

## Review of *Junebug*

[first written for the website METACRITIC, spring 2006]:

**Stars:** 9 out of 10

This movie understands the complexity of family ties--how we are all products of our upbringing, and that we have unbreakable connections to our parents and siblings, no matter how much time and space separate us from one another. [\*\*\*SPOILERS\*\*\*] When metropolitan George returns to his North Carolina roots accompanied by his new wife (Madeleine), we see him utterly relax (note how often the movie shows him sleeping, one time even drooling on the living room couch) and, during key moments, how he fits right back into his initial milieu. Yet Madeleine's presence reveals the complex interactions and ferocious tensions that permeate this family. When Ashley loses her baby, we see the film maker's dominant metaphor: When families grow, sometimes the process is painful, awkward, and even aborted. But the families endure and the individuals go off in their own directions while never quite losing touch with their origins. These people simultaneously know each other better than anyone else while still remaining isolated and incomprehensible to each other. The mother cries alone in her bedroom, the father isolates himself in his workshop, and the younger brother has built a protective shell of sullen silence and hostility. At the heart of the family is the wide-eyed, innocent daughter-in-law, Ashley. Her uninhibited generosity of spirit shines hopefully in the face of the dark emotional complexities of this family (symbolized by the tangled woods that surround this middle-class ranch house). By the end of the film, we come to see the huge distances--even outright dislike--that divide the individual family members, but when Madeleine finds her father-in-law's missing screw driver, we see that each family member has a role to play in establishing order and form in the larger family structure. Each addition to the family changes the shape and definition of the unit. These family members love and hate, share and withhold, praise and criticize; they build up and destroy. But their ties are unbreakable. As George drives away, we can understand why he says he is glad to be getting out of there, but we can feel pretty sure that inevitably he will be returning to these people with whom he is more intimately connected than anyone else he knows. This is an excellent and perceptive movie that never patronizes the Southern family it spotlights, nor mocks the city-dweller Madeleine who reconfigures the family nucleus into which she marries.