



Patron: Jim Broadbent
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After Love (Cert 12a)

dir: **Joachim Lafosse**

Starring: **B r n ce Bejo, C dric Kahn**

Sponsor: **Andrew Howard**

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Synopsis: Brussels, the present. Marie and Boris are a divorcing couple who are continuing to live together while their financial affairs are sorted out. Marie, an academic from a wealthy family, has invested the most financially in the home over the 15 years they have lived together, while Boris, a handyman, has improved its value by substantial renovation work. They are unable to agree on how much Boris should receive when the house is sold; Marie thinks one third of the value is reasonable, but Boris claims an equal share. He has substantial debts and is unable to afford other accommodation, and insists he will not leave until she agrees a half-share settlement of  200,000. Marie's mother Babou offers Boris paid work and somewhere to live in return for renovating the old family home, but Marie will not allow this. Marie tries to impose a routine on family life, but their two daughters Jade and Margaux are regularly caught in the crossfire of the parents' arguments, as are Babou and the couple's circle of friends. Boris is beaten up by his creditors: he moves out after Marie lends him  10,000 to pay them off. When he looks after the girls while Marie goes away for the weekend, Jade takes an overdose of her mother's sleeping pills and is hospitalised. Marie and Boris finally realise the effect their actions are having on the children, and agree to divorce amicably. They split the value of the house equally and commit to shared custody arrangements for the girls.

The original French title of this family drama, *L'Economie du couple* - something closer to 'Marital Finances' than 'After Love' - has the prosaic air of a fact-finding documentary. F t d at Directors' Fortnight in Cannes 2016, Belgian director Joachim Lafosse's film harks back to the intimacy and sparseness of Maurice Pialat, offering a forensic dissection of the family unit. A fly-on-the-wall aesthetic lets us witness a series of scenes from a very modern marriage; that of a couple who have apparently fallen out of love and are cohabiting uneasily in the family home while settling their monetary affairs.

Boris (C dric Kahn) and Marie (B r n ce Bejo) are parents, flawed in the same way as any busy working couple with a home to run and young daughters to look after. Some of the time they seem to muddle along maturely in their airy Brussels home, but at other times they argue about timetabled access to the girls and separate shelves in the fridge. This, we soon realise, is a couple capable of deploying a piece of cheese as a weapon; shouting angrily about who paid for it, who didn't and who is going to have some anyway. Living neither together nor apart, Boris and Marie attempt a grown-up arrangement, prioritising family life over their own desires, and normalising the reality of the future separation for their twins Jade and Margaux. But the reality is they simply can't agree on who is entitled to what share of a property now worth  400,000, and neither has the wherewithal to buy the other out.



As befits a narrative where the main issue is the money bound up in the bricks and mortar of the family home, the space of the house itself is the film's stage until the closing five minutes. A camera watches Marie arrive home with her daughters and tracks her slowly as the evening business of cooking dinner, checking homework and running their bath gets under way. The naturalism of the scene speaks to the home as sanctuary, with the gate closed for the day on public face and social convention. But suddenly, the mood shifts as Marie fixes her gaze on an off-screen presence. Her anger seeps through a series of sharp statements: "What are you doing here?" "It's not eight o'clock yet", "It's not Wednesday." The girls shriek with delight that their playful daddy is home for bath-time, and make a beeline for the games on his computer; mum says they can't play them because it's not Friday. She warns him that she hasn't made enough food for him to have dinner with them, but he sits at the table anyway, making sure the girls clear their plates and eat the good-for-them stewed fruit for dessert; mum tidies the half-full plates away and gives into their pleas for ice-cream. In the opening moments, then, the dynamic of this couple is revealed as harried parental one-upmanship in which each takes turns to assert their authority and undermine the other, while the girls just get their own way.

Lafosse sets Marie up as the unsmiling, no-fun parent whose function is to grimly impose order both on her children and their wayward father, and Boris is cast as the hard-done-to husband who can't do right for doing wrong. Marie, who has the run of the house, breaks her silence only to give him instructions, while Boris retreats to the tiny study for work and sleep - his "dog-house", as he terms it when an estate agent comes to make a valuation. But slowly, a backstory and an explanation of sorts come into focus: Marie paid the deposit on the house with money from her parents and her savings; Boris, who had nothing at the time of purchase, renovated it, and thereby increased its value. Boris now has debts - sufficient to bring a team of heavies to the family door - and he is unreliable in his contribution to the household funds, regularly missing mortgage payments. He has promised to buy Margaux new football boots, but never manages to get around to it; when Marie buys them herself the day before the match, he is furious, and somehow manages to lose them on their first outing, saying he'll buy

another pair when he gets paid.

A pattern emerges of a fiscally and profoundly fed-up woman keeping a roof over everyone's heads, and a financially incontinent man whose unpredictability no longer holds any charms. Our sympathy for Boris wanes further as we see how he manipulates situations to his advantage, regularly blindsiding Marie in front of the children: announcing that the girls have been invited to spend a month on holiday with his mother in the summer; or that maybe he and Marie won't split up after all. When she calls him on his behaviour she can barely speak - her refrain is a clenched teeth "What are you playing at?" Again and again, her privacy is disrupted by Boris, who refuses to respect her boundaries and rules. The home is a less and less peaceful place when he is there, and every irritation is amplified for Marie; the clinking of crockery in the kitchen, the turning of the pages of a book, the bleeps of Boris texting a friend, footsteps padding about outside the bathroom. It's a war of domestic attrition. We believe Marie when she tells her friends during dinner in the garden that over time love has simply turned to hate.

