

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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OCCIDENT (2002)

CRISTIAN MUNGIU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aeZONhVA48>

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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 *Occident* was released in 2002 by Temple Films. Structurally, it is a very interesting, non-chronological movie, which makes up the full story as though out of pieces of a puzzle. Some critics dubbed the movie 'drama', others 'comedy'. It is very hard to put a label on this bitter-sweet story, but the main message and themes are rather dramatic, even if the film is filled with humour. It also has a little bit of the *noir* comedy elements.

In this movie, Mungiu criticized the poor condition many Romanians live in, particularly intellectuals, as well as the desire to leave the country for the wrong reasons.

BACKGROUND The movie plays on the mirage of the West that seems omnipresent both for the older and for the younger generation in Romania. In order to escape poverty, people would do anything, even abandon love or their parents. The characters in the movie make these compromises and forsake their dreams. Mungiu criticizes both the miserable situation of people living in Romania and the decision to leave the country on materialistic grounds. On the one hand, he shows that intellectuals – Luci, for instance, used to work in a research center – have been degraded and live in poor conditions. On the other hand, those who find the solution to leave, like Sorina, for instance, do so at the price of their own love and dreams. Thus, Mungiu depicts almost a *Catch 22* situation for contemporary Romanians who are obliged to flee their country for a life whose only advantage are the material means.

SYNOPSIS

Occident is a bitter-sweet film about the lives of a group of people brought together by a series of (un)fortunate events. The movie starts with a couple, Sorina and Luci, and their problems: they have been evacuated from the building they lived in, Luci does not have a job and he gets hit in the head by a bottle and ends up in hospital. Sorina is sick and tired of all these problems and moves in with a French man she meets. Luci will try to win her back several times but, in the end, Sorina will leave for France with Jérôme. Luci finally gets a job in advertising, where he has a colleague, Mihaela. Mihaela is equally distressed because she has been abandoned by her fiancé on her wedding day. Her parents are doing everything to find her another husband, but in the end, she will simply leave for Germany. She leaves for Germany with Nae, a man who had emigrated after the fall of Communism. He is back in Romania to bring the sad news of Nicu's death. Nicu is Luci's cousin and aunt Leana's son. Nae owns a printing press and will probably help Mihaela, who is also a poet.

CHARACTERS

Luci	An unemployed intellectual
Sorina	Luci's girlfriend and a kindergarten teacher
Jérôme	A French man
Mihaela	Luci's colleague from work and a poet
Aunt Leana	Luci's aunt
Mihaela's mother	A hairdresser

Mihaela's father	A police chief
Mrs Jura	The kindergarten's director
Gică	Luci's friend
Nae	A friend of Luci's family
Luigi	The Italian suitor

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

LUCI Open(*Kind-hearted, Loving, Feisty*)

Luci is one of the main characters in the movie. He is a poor boy (unemployed at the beginning of the film), but he is kind-hearted, loving and caring. He is in a relationship with Sorina, whom he wants to marry.

Kind-hearted Luci is a very kind-hearted man, he is considerate and respectful: he treats his aunt, who raised him, with a lot of affection and love. He says he does not want to leave the country because he has to take care of Aunt Leana, who is old and ill. He is careful that she does not take any sugar in her coffee because of her sickness.

Loving Luci is very much in love with Sorina, his fiancé, whom he would like to marry but does not have the means. When the movie begins, he and Sorina had just been evacuated from the shabby building they were living in. The only housing he can offer Sorina now is at his aunt's: a small bachelor's apartment. He tries to win Sorina back on several occasions, goes to get a job, as she had asked, but, in the end, she leaves him.

Feisty Luci is also somewhat feisty: when he sees all their furniture and belongings thrown in the yard, he goes to look for the one who is responsible. He is aggressive towards that person, curses, and even pushes him. He is also quite feisty when he visits Sorina in Jérôme's apartment and insults Jérôme. The latter, however, does not understand, so no harm is done.

