

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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4 MONTHS, THREE WEEKS, TWO DAYS (2007)

CRISTIAN MUNGIU

Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Cristian Mungiu (b. 1968) is one of the most gifted directors of the Romanian New Wave Cinema. To date, he has directed twelve movies, for which he has received numerous awards. He became widely known after his movie *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days* (2007), which received the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. He also received the *Best Screenplay* award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012 for the movie *Beyond the Hills*. For the movie *Graduation*, he received the *Best Director* award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016. In 2017 he was knighted with the Legion of Honour by the French ambassador in Bucharest, Michelle Ramis.

Film The movie was released in October 2007 and was produced by Cristian Mungiu and Oleg Mutu. It received the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Festival in 2007. It received numerous other international awards, among them the Best Movie Award at The Stockholm Festival and the FIPRESCI Award for the best movie of 2007.

The movie documents the drama of abortion in communist Romania and the corruption and promiscuity involved in it.

Background The background of the movie is the anti-abortion decree during communist rule in Romania. Because of this decree, many women lost their lives, as they had abortions in improper conditions and illegally. Many compromises were made also. This theme appeared also in the Romanian movie *Postcards with Field Flowers* in 1975.

SYNOPSIS

4 Months, Three Weeks, Two Days is a drama about two young women, Gabi and Otilia, who are students during Communist Romania. One of the women, Gabi, is pregnant and, not being able to keep the baby, decides to have an abortion. The two book a room at the hotel where the illegal abortion is to take place. For the job, they contract Mr Bebe, a doctor with previous experience in illegal abortions. Mr Bebe takes advantage of the girls' situation; seeing that they have no money for the abortion, he asks them for sexual favours instead. The girls say they will pay him all the money soon enough but he is adamant in his claim. The girls finally accept his proposal and have sexual intercourse with him. After this, Mr Bebe performs the abortion. Traumatized after this experience, Otilia goes to her boyfriend's mother's birthday party, but it is all too much for her and she has a fight with the boyfriend. She goes back to the hotel and finds that Gabi has had the abortion. Otilia takes the foetus and goes to bury it somewhere. The movie ends with the two young women having a chat in the hotel restaurant and promising to never talk about this episode again.

CHARACTERS

Gabi	a student
Otilia	a student
Adi	Otilia's boyfriend
Mr Bebe	a doctor
Mrs Radu	Adi's mother
Mr Radu	Adi's father

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

GABI Emotional (*Weak, Incoherent, Courteous*)

Gabi is one of the protagonists in the movie. She is a student in the Polytechnic Institute and she has become pregnant. Since there is no way she can have the baby, she has to have an abortion. Throughout this process, she is insecure, weak and very scared. However, she is nice and a good friend.

Weak Between Gabi and Otilia, Gabi is clearly the weaker: it is very hard for her to go through the abortion and is unable to deal with the details relating to it. She asks Otilia to go in her place to deal with 'the money problem' although she had promised Mr Bebe to go to meet him herself. When Mr Bebe is aggressive towards her, she cowers and merely apologizes. She is frail and in no way prepared to deal with the difficult situation she is in.

Incoherent Gabi is also rather incoherent and makes a series of mistakes that put both her and Otilia in a difficult position. Being worried she might be refused by Mr Bebe, she lies about the duration of her pregnancy and also tells him that she and Otilia are sisters. When Mr Bebe confronts her with the truth, she becomes confused and incoherent. Fear and weakness make her make the wrong decisions, which jeopardize both Otilia and herself.

Courteous Gabi is a courteous and well-mannered young woman. She has prepared home-made cookies for Mr Bebe's visit and serves him when he comes into the hotel room. He refuses but she weakly insists, saying 'They are home-made'. Even though Mr Bebe treats her with disrespect, she is very respectful and courteous towards him. When Otilia says she needs to go to Adi's parents, Gabi is scared, but she does not say a word.

OTILIA Rational (*Strong, Assertive, Intrepid*)

Otilia is the other protagonist in the movie and Gabi's best friend. She is also a student at the Polytechnic Institute and has a boyfriend, Adi. She is strong, assertive and intrepid. She helps Gabi a lot.