For all this, it seems to me that the film does not want to argue that the reverse of love is hate. Indeed, the deep connections between these two wounded people are sensitively outlined and explored in a pair of very gentle yet complex scenes. The first is a nocturnal meeting between them that is almost balletic in its choreography; in one single take, we see Marie rise from her bed, grab a drink from the fridge and go and sit silently in Boris's study; Boris in turn, gets up and goes to the fridge, returning with a beer; they remain together for a moment, then Marie rises and returns to bed, crying quietly. Their unspoken intimacy resonates in the plaintive Bach score, the intersecting major and minor chords of the Prelude in C Minor echoing the painful negotiations of their entangled lives. It's a standalone moment, in which music expresses where words can't the emotional weight and depth of their bond. The second such scene also involves music, as first Boris, then Marie join in a dance with their daughters as if this were the most natural thing in the world. As Marie begins to weep, Boris holds her close, and she doesn't resist, clinging to him as the girls imitate them, joining in the game. They are temporarily reconciled in a gesture of mutual trust, and their desire is volcanic; they make love behind closed doors, unseen, and without subsequent commentary.

The film's denouement is the tragic catalyst for the film to venture beyond the home and out into the world, where their family life can be retrieved, supported and reset. The film - and Marie and Boris - finally begins to breathe as an unseen judge sets out the agreement for the separation of the estate. Our last sight of the couple is of them seated in the distance at a café table, talking quietly and companionably about their future

Credits

Marie Barrot	Bérénice Bejo
Boris Marcker	Cédric Kahn
Christine 'Babou'	Marthe Keller
Margaux	Margaux Soentjens
Jade	Jade Soentjens
Director	Joachim Lafosse
Screenplay	Mazarine Pinget, Fanny Burdino, Joachim Lafosse
Director of Photography	Jean-François Hensgens
Editor	Yann Dedet
Art Direction	Olivier Radot
	Marc Engels, Ingrid Simon,

Sound

Valerie le Docte, Thomas Gaudier

Costume

Pascaline Chavanne

France/Belgium 216
100 mins

Another View

The French title of Joachim Lafosse's latest feature film is 'L'Économie du Couple'. Translation: 'The Economy of the Couple', a play on the meanings of the term economy. Etymologically, the word refers to the general management of the household, but it is used in everyday parlance to discuss monetary issues.

For Marie (Bérénice Bejo) and Boris (Cédric Kahn), money is indeed central to their problems as a divorced couple. While Boris looks for a job and another place to live, he has to stay in the house he used to share with his ex-wife and their eight-year-old twin daughters, all the while discussing the shares of the residence they are each due. Lafosse's decision to give wealth such an important place isn't a sign of heartlessness or disinterest for the sentimental trauma of a divorce. Instead, it's a clever way to approach this ordeal with respectful detachment, coming at it through the trivialities of a break-up.

Marie and Boris still have to live in the very house they are fighting over every day, and with great subtlety Lafosse communicates their realisation that this safe haven they built is no more. Every object, every wall, every piece of furniture is the same as it used to be, but is now exposed to the couple's fights and tension. They take on a new, sad meaning. Every corner of the cosy house makes the couple ponder the heartbreaking question that separations often bring to one's mind: how did we end up here?

It is through the everyday, more or less contentious interactions between all family members as they try to live together that Joachim Lafosse delicately hints at the answer to this question. In the way they manage daily chores and, more particularly, in the attitude they adopt towards their twins Jade and Margaux, Marie and Boris' different approaches to life shine through, at once evident yet sometimes emotionally incomprehensible.

This isn't to say that the director shies away from more verbally violent altercations that realistically can't always be avoided when two people resenting each other have to share the same roof. Nevertheless, his point of view remains full of compassion for both Marie and Boris even in these sobering scenes.

Even more poignant, however, is how this humble approach also reveals the remaining bonds between the ex-spouses: despite their irreconcilable differences, Marie and Boris still share a personal connection, even if it is a tenuous one, and are still united in their commitment to parenting. The film's most beautiful scene shows the family dancing together in the living room, and in the space of one song, all the complexities of the situation are laid bare.

Bérénice Bejo proves herself capable of great nuance as contradictory emotions run through her face: fear, disdain, a spark of hope as the couple come together in an embrace, soon clouded by tears when remembering, again and again, that things have changed. Eventually, she comes to grudgingly accept the situation. Lafosse's camera doesn't need any complex setting or to come up close to find and expose the endlessly complicated workings of Marie's and Boris' hearts. Witnessing their often petty arguments about money, and looking at their faces when they are unable to express their feelings, it's all too easy to understand and relate to their crisis.

Manuela Lasic, Little White Lies

Our next film - Friday November 24th, 7.30pm

Letters from Baghdad (UK 2016. Cert PG)

Letters from Baghdad is a documentary about the extraordinary and dramatic life of Gertrude Bell, the most powerful woman in the British Empire in her day. More influential than her friend and colleague Lawrence of Arabia, she shaped the destiny of Iraq after World War I in ways that still reverberate, but has been all but written out of the history she helped make.

With the voice of Tilda Swinton