Tragedy after Farce: Family Relations in Capitalism and the Postsocialist Generational Gap in Radu Jude's *Everybody in Our Family*

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Abstract: : Capitalism didn't only change relations of production in postsocialist economies, but it changed, rather abruptly, the ways of communication between generations, which complicated the transition to a market economy. In this article I analyze Radu Jude's Everyone in Our Family (2012), paying close attention to the way in which New Romanian Cinema translated these changes into film language and style. In the process I will also look at the way in which the heritage of socialism was negotiated by the postsocialist generation, and the way in which postsocialist adults dealt with the traditionalism and patriarchy embedded in child-parent relationships.
Keywords: postsocialism, communism, Romanian new wave, gender roles, Radu Jude.

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A surprisingly large number of Romanian New Wave films focus on relationships between parents and their adult children, and almost all the directors who belong stylistically to the so-called New Wave movement, from Cătălin Mitulescu and Florin Șerban to Cristian Mungiu and Călin Peter Netzer, have at one point or another in their careers focused critically on these relationships. In this article I discuss the reasons this topic became an important part of Radu Jude's early work in the decades following the overthrow of the socialist regime, and the causes that perchance underlie the development of the generational conflict as portrayed in one of his earliest films, *Everybody in Our Family* (*Toată lumea din familia noastră*), made in 2012.

Throughout my close reading of Jude's film, I will focus on the way in which the transition to capitalism affected parent-children's relationships both between the protagonist and his pre-school daughter, whose custody he was forced to give up following an ugly divorce, but also between the protagonist and his middle-aged parents. Furthermore, I will look at the way in which capitalist relations transformed the egalitarianism of the socialist era[1] into a society ripe with greed, which in turn caused familial and social bonds to shatter under the pressure of wealth accumulation, or at least its illusory pursuit. I also suggest that the protagonist's parents are a metonymy for obsolescence and that the protagonist, despite trying to avoid his parents' fate—through choices that he doesn't fully understand—becomes the very mirror image of his patriarchal and autocratic parents. Finally, I will draw attention to the ways in which capitalism rendered risible the representatives of socialism in the postsocialist era, namely those individuals who have been identified as

the "losers" of the transition to capitalism. While the progression from patriarchy to a family modeled on the principles of modernity might appear as an appropriate one in the context of Westernization—which Romanian society pursued relentlessly since the anticommunist revolution—I will promote a reading of Jude's film which examines the side effects this process had caused, namely the damage incurred by the societal and particularly the familial fabric in the postsocialist context.

Everybody in Our Family is a multi-character study and multilayered analysis of parenting predicated on social changes intervening in the transition from socialism to capitalism, as it takes place among shifting axiology and fast-changing social markers via which the director is able to show not only the disintegration of traditional values, but also, and more importantly, the dysfunctionality of human relations in postsocialism. The plot is centered on recently divorced Marius Vizureanu, a thirtysomething professor, dentist, and bachelor, who has been legally ordered by a judge to only visit his preschool daughter Sofia 15 days a year. A victim of economic precariousness, Marius borrows his father's car in order to take his daughter to the seaside, as part of a pre-approved deal between him and his ex-wife Otilia. Citing Sofia's incipient cold, however, Otilia, together with her aged mother and her boyfriend Aurel, strongly oppose Marius' intentions, and, using somewhat aggressive behavior, don't allow the daughter and father to make the trip. This spurs Marius on a violent spree in which he beats up Aurel and ties him and Otilia up, sequestering them together with Otilia's old mother in their own apartment. Escaping the arrival of the police on the scene, Marius gets away through the bathroom window, but hurts himself in the process. After his pained escape and a lengthy run on Bucharest streets, he lands in a pharmacy where he receives some medical care from a female pharmacist and her daughter, who are shocked to see Marius bleeding profusely from his broken temple. The film ends with the pharmacy security guard comforting Marius and telling him to "get up and walk," making once an ironic and sarcastic reference to Lazarus' biblical character.

In New Wave minimalist style, the film makes sparse use of locations, employing only a few spaces in its diegesis: Marius' studio; a Bucharest market; his parents' flat; a couple of streets seen from the window of his car; a flower kiosk; Otilia's apartment (where most of the action takes place); and a pharmacy in the film finale. Most times, Jude's camera is participative to the action, staying close to the characters, which makes the action appear claustrophobic. This feeling is rendered even more intense by a camera that is most times hand-held, shaking and moving excitedly during adrenaline-pumping scenes which depict Marius' violent behavior. Editing is sparse, the director clearly preferring to let the camera roll when the action moves from one room to another, or when he chooses to follow a certain character over another. Filming through door frames and window frames is another preferred directorial method, which further increases the claustrophobia. The only shots offering breathing space are those of Marius seen cycling through the streets of Bucharest to his parents' flat in the beginning of the film (before he borrows their car), and those of him running on sidewalks, once he makes his narrow escape at the end. The effect of Jude's directorial style creates naturalistic realism and makes the actions of his characters not only believable but very effective.