Strong Otilia is a strong woman, who manages to cope with difficult situations. She never loses her temper in public, although we can tell that the experiences she has been through have taken their toll on her. When she visits Adi's parents, she keeps her cool, although she has been traumatized by having had to have sex with Mr Bebe and by Gabi's abortion. In spite of all this, she carries out all her tasks to the end, even the burial of the foetus, which has affected her greatly.

Assertive Otilia is also an assertive woman. In the face of Mr Bebe's aggressivity, she holds her own ground and answers politely, but firmly. She always has an answer or an explanation for all situations. She also asks questions because she realizes that things are not as they seem. She also manages to convince the second hotel receptionist to give her a room, even though the latter had appeared reluctant.

Intrepid Otilia is also an intrepid young woman: she always manages to find a solution in the most difficult situations: she manages to book a hotel room, to get a pack of Kent cigarettes, although it was difficult to find one, to repair Gabi's blunders and mistakes and to take care of the dead foetus. All through this, she is caring and kind towards Gabi, fully understanding her situation.

MR. BEBE Disagreeable (*Unprincipled, Aggressive*)

Mr Bebe is the doctor who takes care of Gabi's abortion. He is aggressive, unscrupulous and corrupt. He takes advantage of the girls' difficult situation in order to have sexual intercourse with them.

Unprincipled Mr Bebe is clearly the most unprincipled and unscrupulous of men. When he learns the girls do not have enough money for the abortion, he asks for sexual favours from both of them in return for the abortion. He has done illegal abortions previously, as we learn from Gabi. He has no moral standards and he does not shy from any compromise.

Aggressive Mr Bebe is very aggressive towards the girls. He has a domineering attitude and is rude towards them. He even shouts at them and threatens them. He is rude and says that they should not try to fool him as more expert people had tried to fool him but did not succeed. He is arrogant and aggressive.

ADI Agreeable (Kind, loving)

Adi is Otilia's boyfriend and a student in chemistry. His parents are doctors and he is well-educated and kind. We can tell that he loves Otilia very much.

Kind Adi is a kind and well-mannered young man. He treats Otilia with respect and helps her with money, even if he does not know what it is for. He understands when she says she cannot tell him

why she cannot make it to his mother's birthday party. When Otilia accuses him of a lack of support, he does not retort but is supportive. He says he will be there for her and take care of her.

Loving Adi loves Otilia very much. When they have a quarrel, he says: 'I love you and I am willing to do anything to be with you'. When Otilia asks him what he would do if she were pregnant, he says that he would marry her and let her have the baby because he believes an abortion is dangerous. No matter how harshly Otilia treats him, he remains as loving and caring as in the beginning.

THEMES

SOCIETY (Corruption, Poverty, Abortion)

Corruption Mungiu also criticizes corruption during Communist times in his movie. In order to secure a room, Otilia bribes the receptionist with a pack of the most expensive cigarettes at the time. There is a whole network of black market that thrives both in the girls' dorm and elsewhere. Mr Bebe is, however, the epitome of corruption in the movie. When he hears that the two girls do not have enough money to pay him, he asks for sexual favours instead. He intimidates the girls, screams at them and threatens them. Corruption is thus the root of all evil in the movie, together with the discriminatory social system at the time in Romania. Mungiu offers a realistic picture of corruption, showing how it destroys people's lives from an early age. It is, however, the only way to 'get by' in the kind of society created by the Communist regime. The film's protagonists – Gabi and Otilia – are representative victims of the system of corruption from that time.

Poverty Mungiu also shows the miserable conditions in which students lived in communist Romania. The film opens with scenes from the girls' dorm room: it is a shabby room, with plastic covers on the table, jars of food (from parents) lying about in the room and few of the means needed for subsistence. However, there is a black market in the dorm and the girls can get soap or cigarettes from their fellow students through that illegal route.

