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Vermiglio (15)

Dir: Maura Delpero

with: Tommaso Ragno, Roberta Rovelli, Martina Scrinzi

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Synopsis: Italy, 1944. Lucia is the eldest daughter of a teacher in the remote Trentino mountain village of Vermiglio. When Pietro, a deserter of Sicilian origins seeks refuge in the village, they fall in love and marry and Lucia becomes pregnant. As the war ends, Pietro returns to Sicily to see his family, promising he will return soon. He disappears and the family learns he has been killed by a Sicilian woman he was already married to. Lucia gives birth to a daughter, Antonia, but is devastated by Pietro's death. She falls into despair and contemplates suicide. Her brother Dino saves her. Gradually recovering, Lucia travels to Sicily, where she meets Pietro's first wife and visits her husband's grave. She leaves her child to an orphanage, where her younger sister Ada works. Finally, she decides to go to the city to work for a wealthy family, promising herself she will return later for her daughter.

High in the Italian Alps in 1944, village life subsists in precarious isolation from the war but follows the grooves of ingrained tradition. The family of grey-haired school teacher Cesare Graziadei (Tommaso Ragno) runs to nine children with a 10th on the way, despite each new addition threatening their ability to feed themselves and further educate their children.

Among the brood are the adult Lucia (Martina Scrinzi), who has caught the eye of Pietro (Giuseppe De Domenico), an illiterate Sicilian army deserter hiding out in the community; the teenage Ada (Rachele Potrich), who dreams up new self-punishments whenever she hides away to touch herself, Flavia (Anna Thaler), the academically bright pre-teen whose eye for the truth is most acute, and the mildly rebellious adult Dino (Patrick Gardner), who kicks against his peasant fate through drink.

This slow-burn family saga of immense subtlety and quiet observation at first resembles films that seem to yearn for a more authentic rural past (Ermanno Olmi's works come to mind) but behind its insistence that 'this is how it was' lurks a stinging rebuke of the sacrifices made, which comes in passing remarks that run against the predominant accepting flow. It's a peculiar three-way push-pull between phenomenal restraint, whispered yearning and bitter resentment.

Although it's the Alpine environment that's determined the family's sparse, fingernail-grasp of a lifestyle, its beauty, revealed in the seductively gorgeous muted-colour cinematography of Mikhail Krichman – highly regarded for his work with Andrey Zvyagintsev (2007's *The Banishment*, and 2011's *Elena*) – is largely ignored by

the protagonists, except when they're smoking and contemplating the variegated hopelessness of their individual situations.

Although he espouses some liberal values and loves Chopin and Vivaldi, Cesare's high position in the village fixes him as a petty tyrant, set apart from the other villagers by his education and from his family by the wielding of life-changing authority. It is he who decides who they can afford to send away for further education, the only escape route bar the prospect of becoming a nun. Perhaps the best example of the film's counter-narrative comes when he is offended by criticism from his wife Adele (Roberta Rovelli) for spending money on gramophone records when they can hardly feed their offspring. "How dare you reproach me in front of the children", he says, before leaving the room with all the children staring at him.

The grinding cycle of Adele's endless childbearing centres the story for a while, with major events of death and Lucia's marriage to Pietro understated in passing, but it gradually opens out into deeper character portraits of the children before landing its focus on Lucia's fate after the war ends. She's pregnant when Pietro leaves to show his mother he's still alive, but months pass with no word from him so, after the baby is born, she suffers a mental collapse and has to take her fate into her own hands.

Vermiglio is derived in part from director Maura Delpero's own family history and is her second fiction feature after *Maternal* (2019), which focused on young single mothers living in hostels run by nuns (Delpero also made two documentaries, *Teachers* (2008) and *Nadea and Sveta* (2012)). She has a real knack for getting the best out of her cast, a mix of actors and non-professionals, all of whom impress, with Martina Scrinzi particularly vivid as Laura. But most peerless in its intimacy is Delpero's observational acuity: the children's bedroom crammed with shared beds where critical late night chat takes place, the cowshed with the cow looming, the schoolroom with its wind up gramophone, the mirrored wardrobe door behind which Ada hides, the table around which a dozen people crowd for dinner are all observed with such reverence you can almost smell them.

But Delpero is to be praised, too, for being so aware of how easily beautifully shot bucolic history dramas evoke a kind of mass photo-book nostalgia, although the restraint, use of inference and

speed of editing with which she counteracts sentimentality might leave some viewers looking for stronger encouragements to empathy. In that sense, *Vermiglio* is a film quietly at war with itself. It delineates situations with the exquisite sensitivity of remembrance while salting in complaint, yet its predominant atmosphere remains one of stoic acquiescence. The rebel is in the detail.