SORINA Rational(*Pragmatic, Credulous, Selfish*)

Sorina is Luci's fiancé and a kindergarten teacher. She is upset and bitter about the situation they are in and would like a better future for herself. Although she loves Luci, she leaves him for another man for materialistic reasons.

Pragmatic As compared to Luci, Sorina is more pragmatic. She insists that he take a job and go to an interview even if the advertising position does not suit him. She can no longer endure the poverty they are living in and refuses to move to Aunt Leana's, under the pretext that there is not enough room for all of them there. She prefers to move in with Jérôme, a complete stranger, whom she had met while looking for someone to help the wounded Luci.

Credulous Although she is pragmatic and materialistic, Sorina also has a somewhat dreamy and credulous side. When she and Luci go to her father's grave, she asks for a sign from her father and believes that a flock of crows flying away means that her father has given her a sign. The sign does arrive, but in the guise of Luci's being hit in the head by a bottle of alcohol and falling unconscious to the ground.

Selfish All in all, Sorina is selfish as she does not think for a second about Luci's situation: she only seeks to save her skin. Although she and Luci are sharing the same problems – lack of housing, lack of money – she finds a way to solve them, but only for herself: she moves in with Jérôme, the French man who helped her take Luci to hospital. She leaves Luci for Jérôme, in spite of Luci's efforts of winning her **back and in spite of his love for her**.

MIHAELA Agreeable (*Idealistic, Immatuire, Kind*)

Mihaela is the young woman Luci meets while working as a mascot for the advertising company. She is also a poet. Her problem is that she has been abandoned on her wedding day by her drunkard fiancé. She is nice and cheerful, in spite of her misadventures, but she is completely dominated by her mother who imposes her will on her.

Idealistic Mihaela is somewhat of an idealist, not because she writes poetry, but because she says, on several occasions, that money is not important for her. She seems to fall in love very easily, the way

she did with Jérôme, the first time she saw him. She also falls in love with Luci, although he had been nothing but friendly towards her.

Immature Because her mother completely dominates her, Mihaela is unable to make her own decisions, and this is why she remains immature. She goes to meet men through a matrimonial agency that her mother had contacted. She does not like either of them but continues to meet them because her mother says so. In the end, she refuses the last suitor, probably on the grounds he is of African origin, which shocks and horrifies the whole family.

Kind Mihaela has a kind nature; she is very friendly and compassionate towards Luci's problems and listens to them and gives him advice. She goes out with him and makes him laugh when he is upset. She goes to him to say good-bye before leaving the country for Germany.

MIHAELA'S MOTHER Disagreeable (*Materialistic, Oppressive*)

Mihaela's mother is a hairdresser. She is the type of mother who is oppressive and domineering. After her daughter's failed wedding, all she wants is for Mihaela to find a husband, preferably from the West and with a good financial situation.

Materialistic Mihaela's mother is clearly materialistic. When she hears about the case of a young woman who married very well abroad, she wants the same thing for her daughter. When she goes to the matrimonial agency, she says she would like the suitor to be a doctor, preferably from Europe. She does not care about her daughter's dreams and wishes – to write and travel – and almost pushes her into a loveless marriage.

Oppressive When Mihaela says she no longer wants to see the men from the matrimonial agency, her mother insists, saying that she should try one more time. She goes to the matrimonial agency herself, before asking her daughter if she agrees or not. She is pushy, manipulative and domineering.

MIHAELA'S FATHER Rational (*Caring, Helpful*)

Mihaela's father is a police chief, who would also like his daughter to get married very soon. However, he mostly does as his wife dictates, without being very much aware of his daughter's feelings. He is very caring towards his daughter and helpful towards other people.

Caring When Mihaela is to meet the last suitor, a man from Italy, her father goes beyond himself helping to prepare the date. With the help of his subordinates, he rearranges and refurnishes the house, does the cleaning and makes sure everything is perfect for the date. However, when he sees that the suitor is of African origin, he is shocked.