Focusing on parental dysfunction in Romanian society, American anthropologist David Kideckel finds the absence of the father in family life important for various aspects of a postsocialist, post-dictatorial society. In Romania's case, he states that the lack of a paternal figure is due to the politics of authoritarianism that was inherited from the socialist period, in which the figure of the father was replaced by that of Ceaușescu's own.[2] Other authors discussing Romanian New Wave cinema equally address the issue of the absent father. In this sense, Bogdan Popa discusses the topic of blame that comes up in various postsocialist films and illustrates with an appropriate a scene in Cristi Puiu's *Cigarettes and Coffee* in which a father is interviewed by the son in order to get a job in the new capitalist economy.[3] The motif also comes up in Peter Netzer's film *The Medal of Honor* in which the son (who has emigrated to Canada) turns against his aging father (played by iconic veteran actor Victor Rebengiuc, as in Puiu's film), and blames the latter for denouncing the former to the socialist militia before the fall of the regime.

The centrality of the absent father motif is furthermore supported by its relevance in a long series of New Wave Romanian films such as Florin Șerban's *If Want to Whistle I Whistle* (*Eu când vreau să fluier, fluier*, 2010), in which the role of the father is replaced by that of a dominant mother figure. In fact, following the immediate birth of the New Wave in 2001 with Cristi Puiu's *Stuff and Dough*, which is generally accepted to mark the beginning of the movement,[4] filmmakers focused on ever more detailed aspects of parent-children relationships, exploring the dysfunctional aspect of either parental absence or abuse. If Mitulescu's intent in his pioneering work, *How I Celebrated the End of the World* (*Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii*, 2006), isn't so much to criticize the patriarchy of his protagonist's parents, as much as treat it with something akin to benign nostalgia, in Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*, 2007), the parents' patronizing attitude vis-à-vis their children's needs (recall the dinner table conversation) describes the widening gap between generations even before the demise of socialism. This gap turns to abuse in Jude's first feature film, *The Happiest Girl in the World* (*Cea mai fericită fată din lume*, 2009), when the parents force their daughter to give up a car

that she had just won in a lottery contest in order to fulfill their own egocentric needs. Finally, dysfunctionality is writ large in Călin Peter Netzer's *Child Pose* (*Poziția copilului*, 2013), in which an emasculated father becomes a secondary figure in the conflict between a domineering mother and her adult child. Involved in a traffic accident that took the life of a kid, Barbu's mother in the film (played by Luminița Gheorghiu) manipulates her son together with the entire establishment of the corrupt Romanian police force to get her son off the hook in an investigation that would have caused him punishment by incarceration.

Contributing to this trend, Radu Jude's *Everybody in Our Family* details the inner development of a family that, following a brutal divorce, experiences the absence of the father in a young daughter's life, all the while depicting the presence of the most brutal and, at the same time, detailed account of patriarchy, abuse, and eccentricity ever probably captured in a Romanian postsocialist film.[5]

The movie starts by observing a sleeping Marius (wearing only his underwear), sprawled out on a single bed situated at one side of an untidy, dimly-lit room. The amalgamation of books, an eating bowl, cables and DVDs placed on various shelves, as well as a Che Guevara poster on the wall, in possible reference to the protagonist's generation, all have a suffocating effect. The mood is brooding, as the late morning sun coming through the Venetian blinds barely lights up Marius as he starts to frantically make a phone call on his cell. The beginning creates immediate tension, and the aural background, suggesting the busy life of a city in which honks and construction noises are heard intermittently, adds a sense of pressure to this mood. As the person on the other end doesn't answer the phone, Marius mutters a vulgarity and hangs up, pointing to the abusiveness of everyday language, and the central conflict of the film, which will focus from this point forward on Marius' relationship with his ex-wife.

All the actions Marius undertakes in his apartment are edited as to appear unfinished, thus giving the film an alert rhythm from the beginning. The director cuts rapidly between the protagonist moving about his room and sitting on the toilet, holding a bag of ice to his head while smoking a cigarette, probably in reference to a hangover. The same editing is used as Marius is seen through the door frame of the balcony fixing the seat on a bike.

A quick cut to the next sequence shows Marius energetically yet contentedly biking through the morning streets of Bucharest. The fact that he is the only biker in a street full of motorized vehicles references both the consumer-oriented society in which he lives, as well as his self-chosen isolation from his surroundings. Additionally, the fact that he carries a plastic-made toy octopus on the seat of his bike while wearing a travelling backpack make him appear like an outcast in a city obsessed with speed and accumulation. His humming of Pink Floyd's lyrics "Ticking away the moments that make up a dull day.../ Waiting for someone or something to show you the way" further points to the character's isolation and disorientation in an environment in which he feels ill at ease. Only two cuts segment this minute-and-a-half long take, which otherwise shows Marius enjoying his bubble of intimacy in the midst of the pressure created by the surrounding traffic. Despite eventually focusing on the protagonist's relationships with his ex-wife and daughter, the film continues with a 10-minute-long scene in which Marius visits his aging socialist-era parents. Because it is central to the subsequent development of the plot, the scene needs careful analysis.

After Marius opens the door to his parents' flat with his own keys (signaling strong familial ties typical of Eastern European and Balkan cultures), he is greeted by his mother, who is wearing a pair of blue pajamas. Referencing an age-old expression that, in Asian style, has almost become a form of greeting ("Have you eaten?"), she pressures him to stay despite Marius' protests that he has little time. Marius' father, whom his wife affectionately calls Maurice (a detail intended to point out the resemblance between father and son), soon joins them intoning a parody of Nat King Cole's *Mona Lisa* in a sad projection of bonhomie. He is wearing a denim baseball cap and a T-shirt, under which he tries to hide his advancing age and dwindling masculinity. When his mother again asks Marius to stay, his father shows his manipulative side, aggressively butting in that Marius doesn't know what he wants, and convincing him to have coffee after protesting that their son spends too little time with his parents anyway. His parents' demeanor and apparent control over him have the effect of temporarily shutting down Marius, who turns somewhat docile in contrast to the alertness he exhibited in the opening shots.

