

REVIEW

# Lost in Transition

Tudor Cristian Jurgiu's *Japanese Dog* (*Câinele japonez*, 2013)

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It has been a prolific time for Romanian films this fall. More than nine productions have been released starting with Corneliu Porumboiu's "...Metabolism", in mid September. One production, *Japanese Dog* (*Câinele japonez*) by Tudor Cristian Jurgiu's stands out. His first feature film is set in a small village where a widowed father awaits the return of his prodigal son.

The film starts off following Costache who is recovering from the recent loss of his wife Maria and has to deal with the aftermaths of a flood, which destroyed his home. It is unclear if the floods caused Maria's death or not. She does not appear in the film but is an important story element, the plot being constructed around her death. Built like a puzzle, some of the pieces gradually start to add meaning to the story when Ticu, Costache's son, returns to the village from Japan in the second half of the movie. Contrasting with the austere village life, Ticu enters the scene in a car, one of few signs of technology present in the film. His wife, Hiroku and son accompany him.

In Costache, Jurgiu portrays a grumpy old man who has little or no contact with his fellow villagers. Ticu returns and tries to repair a relationship that has been affected by his emigration. We find out that his departure had a great impact on the lives of his family and on a girlfriend whom he had promised to marry. He has to solve all these conflicts upon his return but the solutions the writers offer appear shallow. Ticu's reconciliation with his ex-girlfriend Gabi, for instance, is solved in a short sequence where they have a chitchat about cultural differences.

*Japanese Dog* can be placed in the new wave paradigm, with diegetic music, fixed frames, and a slow, natural rhythm. Cristian Tudor Jurgiu's sensitive testimony of immigration and life in a contemporary Romanian village paints an overall powerful portrait of an idyllic space on the verge of abandonment. Jurgiu's latest short, *In the fishbowl* (*În acvariu*, 2013) was awarded at Cannes with 3rd Prize Cinéfondation Ex-aequo, this year. It will be interesting to follow the young director's (29 years old) future projects.