Helpful Mihaela's father is also very helpful towards Luci's family. When Nae arrives from Germany and tells him about himself and his friend, he does everything to help. He looks for Nicu's suitcase and finds it; he has a long chat with Nae and goes to tell the family about Nicu's death. He is very nice and friendly towards everyone in the family.

AUNT LEANA Agreeable (*Selfless, Loving*)

Aunt Leana is Luci's aunt and the one who raised him. She loves Luci as if he were her own child and she is able to make sacrifices for him.

Loving Aunt Leana is very loving towards Luci. When she hears he no longer has where to stay, she immediately accepts to lodge him and Sorina in her small apartment. When she hears that her son is no longer returning from Germany, she does not become upset: rather, she inquires about his state and health.

Selfless When she hears about Sorina and Luci's problems, Aunt Leana asks Luci to have a chat with her. She proposes that she move into a nursing home and let them stay in her apartment. Naturally, Luci refuses, but her gesture is full of selflessness and kind-heartedness. She is a very positive and kind woman.

GICA Agreeable (*Funny, friendly*)

Gică is Luci's friend and Aunt Leana's neighbour. He is the type of friend who will help one in need

and also say a good word for him. He also has a natural sense of humour which alleviates the most tense situations.

Funny Gică is a funny man, either voluntarily or involuntarily. When talking with Aunt Leana about a heart attack, he breaks the plastic balloon in his hand all of a sudden, scaring Aunt Leana. At another time, he wears Luci's bear suit attempting to play a practical joke on aunt Leana, who locks him out on the balcony.

Friendly Gică is also very friendly towards Luci. He goes with him to his old building to take away the furniture and comes back with just two plants because Sorina had already picked up the furniture. He gives Luci some good advice and is there for him in times of need.

MRS. JURA Disagreeable (*Materialistic, Superficial*)

Mrs Jura is the director of the kindergarten where Sorina works and a friend of Mihaela's family. She is also Mihaela's father's mistress. She is materialistic and shallow.

Materialistic It is Mrs Jura who gives the idea to Mihaela's mother to marry her daughter to a wealthy stranger. She thinks that this is the best way to make a living for a young girl like Mihaela and fully endorses her meeting with men from the matrimonial agency.

Superficial Mrs Jura is a superficial woman who only judges people by their looks (and wallet). She treats the foreigners she comes in contact with – like the Dutch man who came to adopt a child from her kindergarten – with respect and solicitude. She also has an affair with Mihaela's father, although she is friends with the wife.

NAE Agreeable (Caring, Helpful)

Nae is Nicu's friend from Germany. He is the one who brings the sad news about Nicu's death to Romania. Upon returning to Germany, he agrees to take Mihaela with him.

Caring We can tell that Nae is very caring from the way in which he speaks about his friend, Nicu. Both of them had moved to Germany during communism and, while in Germany, he hired Nicu in his company. He comes to Romania to bring back Nicu's belongings and to tell the sad news of his death to the family.

Helpful Nae is also very helpful. When Mihaela's father asks him to take his daughter with him to Germany, he does not hesitate and accepts. There is a hint that he will also help Mihaela with her poetry because he owns a printing press.

THEMES

RELATIONSHIPS

SELF-INTEREST VS RELATIONSHIP Another important theme in the movie is that of relationships: relationships between lovers, between parents and children, neighbours, or mere acquaintances. The main idea in the movie is that all authentic relationships are tainted by self interest, materialism or lack of principles. Sorina leaves Luci because she thinks only about herself; Mihaela's mother oppresses her daughter into leading a life she does not want; Mihaela's father has an affair with a family friend. In the movie, most characters are well-meant and kind, but they make poor decisions due to social and economical pressure. Mungiu seems to say it is impossible to have a good relationship if you do not have the basic/material needs fulfilled.