The scene continues in the kitchen, as many scenes in Romanian New Wave films do,[6] where the two men sit at a table covered with a plastic tablecloth in a small room plastered with white tiles, both typical of working-class socialist-era apartments. There is also a Christian Orthodox calendar hanging on the wall, further referencing the parents' traditionalism, which, as it will become clear later, comes into conflict with Marius' more refined worldview. Jude's particular choice of mise-en-scène and figure behavior points to the patriarchal order in Romanian society. The mother stands near the cooking stove, while the two men are seated, even though all three are located in the same room. This highlights the relegation of women to domestic chores, while the focus rests on the men who are usually involved in chatter.

When he finds out the reason for Marius' visit (to borrow their car for his daughter), Maurice immediately uses his advantage to accuse the son of not having won custody of his daughter in court, implying that Marius is not manly enough, and scolding him for failing to

stand up to his ex-wife, Otilia, whom he calls "a bitch." Revealing one of his inner contradictions that will become apparent later in the film, despite tacitly agreeing with his father, Marius defends his ex-wife against Maurice's demeaning behavior. While this inner contradiction renders his character more believable, it may also point to issues describing Marius' generation, which appears hemmed in between the traditionalism of the past and the oftentimes brutal prerequisites of life in capitalism. The two men trade insults when Maurice offers himself as an example of healthy masculinity, which in turn attracts Marius' disapproval of his father's old-fashioned thinking on grounds that the son believes in modernity and justice. Detecting the guilt-baiting which his father employs in order to manipulate him even in his adult age, Marius justifiably reacts angrily, renouncing his request to the car. As he leaves in a rampage, his mother follows him outside the apartment building in her pajamas and convinces him to take the keys after all.

This rich scene reveals the ambivalence of child-parent relationships in an economic environment in which adult children can't stand on their own without their parents' help, while signaling problems surrounding parenting in postsocialism at large. Moreover, judging from Maurice's patriarchal behavior, we soon understand that the parental manipulation Marius was subjected to while growing up is affecting his current behavior towards his ex-wife and daughter. Finally, Marius' initial refusal to stay longer in his parents' house suggests that conflicts of the type we have just witnessed have happened before. It is probably for this reason that, despite strong emotional ties between parents and child, the interactions between Marius and his parents have been reduced to banal material and mercantile exchanges (such as the act of borrowing a car) which point to the parents' redundancy in the capitalist age except as material providers.

Aside from showing the troubled mechanics of family patterns in postsocialism, Jude's choice of actors is a direct socio-political comment. It becomes evident that the parents' background has been strongly impacted by the morals of the socialist era, because the actors playing Marius' parents are the uber-famous Romanian comedy duo Alexandru Arșinel and Stela Popescu. As Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr correctly observe, the actors were famous for audiences of all ages in the socialist era, as they played characters involved in domestic rows, which appealed to a sense of national neurosis.[7] Gorzo and Lazăr further connect the parents' bickering in their television sketches to Marius' fighting with his ex-wife in Jude's film, making the valid point that Marius has Arșinel's "comically short fuse" temperament, which in the film acquires, however, an almost tragic dimension.[8] In that, Marius does not only mirror the traditionalism of his parents, but, in an ironically perverted way, also Marx's comment on history, albeit with a twist: It is not so much that history repeats itself first as tragedy, and the second time as farce, but the other way around. If the duo's TV Sketches were already farcical during socialism, what we see in postsocialism with Marius' behavior in Jude's film is the real face of tragedy. With the elapsed interval between socialism and postsocialism, farce becomes in retrospect a prefiguration of tragedy.

Referencing a comment about the influence of history on the lives of successive Eastern European generations, this interpretation also fulfills Yvette Biro's prophetic commentary on the cinema of Andrzej Wajda and Miklos Jancso. Mentioning the inability of Polish and Hungarian societies to get rid of their heavy historical burden marked by wars and revolutions, Biro comments that both Wajda's and Jancso's films "inexorably embody the destiny of their countries: tragedy."[9] In that sense, the repetition of abuse and neglect which Marius reenacts in his family replicates his own upbringing. Jude's film brings to mind in that sense one of Bela Tarr's early dramas, *Prefab People* (Tarr, 1982), in which we also witness the disintegration of a family due to the erratic behavior of an absentee father. Although Tarr does not delve as prominently in self-ironic satire as Jude does, the Hungarian director also makes oblique references to a preordained Eastern European condition that subjects his characters to a type of reality, which, through its "constantly threatening cataclysms,"[10] predisposes characters to defeatism and melodrama. The fact that Jude's film pays silent homage to earlier socialist-era films like Tarr's doesn't only reposition tragedy as a possible outcome of conflicts involving generational divides, but also places Jude's film squarely within the larger context of Eastern European cinema in which, following the motifs, themes, and style employed by earlier Romanian, Hungarian, and Polish filmmakers, it unmistakably belongs.