Abortion The movie's main theme is abortion and the problematic ethics behind it. In communist Romania, abortion was forbidden, and women had to carry it out in dangerous conditions: many of them died in the process. At the same time, the doctors performing the illegal abortions were risking prison. However, many abortions were performed, in spite of all these problems. The movie problematizes this phenomenon, while pointing out the compromises women made and the dangers they were exposed to while having an abortion. In the movie, the doctor performing an abortion is an unscrupulous man, who takes advantage of the girls' difficult situation, in order to ask for sexual favours from them. This, together with the abortion proper, traumatizes the two young girls who are students at The Polytechnic Institute at the University of Bucharest. Without the financial means, or the social welfare system, to help them in this situation, they fall prey to abuse. The film also problematizes the ethics of abortion through the very realistic depiction of the dead foetus and Otilia's reaction upon seeing it.

Black Market Mungiu highlights in his movie the presence of the black market as a phenomenon of everyday life. In the girls' dorm, there is a foreign student who sells cigarettes, alcohol and other goods, products which would have been impossible to find in a normal store at the time. Other girls sell beauty and cosmetic products. It seems that people have to get by somehow, be it legally or illegally. They need these products in order to get access to other services, such as when Otilia has to get a last-minute room in a hotel: she bribes the receptionist with a packet of Kents, which she obtained in another hotel lounge.

RELATIONSHIP (Friendship)

Friendship The film's harsh realism is mollified by the glorification of friendship. Gabi and Otilia are like sisters and Otilia helps Gabi a lot. While Gabi is helpless and insecure, Otilia seems strong and intrepid, the one dealing with the hard problems they face. Otilia's friendship with Gabi is such that she agrees to have sex with Mr Bebe although she is not the one having the abortion. Gabi tries to persuade Mr Bebe to have sex only with her, but it is in vain. Otilia also takes care of the dead foetus, although this is very hard for her. In times where the whole society seems constructed so as to destroy the individual, friendship rescues and ennobles these two girls. The whole drama in the movie is thus transfigured through the beauty of friendship.

Prostitution Prostitution is also an important theme in the movie. Mungiu problematizes it through the girls' having sexual intercourse with Bebe in exchange for his medical assistance. However, to their credit, the girls try everything to persuade Bebe to accept another way of payment before that. But Bebe aggressively and adamantly refuses, so the girls are left with no choice but to comply with his demands. Mungiu shows the depth of the level of corruption present at the time in Romania, which corrupts, in its turn, innocent young people.

Sexual coercion Sexual coercion is highlighted in the scene of the girls' sexual intercourse with Mr Bebe. After the sexual act, Otilia goes to the bathroom and minutely washes herself, without crying, however. Gabi also comes into the bathroom and goes to the shower in tears. The dramatism of the whole scene is portrayed in the moment when Mr Bebe and Otilia begin to take off their clothes. It is a very strong and painful image and Mungiu manages to transmit the trauma of sexual coercion to perfection.

PSYCHOLOGY (Trauma)

Psychological trauma Mungiu takes his time to document the psychological trauma of the girls as they are exposed to abuse and the pain of abortion. In the long scenes where we see the girls' reaction after the sexual intercourse with Bebe, they each go immediately to the bathroom and vigorously wash themselves. We also see trauma when Otilia goes to bury the foetus. We witness her despair and dejection, as she walks aimlessly at night on the dangerous streets of Bucharest. There is the hint that her trauma is such that she will be unable to continue her perfectly sane relationship with Adi after these events. Psychological trauma shows the fundamentally humane character of the heroines and dramatizes the action.

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APPEARANCE

Appearance vs. Reality The conflict in the movie is triggered also by the conflict between appearance and reality. For instance, because of Gabi's lies, the young women have to have sexual intercourse with Bebe. Gabi lies out of fear that she might not get the abortion. Fear underlies the network of lies and deception in the movie. Furthermore, there is a component of respect and care which we can witness in Otilia's protective attitude towards Adi: she refuses to tell him the truth about Gabi's abortion, probably in order to protect him. However, after the sexual abuse, Otilia confronts Gabi about the way she found Bebe, only to learn that he was the only one accepting to do an abortion after the three months' term. Fear, the need to protect the other, and corruption are the driving factors behind the interplay between appearance and reality.