LOVE In this context, what, then, is the fate of true love? Although Luci and Sorina love each other, they are unable to continue their relationship because they are too poor. Although Mihaela falls in love with Luci and they seem quite suited for each other, their relationship suffers because, on the one hand, Luci is still in love with Sorina, and, on the other, Mihaela is unable to communicate how she really feels. For another example, Mihaela's father cheats on her mother with her best friend. The only 'pure' relationship in the movie is between Aunt Leana and Luci: the two truly love each other. In post-communist Romania, the grounds are inauspicious for true love and all the characters suffer from this.

PSYCHOLOGY (Materialism)

MATERIALISM Materialism is another important theme in the movie. Mungiu criticizes the materialistic penchant of his characters who represent the types of people who do not care about

feelings or ideas, but rather about their own well-being. In Romania, it seems that people fall prey to materialistic needs and are willing to sacrifice their own dignity and happiness for them. Mungiu clearly condemns this attitude through his characters, in particular Mrs Jura, Mihaela's mother and Sorina.

QUEST: Leaving Romania One of the movie's main themes is leaving Romania. The main characters in the movie— Sorina, Mihaela, Nae—talk about leaving or actually do leave the country. First of all, Sorina can no longer endure the poverty she lives in and is willing to leave for France with a stranger. Mihaela also wants to leave the country, mainly because she likes the idea of travelling and wants to find a husband. They seem to correspond to the old need for emigration when, during communist times, people emigrated illegally under the threat of being killed. The same had happened to Nae and his friend, Nicu. Nae tells Mihaela's father of the time when he was caught at the border and beaten for wanting to cross the border. Tragically, things do not seem to have changed in Romania and young people still want to, or have to, emigrate.

SCENES

LUCI AND SORINA

POVERTY Upon returning home to their apartment in a shabby building, Sorina and Luci notice that all their belongings have been taken out in the yard. They sit down on the couch and meditate on the miserable condition they are in. Luci gets mad and goes to see what happened. Sorina seems resigned and decides to go ask her father for a solution at his grave. Luci accompanies her there.



UNEMPLOYMENT Luci goes to take the job that Sorina had told him about and gets to be a mascot for a company. At the job, he meets a woman, Mihaela, who also works as a mascot. This means that the two are wearing costumes at work advertising for commercial products. Luci asks Mihaela for her cell phone in order to call Sorina. After this, the two quickly retell each other's personal relations and their problems.