Reinforcing his father's accusation of financial insecurity, immediately after leaving his parents' apartment, Jude shows his protagonist engaging in a series of mercantile exchanges with Bucharest cheap market vendors. One of these exchanges is of particular importance as a female merchant is verbally abused by a customer transitorily seen in the background. The latter tells her to use more deodorant as she is "stinking up the place." This describes the dominant condition of the classes that make up postsocialist-era Bucharest, especially because the shot is framed so as to claustrophobically feature the vendor's desk overflowing with cheaply made goods, mostly made of plastic. This references the abundance of bad-taste capitalism, but also the precarious condition of postsocialist denizens who were left behind by the transition to capitalism. The scene also serves to comment on the radical re-orientation of the Soviet-styled economy in which Marius' parents grew up to one in which the effects of capitalism bring about precariousness for low and middle-income families, like that from which our protagonist hails.

This precariousness is further emphasized when, driving from his parents' apartment to that of his ex-wife, Marius is approached by a young man who offers to wipe his windshield while his car is stopped at a traffic light. Using strong language, Marius intimidates the young man, trying to get rid of him but, at the latter's insistence, ends up giving him some change as a consolation act. The scene shows the stratification of the poor in postsocialism: while both are victims of the capitalist transition, Marius relishes his perceived superiority over the young man, who has to stoop even lower than him in order to make ends meet. The scene also shows the essential similarity between all members of society who do not belong to the privileged or the nouveau riche classes, which, although never presented at face value in any of Jude's films, act as a sort of imagined community which is seen in contrast to the ubiquitous one of poverty. This well-to-do yet imagined community represents therefore a hierarchical level to which members of the Romanian middle class aspire (Marius' ex-wife included) yet can never reach.

At Otilia's apartment, he is greeted by Coca, Marius' ex-mother-in-law, played by socialist-era actress Tamara Buciuceanu-Botez in an untypical role: that of an aging pensioner whose quiet life contrasts greatly with the tomfooleries of her former life on-screen. Although Buciuceanu, like Popescu and Arșinel, was a household name following her comedic parts in made-for-TV sketches and popular comedies, the face she shows the world here is one of desolation. In that sense, Jude's choice of actress further references the transformation of farce into tragedy discussed in the case of Marius' parents: Just as Popescu and Arșinel's characters have been rendered useless to their adult children except in their availability to provide material help, Coca is relegated to playing the unglamorous role of being a live-in maid for her pampered niece. Jude's choice of actors subliminally comments on the injustice of relegating symbolical authority figures (Buciuceanu played a teacher in Nicolae Corjos' *The Graduates* (*Liceenii*, 1986) and visible social actors who played important roles in the socialist era to parts that (with the intervention of anticommunism during the transition) became unglorified and lacking in dignity when contrasted to their former lives as socialist-era icons.

The fact that Jude is indeed concerned with the fate of socialist-era popular figures in postsocialism is reinforced by his use of Dorina Lazăr and Laszlo Miske as side characters in his social realist drama condemning capitalist work ethics *Don't Expect Too Much from the End of the World (Nu aștepta prea mult de la sfârșitul lumii,* 2023). In this film the two stars of the eighties' drama *Angela Drives On (Angela merge mai departe*, 1981*)* directed by Lucian Bratu play the unglamorous parents of an employee who goes on television to ask for worker compensation rights in a desperate appeal addressed to a reimbursement-program-cum-degrading-reality-show sponsored by an Austrian production company. Indeed, the compensation that the injured worker expects in the film mirrors the lack of (affective) compensation that socialist-era film starts find in capitalism in reward for their service for the last socialist generation onscreen.

During the first part of the scene taking place in his ex-wife's apartment, Marius is particularly civil and well-behaved with Coca and Aurel. (He even brings Coca a potted flower, which he bought after haggling with a kiosk vendor; and makes a visible effort to treat Aurel well). The camera follows him at close range as he travels the geography of the rather spacious apartment, most likely a 1950s building, decorated in Western taste. The space contrasts strongly with both his own small studio and his parent's crammed, late-socialist era apartment. This immediately puts Marius at a disadvantage in contrast to his ex-wife, who commands more security and space in which she can accommodate her mother, daughter, and boyfriend.

As she is making the bed, Coca lets Marius know that his daughter is sick; running a fever after she had just returned from a trip from Greece, and still sleeping. The jerky camera peeking at the scene from behind Marius' back—as it does throughout the rest of the scenes in the apartment—adds to the contingency and instability of the situation. As Aurel (played by iconic New Wave actor Gabriel Spahiu) enters the room, we learn that Otilia is at a cosmetics parlor and is unreachable by phone. This suggests that Otilia is a product of capitalist relations, and her indulgence in physical well-being represents a commentary on the social transformations intervening between the lackluster character of the socialist economy and capitalism. Furthermore, her absence and commitment to something as frivolous as treating her own ingrown nail while her daughter is allegedly sick help prefigure Otilia's character as that of a somewhat distant, and even possibly uncaring mother, even though that does not necessarily turn out to be the case during the rest of the film.