SCENES

BEFORE ABORTION

THE DORMITORY In the first scenes in the movie, we see Gabi and Otilia in their dorm room. Gabi seems worried and stressed out, while Otilia is calm. They are talking about leaving somewhere. Gabi asks Otilia for all sorts of favours and Otilia complies: she goes to get soap and cigarettes and promises Gabi to deal with the 'money' business.



THE HOTEL Otilia goes to a hotel to secure a room Gabi had booked. However, the receptionist cannot find the booking anywhere, allegedly because Gabi had made the booking over the phone. Otilia asks to have a room nonetheless, but the hotel receptionist says they do not have any available rooms. The two have a tense conversation and Otilia is forced to go find another room in another hotel.



THE DOCTOR Otilia then goes to meet Mr Bebe, a man who is supposed to perform an abortion. Mr Bebe is not pleased that Gabi has not come to the meeting herself, on the grounds that she is indisposed. He is also displeased with the fact that they have not booked a room at the hotel he had indicated in the first place. Otilia tries to calm him down and convince that him all is in order.



THE DEAL Mr Bebe and Otilia arrive in the hotel room where Gabi is waiting for them. On consulting Gabi, he notices she is long past three months pregnant and he says that this changes things a lot. The girls say they will pay more, but he does not believe them and asks for sexual favours from both of them instead. The girls have no choice but to comply with his request.



THE ABORTION After sexual intercourse with Gabi and Otilia, Mr Bebe agrees to perform the abortion. After being aggressive towards them, all of a sudden he becomes nice and sweet-tempered, even caring. The girls are both distraught. They each go to the bathroom to cleanse themselves after having sex with Mr Bebe.



OTHERS

BOY FRIEND In-between her errands, Otilia visits her boyfriend, Adi, at his university. He invites her to his parents' house that night for his mother's birthday party. Otilia refuses at first, saying she has something to do. Adi insists, saying that his mother has prepared a marshmallow cake especially for her. At length, Otilia agrees to go. Adi also lends her a sum of money.



PARENTS Because she had promised, Otilia goes to Adi's mother's birthday party, in spite of being worried about Gabi's state. There, she is met by several friends of the family, all doctors, who interrogate and even scold her. Otilia is told off for smoking in front of them, because for some people at the time children did not dare smoke in front of the parents. She is clearly absent-minded and does not pay much attention to the discussion, worrying about Gabi's state.



OTILIA TELLS ADI ABOUT THE ABORTION Otilia asks Adi to let her use the phone in order to call Gabi. In his room, he insists that she tell him the reason why it was difficult for her to make it to the birthday party that night. Reluctantly, she tells him about Gabi's abortion. She is, however, devastated after the stress she had been through and pointlessly reproaches Adi, saying he would not take care of her were she to be in Gabi's situation. The two part on cold terms.



AFTER ABORTION

THE REPROACH After Mr Bebe leaves, Otilia reproaches Gabi, blaming her lies and blunders for making both of them go through this trauma. Gabi tries to excuse herself, but only makes things worse. It is the only time we see Otilia blame Gabi for anything. Indeed, Gabi has made many mistakes: she lied about the length of her pregnancy, she told Mr Bebe she and Gabi were sisters and she failed to make a reservation for a room at the right hotel.



THE FOETUS Back in the hotel room, Otilia learns from Gabi that she has had the abortion in the bathroom. Otilia goes to the bathroom and sees the small foetus on the floor. She is clearly moved and distraught but eventually wraps up the foetus in a towel and puts it in her bag. Gabi asks her to bury it somewhere. She leaves the hotel with the foetus in her bag, wandering the streets in despair for hours.



THE RESTAURANT Upon returning to the hotel, Otilia does not find Gabi in the room. She goes to look for her in the hotel and a receptionist tells her she is in the hotel restaurant. Otilia meets Gabi there and asks her why she left the room. Gabi simply says she was hungry. The movie ends with the two of them having a conversation and Otilia saying she never wants to talk about this episode again.