Credits

Cesare Graziadei	Tommaso Ragno
Adele	Roberta Rovelli
Lucia	Martina Scrizi
Pietro	Giuseppe de Domenico
Virginia	Carlotta Gamba
Zia	Orietta Notari
Attilio	Santiago Fondevila
Ada	Rachele Potrich
Flavia	Anna Thaler
Dino	Patrick Gardner
Pietrin	Enrico Paniza
Tarcisio	Luis Thaler
Giacinto	Simone Benedetti
Anna	Sara Serraiocco
Giovanni	Domenico Farraioili
Don Giulio	Leone Gubert
Donna Della Panchina	Romina Cescolini
Oeste	Fabio Daprà
Rigo	Maurizio de Florian
Gino	Matteo Adriana Delpero
Mamma Virginia	Sabrina Campagna
Anita	Melissa Bertolini
Rodolfo	Luca Genetti
Dottore	Maurizio Bontempelli
Director	Maura Delpero
Screenplay	Maura Delpero
Cinematography	Mikhail Krichman
Music	Matteo Francheschini
Editor	Luca Mattei
Italy/France/Belgium/USA 2024 119m	

Take 2

The relationships we forge in life often aren't always smooth-sailing. They can be both loving and heartbreaking at the same time. That being said, perhaps the most complex of relationships isn't ones with romantic intrigue, but with our own families. Maura Delpero's *Vermiglio* is an Italian drama that won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2024 Venice Film Festival, and went on to be a rich headliner on the year's ensuing festival circuit. Set in the scenic yet remote Alpine village of Vermiglio in 1944, there isn't much noise about World War Two that is happening just over the hilly horizon. The only noise comes from the unexpected arrival of Pietro (Giuseppe De Domenico), a Sicilian soldier who decided to opt out of life on the front line. Cesare (Tommaso Ragno), the local school teacher and father of an ever-growing family of nine, helps Pietro become part of the tight knit community, declaring that no soldier asked for the war. It's evident that Cesare's eldest daughter Lucia (Martina Scrizi) has a soft spot for Pietro. The swift love affair between the two is

mostly played out sans dialogue, though the chemistry between De Domenico and Scrinzi allows for the sentiment to feel genuine. Soon after their quiet first kiss, the pair marry and are soon expecting their first child. As the war is declared over and celebrations break out, it's time for Pietro to return to Sicily. He promises to write to Lucia as soon as he arrives, but weeks go by and nothing comes. Sadly, through the newspaper, they learn that Pietro has been murdered by someone who didn't take too well to his new life. As the film progresses through its first half, it feels stuck at times as it attempts to juggle the complicated lives of the family, rather than finding its sole focus. Dino (Patrick Gardner) is resentful of his father and opts to drink than focus on his education, whereas Flavia (Anna Thaler) is the smart one destined for a proper education. We see Ada (Rachele Potrich) acting strange at times and sneaking off behind the wardrobe door to touch herself. The film's plot twist is the first time it feels like a narrative has been cemented, even though it feels rushed and tangled amongst the complex exploration of family complications. Arguably the film is a missed opportunity to explore further the depths of Lucia's grief. Only within *Vermiglio*'s final act do we see Lucia heavily pregnant and struggling following the sudden death of Pietro. Scrinzi is the star of the film at this point, allowing audiences to really empathise with her character. Grief in films can sometimes allow audiences to additionally find something they relate to, but as the theme is introduced quite late within the narrative it doesn't quite hit home. It's easy to see why *Vermiglio* has received praise on the festival stage; it's a hushed yet effectively emotive drama that's bolstered with the addition of Mikhail Krichman's stunning cinematography. Yet sadly, it's hard to overcome the film's biggest weakness – the ripple effect that comes from its overcomplicated characterisations.

Natasha Jagger: Little White Lies

Our next screening (please note the earlier start time)

Friday November 14, 2025. 7.15pm
I'm Still Here (Brazil 2024. 15)

Anchored by a stupendous performance by Fernanda Torres, which has garnered a number of awards including an Oscar nomination and Golden Globe for Best Actress, *I'm Still Here* is based on the life of Eunice Paiva, who became an activist lawyer investigating the brutality of the military junta that ran Brazil for 20 years from the mid 1960s, and in particular the disappearance of her husband, politician Rubens Paiva.