Mirroring the avoidance of his own parents, under the pretext of going to the bathroom, Marius slips into Sofia's room, and wakes her up despite Coca's and Aurel's instructions. There is a visible disconnect between daughter and father when they first meet and she flaunts her toys in front of Marius. Jude chooses to present Marius in this scene as somewhat suspicious of his wife's rearing of Sofia. Although it is difficult to ascertain exactly the root of their disconnect, since Sofia calls Marius "a four-eyed monster" in reference to the glasses he wears, this can possibly point to the child's arrogance and rudeness that Marius can only deduce the girl has learned from her mother. The fact that she is surrounded by oversized toys further points to her being spoiled and dotted on by her mother and Aurel, and in that sense, Sofia appears to be, at least in Marius' eyes, almost a by-

product of capitalist consumerism. To counterbalance this consumerism, in something of a futile effort, Marius attempts to play archaic word games with the girl, something which Sofia finds downright boring, just as she finds Marius' gift of a toy octopus. This doesn't only show the daughter's unwelcome transformation in Marius' eyes, but serves as an incitement for the rage that would eventually overcome the father to the point of obsession and violence. As such, Marius begins to feel replaced not only by Otilia and her new boyfriend, but also by the products of consumerism which his daughter has access to. In a way, mercantilism fulfills his child's need for affect, and replaces her need for the presence of a father, which is something that Marius doesn't only notice, but that hurts his pride and paternal instincts to a great degree.

Upon returning to the living room, Marius is admonished by Coca for waking the girl up before Otilia's arrival. From this point on, everyone disregards the law that should have kept Marius and his ex-wife apart, and the protagonist enters a downward spiral of defeatist behavior which is only motivated by the father's lawful right to take his daughter on a trip. While this does not even begin to excuse the actions Marius performs from this point on, he feels justified in his behavior as his actions are framed so as to elicit his constant need for opposition. The dialectical framing of the actions of ex-husband and wife doesn't only keep the spectator guessing as to whose side to identify with, but also shines a light on the futility of the justice system, as both sides seem uninterested and unable to keep up their side of the "bargain."

The only point in the film where, ironically, father and daughter seem to connect is in the scene in which Sofia and Marius watch the funeral of a Roma man—whom Marius calls in demeaning fashion a "gypsy"—through the window of Sofia's room. The framing of the POV shots in the scene produces an anxiety-raising effect, as death has a distant yet ominous feel while it is being peeked at from afar. Furthermore, the extreme long shot of the almost indistinct coffin in the background puts the audience in Sofia's shoes. As such, the girl starts asking more questions than Marius has answers for. The short philosophical interlude gives Marius' character a chance to explain the title of the film: When Sofia asks which of her relatives will go to heaven, despite their not altogether upright behavior we have seen thus far, her father retorts: "Everybody in our family. Except for an uncle of mine." The irony of the statement and the suggestive camera point to the clear reversal of the message: not only is there no "family" to speak of after the divorce, as Marius has been replaced by a surrogate father and is not even welcome in the house, but nobody's behavior toward one another in the film can be cataloged as "Christianly" or warranting a blissful afterlife. Contrasting their family with the one of the Roma whom he looks down upon, Marius in fact is looking at his own misfortunate destiny, which, due to short-sightedness, he does not recognize. This makes him, in tune with Biro's assessment of Eastern European films, a victim of a type of history that keeps repeating itself without giving characters a chance to change their lot.

As she watches her father pack her bag, at Marius' insistence, Sofia sings a song she learned in kindergarten. Aside from showing that the daughter has been spoiled by both educational system and family, the choice of song ("Volevo un gato nero") drives another wedge between the father's increasing sense of surprising newfound nationalism and what he interprets to be her Westernized behavior (because Sofia sings the song in wannabe Spanish). Although a promoter of modernization and internationalization from what we know of him thus far, when faced with the danger of seeing his daughter become estranged from the values that he holds dear in spite of himself, he becomes, quite surprisingly, the very patriarchal and quasi-nationalist figure he detests in his father. This increases Marius' ambivalence while signaling Jude's potential warning about the exaggerated Westernization of contemporary education. While it is undeniable that the simple rendition of a Spanish song does not necessarily spell out the danger of over-Westernization, the possible subtext here is that, in Marius' increasingly over-sensitive reading of facts, this can mean that Sofia downplays the values that local education could offer in exchange for the "cheap thrills" of Westernization. Although far from a traditionalist, Jude may be signaling a certain concern with Westernization inasmuch as this trend featuring in the last decades of Romanian development doesn't only favor a reorientation toward the West but also a remembering of the country's interwar past.

When in the very next scene Aurel yodels a greeting to Sofia—which she reciprocates—and then tells Marius that Sofia is singing a German march, it becomes clearer that what is at play is the broader fear of not only Westernization but Germanization. This is supported by Jude's insistence on the march motif for a few good minutes of screen time in which Coca teaches Sofia to sing while keeping the measure with her hand under her chin. Furthermore, this ties in with the possible motif of contemporary Nazification, which is a theme that emerges in Jude's later work. As an example, we have only to think of the German march that plays languidly on a children's playground in *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* (*Babardeală cu bucluc sau porno balamuc*, 2021) while Jude's camera explores the social and political contrasts of contemporary Bucharest. Finally, recall the joy with which the actors wear their Nazi uniforms in the finale of *I Don't Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians* (*Nu-mi pasă dacă vom intra în istorie ca barbari*, 2018) and the gusto with which they play their torturer roles.

