

Review and personal commentary for **Everybody In Our Family (Toata Lumea Din Familia Noastra)** director RADU JUDE – written by Ioana Salagean for Kinematrix 21.02.2012.

Production details:

Title: Everybody in Our Family – Toata Lumea Din Familia Noastra.

Section: Berlinale Forum 2012.

Catalogue Page: 215.

Nationality: Romanian – a Romanian/Dutch Co-Production.

Producer: Ada Solomon, HiFilm.

DOP: Andrei Butica.

Script: Radu Jude, Corina Sabau.

CAST:

Marius- Serban Pavlu

Sofia – Sofia Nicolaescu

Otilia – Mihaela Sarbu

Aurel – Gabriel Spahiu

Coca – Tamara Buciuceanu-Botez

Mrs. Vizureanu – Stela Popescu

Mr. Vizureanu – Alexandru Arsinel.

Interview- None.

Sales Agent in Berlin: FILMS BOUTIQUE

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Articles quoted for research:

JAY WEISSBERG's – review of the film in Variety:

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117947087/>

DAN FAINARU's –review of the film in Screen International.

<http://www.screendaily.com/reviews/the-latest/everybody-in-our-family/5038012.article>

NEIL YOUNG's review in Hollywood Reporter.

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/everybody-family-berlin-film-review-290027>

Brief Synopsis:

The film focuses on one day in the life of Marius: unhappy, divorced and frustrated for not being able to obtain custody over his daughter Sofia. After quarrelling with his parents he makes his way to his daughter's house where now his ex-wife, Otilia, and her present partner, Aurel, live. Marius has given up his property to them. His intention is to take his little girl, Sofia, for a brief holiday trip to the seaside. Tensions rise when Marius and Aurel engage in a fight, which turns out mildly violent. Otilia returns home, refuses to let Sofia be part of the trip and threatens Marius with an executor order and then calls the police. What started as a breath -taking fight over personal entitlement, anxiety over their ruined relationship and waves of culpability vis-à-vis their daughter's upbringing and personal happiness, becomes a story of kidnapping and domestic violence with an edge. All in low key. With the police practically at his back, Marius must find a way out, which is far from easy. In return, we learn many sides of a truth we cannot completely grasp to the fullest.

For all its bombastic mishaps, occasionally obtuse rhythm and a rather masochistic misuse of filmic length, Radu Jude's second feature **Everybody In Our Family (Toata Lumea Din Familia Noastra)** deserves a strong line of defense and a more balanced appreciation among audiences and critics worldwide. Neither the immensely predictable choice for intimate camera lenses, nor the obfuscating (p)reference for yet another visual example of copycat tour de force in search for austere aesthetics (à la roumaine) can rob the film from its genuine boldness (at least in terms of subject matter and aim), occasional glimpses of originality, charisma and emancipating efforts to deliver some kind of authenticity, a sort of believable feeling in and out of the screen.

Positionality within the industry and the national contemporary production:

From the point of view of historicity, this latest release, at this year's edition of The Berlin Film Festival (February 2012), marks an important landmark in the momentum of the erroneously baptized 'Romanian New Wave'. Luckily, the primary focus has shifted, and it needs to be said, for the better. Instead of the traumatic revisiting of the unsettling past of the Revolution and beyond; contemporary directors are more and more interested in the microcosm; the so called 'cell' of Romania's post-transitional society. At a moment when an enduring part of the population is still protesting in the main square, asking for the corrupt Government to resign; it is important to expect a more actively engaged or a pro-active cinema, stepping through the ashes of clichéd stories and pavlovian class A festival responses. The 'hits' of Romanian cinema have been building up an uncanny algorithm of trauma and reword and a far too simplified and overused recipe for success. There is scope for change, as the last five years have already demonstrated with the advent of bringing new names on the big List. One fact is clear: Romanian Film must change in order to accommodate and create space for new, emerging talent; directors, who by and large, ought not affiliate to anything more generic other than their own individuality. Until this situation will improve and will become a 'normal state', much work still needs to be done and everyone within the industry will surely play a major role in making it all possible.

Radu Jude as a new Romanian talent:

In this, rather grim and indeed 'austere' landscape, Radu Jude's name stands out as sufficiently promising, at least for the time being. In all his previous films, including this one, Jude attempts to create a more personal and personalized approach to film and storytelling, regardless of the fact that he hasn't reached maturity on a more conceptual, formal or aesthetic level. In general, his films are imbued with a particular sense of humor, warmth and freshness that many of his contemporaries seem to lack.

The Film:

Everybody In Our Family, manages to maintain a certain kind of stamina until the end. Lacking the uninspiring didacticism of films such as Loverboy (Dir. Catalin Mitulescu) or If I Want To Whistle, I Whistle (Dir. Florin Serban and ex Berlinale

Silver Bear Winner), this film creates a far more complex portrayal of the crisis and situational near-dementia prevalent in quite a few ordinary Romanian middle-class families, to this day. The way, the film operates, however, is far more intricate and surprising than many films with a similar background or theme. Understanding Jude's pivotal usage of inter-relational explorations, situations and meanings becomes vital for the actual interpretation of the film. As in the past, Jude's strength lies in a subtle, yet adequate mastering of character's psychology and character's interaction on screen. By keeping an eye on the twists and turns of a couple in decline; we are noticing a far more complicated unfolding and decay in human relationships, more generally. This taste of parental inadequacy becomes tailor made for a society, which has become endemically inadequate in and for itself. Jude's strength lies in the lucidity with which he handles not only the small corpus of actors and crew but also the efficacy and hyperbolic quality of the language and effervescent use of dialogue, mostly 'invisible' in the 'as good as it can get', English translation.

