

Critique

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Cinema of Serendipity



Out of Love (2025) by Nathan Ambrosioni

What could be the most unlikely situation for a workaholic woman whose marriage breaks down due to her scorn for rearing children and her paramour is a woman friend? Jeanne Manin, played extraordinarily by Camille Cottin, quite shockingly, one day has to open the doors of her apartment to her estranged sister Suzanne Manin (Juliette Armanet), who, out of the blue, arrives at her home with two little children. If Suzanne's arrival unnerves Jeanne for some time and it takes her quite a while to come to terms with the situation, what unsettles her completely is when she discovers, the next morning, that her sister has vanished, leaving the two children to her care.

Twenty-five-year-old Nathan Ambrosioni's third film *Out of Love* (2025) proceeds with the predicament of its protagonist Jeanne who faces an insurmountable task of handling the children besides navigating the police and legal system to trace her sister, albeit in vain. Jeanne's futile knocking at the doors of the law enforcing agency as well as the judiciary to get a reprieve even in making an attempt to trace her sister reminds me of the fate of Daniel Black in Ken Loach's highly critical film on apathy of social support system and administrative stone-heartedness.

What makes Ambrosioni's *Out of Love* more endearing is the way he endeavours to examine the psyche of both sisters rooted in

their childhood trauma. Their mother having departed at an early age, the uncaring, self-indulgent father remaining apathetic in their grown-up years, in particular hugely affects the younger sister. When she finally finds someone to lean over and gives birth to two adorable children, her hubby too passes away. Whether it's the unbearable extreme hardship or the ordeal of her widowhood, 37-year-old Suzanne leaves no hint of her disappearance. However, it transpires, the scars of their childhood are what make them a little neurotic, both mentally unstable and inconsistent and unsure of their role and responsibilities. Suzanne's escapism can also be ascribed to the mom burnout, or depleted mother syndrome, resulting usually from crushing exhaustion, emotional diminution, and a sense of disconnect or inadequacy arising from the situation she encounters. Not to forget, Jeanne's unstable relationships both with men and women, and her paranoia to become a mother can also be attributed to these factors. It is also pertinent to understand such an attitude in the light of modern-day hectic lifestyle, which also contributes to rejecting parenthood amongst many individuals irrespective of gender for reasons such as time constraints, apprehension about responsibility, a feeling of inadequacy in parenting skills, or merely own career interests. One question however, arise, why after herself deeply affected by childhood scars, Suzanne, commits something which is more calamitous and upsetting for her children.

For his age, Ambrosioni displays great maturity in characterization and his understanding of women psyche is indeed laudable. He skillfully organically weaves the

sequences in a script that is austere set, adequately nuanced, beautifully structured, and has endowed its layered narrative with underlying connotations. While Jeanne occasionally faces hiccups in handling the trauma-inflicted children and for her insensitive dealings sometimes faces their rancorous ire, her portrait artist friend Nicole (Monia Chokri) comes up as someone who knows how to cheer them up and keep them jovial. However, despite Nicole's relationship with Jeanne being very intense, it is because of Jeanne's derision for committed emotional bonding beyond their sexual intimacy that Nicole finally expresses her willingness to have a male friend and to become a mother of children, leaving Jeanne devastated.

One realization Jeanne finally comes to terms with is that since her sister leaves the children to her care even by leaving a note and authorities concerned are shying away from taking responsibility for this reason alone, she has no other option but to become their accidental mother. As time progresses, the children nevertheless, realize it is Jeanne, who now wears the role of their mother and they have to accept her without throwing more tantrums. In one remarkable scene when Jeanne cries in absolute despair in her room shortly after hearing about Nicole's parting decision, the nine-year-old son of Suzanne, Gaspard (Manoa Varvat) enters the room worried and offers her tissue.

Juggling a whole lot of emotional ranges in a complicated character, Camille Cottin delivers a stellar performance with her nuanced and restrained acting and even in difficult situations she remains low-key. On the other hand, the director's ability to draw remarkable performances from both Manoa

Varvat as Gaspard and six-year-old Margaux as Nina Birman, particularly when, they both burst out in anger or rejection, is noteworthy. The film is wonderfully shot by Victor Seguin as the framing of shots, camera movement and tonality of situations all perfectly fit into the film's scheme of things. However, it is the director Ambrosioni who brilliantly brings to life this tense and breathtaking drama of an accidental mother whose life takes a new turn after an uneasy night. The ambiguous open

ending wrapping-up of the film leaves viewers wondering whether someday Suzanne might again show up, whether Jeanne could finally be a good mother or rather, whether the bad-tempered children could cohabit comfortably with the taciturn and introverted Jeanne? These questions which often haunt the mind of the viewers even after ending credits are rolled up, are what make *Out of Love* a memorable and evocative work.

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