The continuation of the scene in the hallway sets off

the main conflict: As Marius puts Sofia's shoes on, Aurel and Coca stage resistance to the departure of the father and daughter. They vehemently suggest that Marius wait until Otilia's return in order to take Sofia to the seaside, adding tension to the situation. Although Marius agrees at first, particularly at Coca's insistence that they delay their vacation, he is gradually seen losing patience as he considers he is being taken in by the other two, which does not agree with his dominant gender role. The scene progresses imperceptibly towards increased aggression as Aurel, although unable to find Otilia on the phone, takes a stand and blocks the apartment door by coming between Marius and the exit, thus cutting off the latter's way out. The camera gets in exceedingly close to the two men seen in profile as Marius, shouting louder than Aurel, gradually gets the upper hand. The standoff degenerates into a violent conflict as Marius loses his nerve, calls the other a "skinned homeless prick," and finally, trying to forcibly remove Aurel from his path, accidentally hits him on the head with the swinging door. Aurel's dramatic cries set off a maelstrom.

What becomes increasingly apparent is that Marius is not content with his new gender role as a father who is not allowed to exercise what he considers to be his parental rights. The situation can be read in the context of capitalist relations as well, as the accumulation of riches by his ex-wife's family allows her to replace him as the dominant figure in the picture. The claustrophobia created by the tight camera positions and the wave of vulgarity and physical violence that we witness makes us sympathetic to the power imbalance that Marius experiences, while simultaneously forcing us to ask ourselves whether his errant behavior is justified or not.

Although he succeeds in taking Sofia downstairs, Marius loses sight of her for a moment. During this time the girl quickly runs back upstairs. This sets off a duel in which all the characters in the drama are seen as courting the little girl's attention. Visibly upset, Sofia hides in a cardboard box in her room, as Marius returns looking for her. It is at this time that Otilia returns home and tries to redress the rapidly degenerating situation. The camera shifts focus here to closely follow Otilia as she moves through the apartment, her attitude rather passive in the beginning. Collecting testimonies from everybody in the house, she seems to tacitly side with her family to the detriment of Marius. When describing what happened, Aurel starts calling the girl "Sophie," with a French accent, further Occidentalizing her name, thus contrasting her wannabe upbringing to Marius' rather hillbilly behavior. Despite Sofia's merrily eating some cherries her mother brought home, Otilia's places her hand on the girl's forehead and concludes that she is burning, which further antagonizes Marius, who is shown at least in this respect to be the voice of reason. This is further enforced by Marius' apologizing to Aurel and calling the incident in which the latter hit his head on the door an accident.

Otilia continues playing the sick daughter card as she ignores Marius talking to her. Instead, she tells Aurel to get various drugs for the girl. She is decided not to let Marius take Sofia to the seaside, and her patience runs thin when Marius opposes her plans. Getting up to finally confront him, she tells Marius to get out of the house because he had already destroyed her life. In further long takes, the two parents fight for Sofia's possession, while Otilia calls Marius a criminal for beating up Aurel, and tells him to "fuck off," threatening him with never seeing Sofia again. Marius continues to rely on justice and his lawful right to see his daughter ("fiat justitiae pereat mundus," he eloquently quotes a Latin saying), but Otilia accuses him of immaturity and of being an absentee father. Referencing Kideckel's statement, this affects Marius deeply. Mirroring his own father's behavior from the scene in which he visited his parents, Marius calls Otilia a "devious cunt" and refuses to leave, which determines Otilia to call the police reporting a case of domestic violence. It is important to point out, yet again, how the pattern of Marius' behavior in this key scene mirrors his treatment of his parents: if he is first jovial and understanding of their defects, with rising tension, he loses his cool and sense of reason, succumbing to reckless, aggressive, and finally violent behavior, even though he intermittently yet vainly attempts to return to calm.

As he finally realizes that the stakes are against him, Marius recants and asks Otilia to tell the police not to come. She ignores him as he humiliates himself in front of all the others, falling to his knees and imploring Otilia to keep the police away from their private life. This only eggs Otilia on, who threatens him with a restraining order. As the two fight, Sofia covers her ears and moves to her room. Marius has a nervous breakdown and becomes increasingly violent, hitting and breaking kitchen utensils and spitting Otilia in the face as she refuses to call off the police. When Aurel intervenes to help his girlfriend, Marius violently hits him. Mayhem ensues. The camera becomes increasingly shaky, unsure, as it were, which of the precipitating actions to follow in a context in which the mood changes swiftly from apparent civility to tragedy. Marius blocks the apartment door, and, as Otilia helplessly watches her ex-husband's outlandish behavior, Marius threatens to kill Aurel with a corkscrew. As Coca arrives on the scene, Marius gags Aurel with a towel, then duct-tapes his mouth and hands.

Coca, equally helpless, shouts that they are educated people and should behave as such. No one pays attention to her as Aurel lies on the kitchen floor next to the overturned table and Marius takes Otilia by force to the living room. He promises to untie Aurel as soon as he and Sofia will leave. He and Otilia are trying to have a conversation as the camera anxiously follows Marius around attempting to control the situation. In the meantime they continue to call each other "ruthless cow"

and "reckless moron," respectively, and Marius tells his ex that he feels like puking for having loved a "devious slime," and confessing that all that he ever wanted was to have a normal family. The police finally arrive and ring the interphone. Soon they'll be ringing the door bell and they will continue to do so from here until the end of the film, adding tension to an already over-dramatic moment.

