

The Little Boy and the Beast

The Little Boy and the Beast was produced Studio Soi GmbH & Co. KG Filmproduktion for ZDF in Germany. Ever since Haro's dad has left the family, Haro's mum has become very strange. She hardly plays with Haro anymore and broods over old photographs; she no longer laughs and is in a bad mood all the time. She has turned into a real beast! Suddenly, Haro has to take care of many things all by himself, which can be pretty tiring. From the boy's point of view the film depicts the difficulties he faces after his parents have separated. However, the film also shows that beastly parents who are going through a divorce may eventually turn into their old selves...

The Little Boy and the Beast was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2010 finalists in the "up to 6 fiction" category.

International experts' opinions

Almost all the international experts loved the program as is handled the delicate issue of divorce and a child's experience of witnessing a transformation in the behaviour of his parents. "I have to say that *The Little Boy and the Beast* was my favourite thing. I think it is brilliant, and I loved every shot. I just thought it was a work of art" (male expert, USA).

They discussed the target audience of the program and the fact that it was well received by both children and adults. "I think this will work for over preschool as well" (male expert, USA). The broadcaster of the program who was present among the audience gave her opinion of the target audience. "We also have, in ZDF, this structure that if employees go through divorce, they have some sort of social counselling. They are using that film as well for that purpose. It turns out that a lot of adults can relate to it. We are sort of unexpectedly surprised" (female expert, Germany).

Some were confident that the program had a universal appeal and should not be restricted to dealing with divorce alone. "I thought it was so real. I think you can relate it to other issues: alcoholism, dysfunctionality, depression, and even things that are not bad things that cause a transition" (female expert, USA). However, there were concerns regarding the ability of a child to understand this program. "I think it is beautiful; I love it, and I was laughing. But, do you know if children actually understand this: that the mother turns into



Figure 1: Haro's mother has turned into a beast after the divorce.



Figure 2: Haro had to take charge in the supermarket.



Figure 3: The beast mother was very abrasive.



Figure 4: At night the beast mother was in the worst mood.



Figure 5: The beast mother needs time to cure her wound.



Figure 6: With time and friend mother was slowly turning back into herself.

a beast, because she is sad about her husband having left for a much younger woman or what?" (female expert, Denmark).

All the experts praised the program for showing a frequent problem (parents going through a divorce) in a fresh and innovative style. They felt that this is something that children can relate to. The program was also a good example for a situation where parents and children can sit and watch together. Since the program dealt with the delicate topic of divorce, it was an eye opener to both children and adults about the overwhelming emotions one goes through during these tough times. "It was just so refreshing and really did it in the mad, the angry, and the mom and dad — I have just never seen it done so. It takes you back to: that is exactly how a kid would see these two parents acting like monsters" (male expert, Canada).

The program also emphasized the fact that children need to understand that people go through various emotions in life beyond just being happy and perfect. Life offers a lot more than just perfect situations. "It speaks to us for not acknowledging how big an emotional life preschoolers have, in general; but there are highs and lows, and happy and upset, and uncontrollable rage. All of these things happen, and we should be a little bit more genuine. You just really get that sense — and that parents have ups and downs too — and seeing that" (male expert, Canada).

The international experts really praised the program for the respecting the audience and mirroring back to them and letting them arrive at the conclusion. "I also thought that it didn't over-explain any of the moments. It just trusted the audience to put these pieces together in a really elegant, beautiful way. It was really outstanding" (male expert, USA). "I would be a curious parent in that situation, seeing themselves represented like that — would be very powerful" (male expert, Canada).

The female expert from Germany who was also the broadcaster of the program emphasized that observation. "We had ZDF screen it there, and during the screening the lady who was sitting next to me started crying, because she was just going through a divorce. There was one lady: the first thing she said was: well, I am a beast," (female expert, Germany).

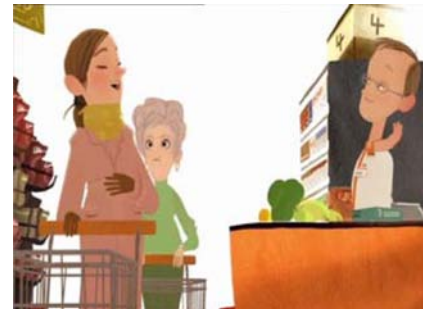


Figure 7: Haro's mother began to talk and act normally again.



Figure 8: Finally mother is back to playing.

The experts were also impressed by the narrative and the production value of the program. “It was just a good storytelling. It just got you emotionally” (male expert, USA). “Technically beautiful, and the care in framing, and the care into the boy’s perspective. It shifts in visual perspective as it went from place to place. I just thought that was so intensely respectful of a kid’s aesthetic position, which we’re often not” (male expert, USA).

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