



Split, the particularity of differences

Description

A story where plural takes on all its meaning

By **Luc Archambault**

M. Night Shyamalan had a film career made of ups and downs. Following a series of uninteresting films, he gives us *Split*, featuring James McAvoy, Anya Taylor-Joy and Betty Buckley. The story centres on the characters played by McAvoy. Here, the plural takes centre stage because the actor has to embody a man suffering from multiple personalities. Kevin hosts 23 different identities, ranging from the controlling Barry, the very feminine Patricia, the young Hedwig, Dennis the stalker, to the 'Beast', another personality who wants to deliver the world of 'untouchables', those who have impure hearts. During an episode when he takes control of Kevin's body, Dennis stalks and then kidnaps three young teenage girls.



Kevin hides in a maze of corridors and locked rooms. One recognizes here the usual Shyamalan technique of disorienting both his characters and the audience. We shall learn only at the very end the true location of this lair. The three teenage girls are kept locked away into a tiny room, and their only contact with the outside world is Kevin, through his multiple personalities. The only other setting in the story is the office of Dr. Fletcher (played by Betty Buckley), Kevin's psychiatrist. For there is a struggle for control between the different personalities of Kevin, and one of them, Barry, serves as a gate-keeper, deciding which one is allowed to manifest itself.

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Caught up in a panic by Kevin's actions, Barry sends a volley of emails to Dr. Fletcher, demanding an emergency appointment. But it isn't Barry who shows up, it's Dennis, who dismisses the emails. Dr. Fletcher then understands the turmoil in Kevin's inner life. Dennis even goes so far as to mention the existence of the Beast to his psychiatrist. Alarmed, she decides to visit Kevin, only to be captured, drugged and killed by the Beast, who then turns his attention to the three teenagers.



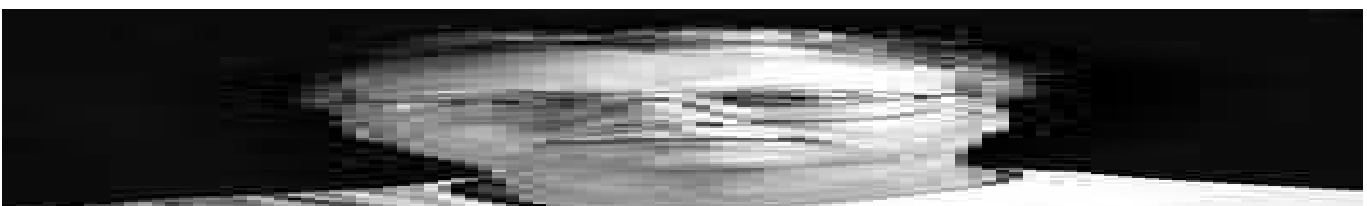
With the use of flashbacks, we learn that one of them, Casey, became an orphan at an early age and was adopted by an uncle who molested her. The scars of these abuses are noticed by the Beast who declares her 'pure'. She takes advantage of this opportunity to escape. Kevin disappears also while Casey is returned to her uncle. Imagine my surprise when, in the final scene, a character drawn straight from one of Shyamalan's previous films, *Unbreakable*, appears unexpectedly opening the door to another sequel.

With *Split*, he relies on a major talent, actor James McAvoy, who plays all the split personalities with a flicker of differences, to perfection.

It was known that Shyamalan wanted to shoot two sequences to his film *Unbreakable*, so the unexpected end of the film did not baffle me. But it seems to me that Shyamalan's narrative talents aren't best served on a long storyline. With *Split*, he relies on a major talent, actor James McAvoy, who plays all the split personalities with a flicker of differences, to perfection. This is highly risky business. But he's able to convince the audience of every distinct mannerism displayed by the diverse characters. This is incredible talent. And to accept such a dark role, especially after having played positive heroes in the past, shows true commitment on his part.

In spite of the uneven plot, run to see this movie for his performance. This alone is well worth the price of the ticket.

Images: courtesy of Universal Pictures





Luc Archambault

Writer and journalist, globe-trotter at heart, passionate about movies, music, literature and contemporary dance, came back to Montreal to pursue his unrelenting quest for artistic meaning.

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