Upon seeing Jude's work, American film critic Jay Weissberg invented a new term to refer to some films made by Romanian New Wave directors. He called Jude's film a "bathroom-sink drama" in reference to the famous "kitchen sink" realism that emerged in Britain in the fifties and sixties with the films of Karel Reisz, Tony Richardson, and Lindsay Anderson. These British New Wave films focused on the lives of proletarian or lower middle-class protagonists who were oftentimes trying to make ends meet while, not unlike Jude's lead, trying to make sense of their amorous and emotional lives in a universe dominated by despair and lack of emotional contact.

After Marius throws Otilia's ringing cellphone into a fish tank, he suddenly turns emotional, falling into Otilia's lap; asking her to forgive him and take him back. The abrupt mood swing denotes a highly strung and possibly imbalanced character. Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr point to Marius' behavior as being the expression of male rage and a "paranoid, childish, pitiful masculinity," which gives the entire film a tinge of vaudeville.[11] They support this interpretation by connecting Jude's film with the real-life work of the comedic duo Popescu-Arșinel, from which they believe that Jude's character hails. This is definitely a possible reading, which would agree with anthropologist Maria Todorova's writings on the Balkans in general. In her famous description of the image of the Balkans as a savage, backward place situated at the periphery of "civilized" Europe, Todorova claims that it is the interpretation of Western writers about the Balkans that made the region appear wild in the common imagination, and that Eastern European writers perpetuated these clichés in order to curtsy acceptance to the "European family" in the years following the bloody Balkan Wars at the beginning of the 20th century.[12] Is Jude's work therefore only perpetuating these clichés? Is the behavior of his characters simply giving voice to rage? Furthermore, is rage an emotion that was internalized by locals after their description by neutral bystanders and thus is Marius' completely unjustified behavior meant to simply shock through savagery and brutality?

Throughout this entire part of the conflict Jude takes pains to describe not only something that could happen, but something that *does* happen in various instances in postsocialist societies, societies which have been disillusioned with the prospects of a quick and painless transition to capitalism, and which witnessed a thorough dismissal of legal authority in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution. If Biro and Todorova are right, and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, respectively, are indeed stuck in a perpetual transition during which history keeps repeating itself more often as tragedy than as farce, these types of backward societies are, as the American-Bulgarian theorist shows, dangerous for others and dangerous to themselves.[13] Considering Jude's later work, which pays careful attention to the history of Communism and fascism in Romania in the afore-mentioned films of 2018 and 2021, but also in his short film *The Potemkinists* from 2022, in which he muses over the heritage of the sailors of the Potemkin who were granted asylum in Romania after the mutiny on the famous battleship that later became the subject of Eisenstein's iconic film, it is evident that the author believes the vaudeville to be only one aspect of a more complex history of danger and violence. Although Marius' outburst should not be read as a metaphor for the entire descent into socio-political turmoil that Romanian society experienced after the 1989 anticommunist revolution, the film analyst can find the answer at the intersection of the self-portrait of a malfunctioning society and, as Gorzo and Lazăr point out, a propensity for melodramatic histrionics that is, we need to add, the natural consequence that indigent living conditions have repeatedly effected on an increasingly traumatized society. Far from justifying abuse, this context hints that Jude's imaginary descent into violence illustrates the socio-political entrapment of a Romanian postsocialist society which is neither able to turn back the clock on its socialist order and security nor overcome the moment of postsocialist mayhem. Alluding to the social instability caused by the postsocialist transition, Geoff Andrew reinforces this reading by stating that "this family's predicament and behavior may be symptomatic of a particular society at a particular moment in time."[14]

In perfect tone with Jude's playfulness, the film's dénouement, however, as if to overturn this possible ideological reading, reinforces the melodramatic reading favored by Gorzo and Lazăr. As Marius begs Otilia to get rid of Aurel, whom the former calls a scumbag (while reciting lines from a poem, which seem desperately inappropriate for the situation), he gags, ties up, and sequesters the couple, which is forced to sit back-to-back on the living room floor, while Marius walks into Coca's room. Paradoxically, Coca is the only person in the house that Marius can relate to, which shows both his traditionalism (after all, he repeatedly mentions that all he wants is a "normal family") and his complexity: how can a reasonable person behave so violently with people he allegedly loves?

It is the next scene, however, that fully transforms the narrative into a dystopian surrealist film: When Sofia notices Otilia and Aurel tied down on the floor, Marius tries to explain they are playing a game. This reinforces the vaudeville reading, with the addenda that it is tragedy that is being masked under the appearance of a

comic routine. The public is furthermore equated with an infantile (possibly foreign) onlooker who doesn't fully understand the history of violence that they are forced to witness. This confusion persists as Marius places Sofia in his lap in an act that contrasts sharply with his previous reckless behavior and starts painting the self-portrait of a loving father (he was the one who took most care of Sofia while she was a baby, he says), while his ex-wife watches helplessly from the other side of the room. Overcome with frustration for having lost both, Marius explains to the confused child that her mother is a "bloody whore," as Otilia mumbles protests from under the scarf; and that Aurel is a usurper who took advantage of him and threw him out of his own apartment. This behavior represents the apex of his cultural gender role (for all the wrong reasons), because in this moment Marius, as a perpetrator of toxic masculinity, completely controls everybody else's behavior in an utter reversal of the image he wanted to project at the beginning of the film, namely that of the normal, enlightened family guy who rises above the obsolete models offered by his bickering parents. Ironically, this does not only reproduce his parents' patriarchy, but points to a delusional character flaw that is elevated to the rank of national trait: in Freudian fashion, feelings too traumatic to handle find their release in anger, which offers the psyche protection from its very own trauma.

