budding sociopath in "Afterschool" was remarkably subtle. Yet perhaps Miller was merely taking his cue from the script by Ramsay and Rory Kinnear, which portrays its characters not as they exist but as Eva perceives them. This stylistic approach both enhances and limits the film's overall impact. In Eva's mind, her painfully sweet husband, Franklin (John C. Reilly), is a naïve pushover unwilling to view his son in an unfavorable light. His endless attempts to smooth over any emotional rupture in the household cause him to emerge as an object of contempt in the eyes of his son. Reilly's performance is affecting, but the one-note nature of his character becomes flat-out maddening.





We Need to Talk About Kevin was released on Blu-ray and DVD  
on May 29, 2012.

*Photo credit: Oscilloscope Laboratories*

Another distraction is Ramsay’s overuse of upbeat American pop tunes during brutally grim scenes. In the past, Ramsay has excelled at this ironic juxtaposition. Who can forget her stunning use of The Chordettes’ “Lollipop” in “Ratcatcher,” or her spellbinding montage set to The Mamas and the Papas’ “Dedicated to the One I Love” in “Morvern Callar”? It’s great to see Ramsay back in the director’s chair after an eight-year absence, but in “Kevin,” some of her signature stylistic techniques are beginning to feel distressingly like overkill. Yet for all of its visual flash, “Kevin” is most effective during its final, nakedly honest moments that oddly culminate in the most hopeful ending of any Ramsay film to date.

“We Need to Talk About Kevin” is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio) and includes Blu-ray and DVD versions of the film packaged in a typically sublime case courtesy of Oscilloscope. Extras include 27 minutes of interview snippets with the cast and crew. Miller makes the most insightful observations, saying that the film depicts motherhood like a “primordial wound,” while arguing that Eva and Franklin’s tendency to “hide the truth for the sake of being happy” is a characteristic prevalent in many American families. Swinton says that it was exciting to explore the taboo psyche of a woman whose maternal instinct doesn’t kick in after giving birth to her first child.

It’s a shame that the film’s excellent Cannes press conference isn’t offered on the disc, since it included many intriguing theories from the ever-eloquent Swinton, who suggested that Eva “gave birth to her own violence.” Instead, this set offers a 17-minute Swinton interview that never once mentions “Kevin,” but still provides great insight into the actress’s technique. It’s the disconnect between thought and speech that most interests Swinton, thus allowing her face to convey what her inarticulate mouth cannot. In an all-too-brief interview, “Kevin” author Lionel Shriver insists that she wanted to take a hands-off approach to the film adaptation in order for Ramsay to present her own distinctive vision. Rounding out the extras are bonus trailers for A-grade Oscilloscope releases such as James Whitaker’s “Rebirth” and Lance Daly’s “Kisses.”

*‘We Need to Talk About Kevin’ is released by Oscilloscope Laboratories and stars Tilda Swinton, John C. Reilly, Ezra Miller, Jasper Newell, Rock Duer, Ashley Gerasimovich and Siobhan Fallon. It was written by Lynne Ramsay and Rory Kinnear and directed by Lynne Ramsay. It was released on May 29, 2012. It is rated R.*



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By [MATT FAGERHOLM](#) [14]  
Staff Writer  
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://HollywoodChicago.com)  
[matt@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:matt@hollywoodchicago.com) [13]

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