Reception in the International Press and subsequent thoughts in response:

In his article, Neil Young dismisses the film on grounds of ferocious implausibility (see Neil Young in *Hollywood Reporter*). Other critics such as Jay Weissberg, writing for *Variety* and Dan Fainaru (*Screen International*) complain about the lack of structure or the somewhat centrifugal spinning of the action until no end. While, it is true that the film's overall's structure is not the strongest, formally, one of the greatest assets of the film, in my view, is dutifully represented by its depiction of nuanced plausibility.

Violence in the film compared with real life situations:

It is important to specify that, by and large, the violent outcome in this film is totally possible, mostly believable and utterly convincing in its absurdity. Domestic violence is a serious, understated issue in Romania; such as the permanent conflicts or tensions caused by generational gaps; the blatant inefficiency of public services etc. For example, *Everybody (...)* makes a very thoughtful, vibrant and subtle portrayal of gross inoperability of public services in ways that are perhaps more intelligent than a direct treatment like the one we see in *Police, Adjective* (dir. Corneliu Porumboiu) or even *The Death of Mister Lazarescu* (dir. Cristi Puiu). In fact, it is not at all implausible that the police is not breaking the door to come to the rescue of Sofia (Nicolaescu) or to free the abused ex-wife Otilia (Mihaela Sarbu) and spends an awful amount of time (as we see in various shots) interrogating their neighbors. The modus operandi of police investigations or indeed the incredibly outdated legislative system and/or faulty legislation makes it almost impossible for ordinary citizens to be entitled to any prompt, adequate help from the authorities, as soon as they find themselves in the likely position of becoming victims. The film does not deal with this matter specifically and by not dealing ends up expressing it, really well. This situation, while seemingly positioned as merely contextual - bears enormous relevance in relation to contemporary Romanian society, more broadly. This endemic inefficiency is, actually, at the crux of things both in the microcosm of the family milieu; as well as in the macrocosm of a soul-destroying society. In all senses, the problem ends up being overtly structural. Everything is important since we know that the devil is in the details. Until the end, we meet even greater cases of corruption and inefficiency and we learn that all is there for a reason. That reason may seem obtrusive or confusing at

times but it works only to deconstruct the way we are thought to see the world, inflexed by binary oppositions: good and bad, right and wrong etc.

In a later part of the film, Marius accuses Otilia of bribing the Judge in order to obtain Sofia's custody. In other words, he sustains that she considers a given, a natural right, something she previously obtained via speculation of illicit means. We don't see any real evidence for this; yet we don't see any compelling action from Otilia, in order to build her own defense against these accusations. Structurally, Marius's allegation of Otilia's injustice is as believable and as plausible as anything else in the film.

Last, but not least, at the pharmacy when Marius is wounded in his forehead we notice how incredibly unprofessional and disrespectful the pharmacists treat him and we understand the fiber of his society right away. Total indiscretion on the one side, peppered with stagnant lack of care on the other, and the basic ingredients for the film's grim finale are ready.

The Film as a Project of Anti-Dichotomies:

For Dan Fainaru, the film seems to be a mere social critique of immoral human behavior, a treatment that functions as a warning sign to the fact that we all have animal/violent impulses or tendencies and that, as a matter of fact, the beast lies within us. (See Fainaru's review in Screen International). Such a reading of the film is a little bit fortuitous and inexact, in my opinion. It does not do justice to the anti-manichean project, which Jude seems to undertake, consciously or unconsciously.

Non Dichotomy:

The issue here is not about a compassionate message or about delimitating right from wrong, black from white, woman (victim) from man (aggressor). Jude, intentionally blurs the action and the information we receive so that it becomes almost impossible for the viewer to take sides in this violent innuendo. The greatest potential from this film lies precisely in the impossibility on behalf of the spectator to completely align with any of the characters and embrace them from a moral or ethical standpoint. Violence, here, is certainly not portrayed gratuitously. This can be exemplified by the numerous times in which Marius does not hit Otilia, nor does he mean to physically abuse his daughter. There is as much violence, as there is self-control, one could say.

What is the point of rejecting dichotomies?

Overall, the premises of the plot might be turning towards a questioning of truth or better yet not wanting truth to exist on its own, in an abstract form. We have Marius's truth, Otilia's truth, even Sofia's truth and none of these truths are **T H E T R U T H** inasmuch as none of these characters are truly innocent (including Sofia, who as much as we might like or empathize with in terms of her positionality, she is shown not telling the truth in relation to actions which we have seen previously on screen). In fairness, Sofia is not our barometer of truth, yet she is the character we look most compassionately towards, since she is the most vulnerable. This film actively avoids impeding on the spectator in relation to ideas of 'reality' or 'truth'.

The point lies not in the identification with the character of the weak, the feminine, the abused (etc.) and solely condemn the figure of the active, abusive, masculine/ The point is that both behaviors are uniquely condemnable and wrong, yet undisociable from their cause and effect relationships. There is no good behavior per se, there is only behavior with its implications but not just 'the beast within us'. Not accidentally, the film's title sparks out of a morality discussion, taking place earlier in the film. Sofia is asking Marius about death and the repartition between heaven and hell. The girl is in search of an understanding of behavior and morality, a certain code, which she can follow in order to be redeemed. As per tradition, and in a lightly recognizable sarcastic way with Jude, this paradigm is exemplified by religious discourse. Sofia wants to find out who from her family will go to hell and who is destined for heaven. Marius replies that most likely everyone from their family is likely to go to heaven, (henceforth the title pun Everybody From Our Family) except, perhaps his 'evil uncle' (a characteristic Judean joke). Nobody will go to hell, because, frankly and empirically, there is no need for anyone to do so. Daily life might be just enough.