Although the film ends on an apparently metaphorical note, Marius' escape through a bathroom window and the final episode in the pharmacy should be read in sarcastic key: a sarcasm pointing both to the author himself and to society's "particular moment in time" described in the plot. After we see Marius walking the whole distance from the apartment to the pharmacy to receive help, the film reverts to a down-to-earth realism that points cyclically to its quieter beginning. When Marius steps out of the pharmacy and onto the sidewalk, he is followed there by the young security guard whom the protagonist asks for a cigarette. As the guard hands him one, he tells Marius to "Get up and walk, Lazarus." The lead responds with an attitude situated between disbelief and utter surprise. It is as if, for a second, as he walks away from the pharmacy, Marius takes the guard's remark seriously, almost believing that his downfall justifies his martyrdom. This is in fact the point which warrants a deceptive tragi-comic reading for the film. For if we were to be entirely in surrealist territory, the line would fall flat both on Marius' ears and on our own. It is that tinge of saintliness that the line alludes to, however, that reinforces the reality of what we had just witnessed, or, as Brian Massumi would put it, the potentiality that the plot did after all take place and that it did stand for a possible glimpse of postsocialist life in a country enmeshed in confusion.[15]

What Jude performs here is an operation thereby which, while using a realist style, he comments laconically on the possible symbolism his protagonist might represent, effectively annihilating any symbolism. Furthermore, given the author's notorious cinephilia and interest in Romanian cinema history, this also relates to the 1980s-era socialist cinema, which coated its stark social commentary in a combination of poetry and symbolism in order to cover up some of the allusions made in the narrative. This invites an almost textual reading of the film which highlights the economic and psychological pressures that mount to paroxysm in a protagonist that crumbles to pieces and gives way to irrational behavior. Ironically, Jude's character is punished in the end for being a victim of his own enthusiasm and for trusting the one social, moral, and political system that will bring about his own downfall: capitalism. Furthermore, because he sees himself above the patriarchal demeanor of his parents as well as the passé traditionalism of his wife in believing he is a "normal" family guy who abides by modern rules of conduct, Marius digs himself deeper into an emotional hole. While this may be his conventional hubris, he also stands for, however, the disoriented subject of the transition. Influenced by the transition from socialism to capitalism, as well as the transition from traditionalism to modernity, Marius represents the effects of the dramatic collapse of a value system that combined blissful patriarchy with abhorrent violence, and was not apt to endure in the 21st century. The conclusion of the film is that the disappearance of this system greatly impacted the communication between generations and that the penetration of mercantilism and capitalism only complicated this strained communication. It goes without saying that this produced an irreconcilable generation gap between the socialist and the postsocialist generations, a gap that Jude both mourns and celebrates in a film that is both self-ironic and irreparably tragic.

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Notes

1. Bogdan Popa in his inciting article "What's Wrong with the Romanian New Wave? Auteur Cinema, the Communist, and the Production of the Violent Working Class" persuasively argues that capitalism and market forces shook the foundations of egalitarianism even before the downfall of Communism, and that this is reflected in various socialist-era films. Dusan Bjelic makes a similar argument about the figure of Mr. Bebe in Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* (which is set in the eighties), showing how this character's greed symbolized the subversion of the egalitarian goals of the socialist state's agenda. While both arguments are valid (even though the former applies to films made during socialism, and the latter is enunciated in reference to a postsocialist film), the pre-1989 Romanian social fabric was more homogenous than that of postsocialism because there were fewer and smaller differences between middle- and upper-class members of Romania's paid workforce.
2. David Kideckel proposes such a general argument in his chapter "The Undead. Nicolae Ceaușescu and Paternalist Politics in Romanian Society and Culture."
3. Popa, "Revisiting the Uses of Nostalgia in Post-socialist Cinema," 75.
4. Gorzo's statement on Puiu's film has been adopted by film critics to correctly describe the history of the Romanian New Wave. See Gorzo's blog, *Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel* [Things that Can't Be Told Differently].
5. Incidentally, Jude's *Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World* produced in 2023 starts in a similar fashion, which indicates a possible recurrence of generational conflict motifs across the director's oeuvre.
6. Chirilov, "Stop-cadre la masă" [Freeze-frames at the Family Table], 11.
7. Gorzo and Lazăr, "Radu Jude's Satirical Studies of Male Rage and Self-Pity," 2.
8. Ibid., 2.
9. Biro, "Pathos and Irony in East European Films," 29.
10. Ibid., 30.
11. Gorzo and Lazăr, "Radu Jude's Satirical Studies of Male Rage and Self-Pity," 3.
12. This is one of Todorova's overarching arguments in *Imagining the Balkans*.
13. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 17.
14. Andrew, "Everybody in Our Family," 83.
15. In "Parables of the Virtual" Massumi suggests that potentiality is the materialization of affect.

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