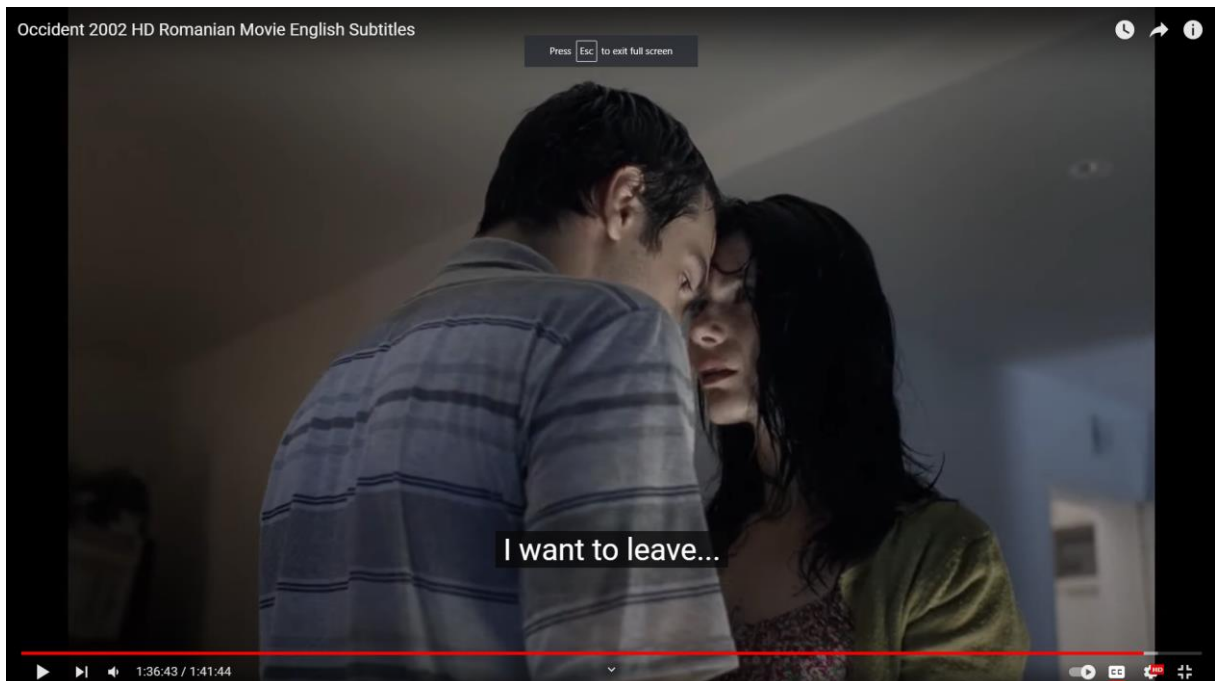
WIFE LEAVES Luci eventually learns where Sorina now lives – she has moved in with Jérôme, the French man who had helped take Luci to hospital when he was hit – and goes to see her. He gets into a quarrel with Jérôme, but the Frenchman does not understand Luci as he does not speak Romanian. Sorina asks Luci to leave.



THE ROMANTIC MOVE Luci tries to win Sorina back and goes to the kindergarten where she says she went to live with candles, flowers and balloons. However, he soon learns that she does not live there, that she has gone to live elsewhere. Luci is upset and disappointed, but fortunately, he has his friend, Gică, with him.



SORINA AND LUCI: THE FINAL ENCOUNTER Luci goes to Jérôme's apartment, in a final attempt to win Sorina back. However, once he is there, he realizes he has arrived too late: they have left for France. In the meantime, Sorina, who had just left, sees Luci by the window and tells Jérôme to stop the car. She goes back to the apartment and desperately embraces and kisses Luci. Although she has come back for Luci, Sorina tells him she has to go to France. We can see how distraught she is as well as Luci's sadness. She leaves amid tears and we realize that although she still loves Luci, her materialism forces her to make that decision.



ADMIRATION FOR THE EUROPEANS: The Dutch official in Romania At Sorina's kindergarten, a Dutch official arrives, who says that he would like to adopt one of the children there. The kindergarten's director, Mrs Jura, is very courteous with him and Sorina translates his words to the kids. In the meantime, Luci arrives and asks Sorina out to have a word with her. Sorina tells him that she no longer wants to live in poverty, implying that she is leaving him.



MIHAELA

MIHAELA IS JILTED AT THE WEDDING DAY Luci's colleague from work, Mihaela, was supposed to get married but, on her wedding day, her fiancé had got drunk and disappeared. The young woman is mortified, and so is her mother. She flees the wedding in tears and arrives at the cemetery where Sorina and Luci were.



LUCI AND MIHAELA Mihaela and Luci start going out together, as friends, and have a good time. They go to an amusement park, with Aunt Leana and Gică. They tell each other jokes and are both amused while listening to a song from their childhood (during Communism).



PARENTS SEARCH FOR HUSBAND: MATRIMONIAL AGENCY After the wedding day disaster, Mihaela's mother decides to go to a matrimonial agency to find a foreign spouse for her daughter. After many failed dates, the last one appears as the best match for Mihaela. The whole family prepares accordingly and refurbishes the house in Italian fashion. Mihaela's father's subordinates are also engaged in this mission.

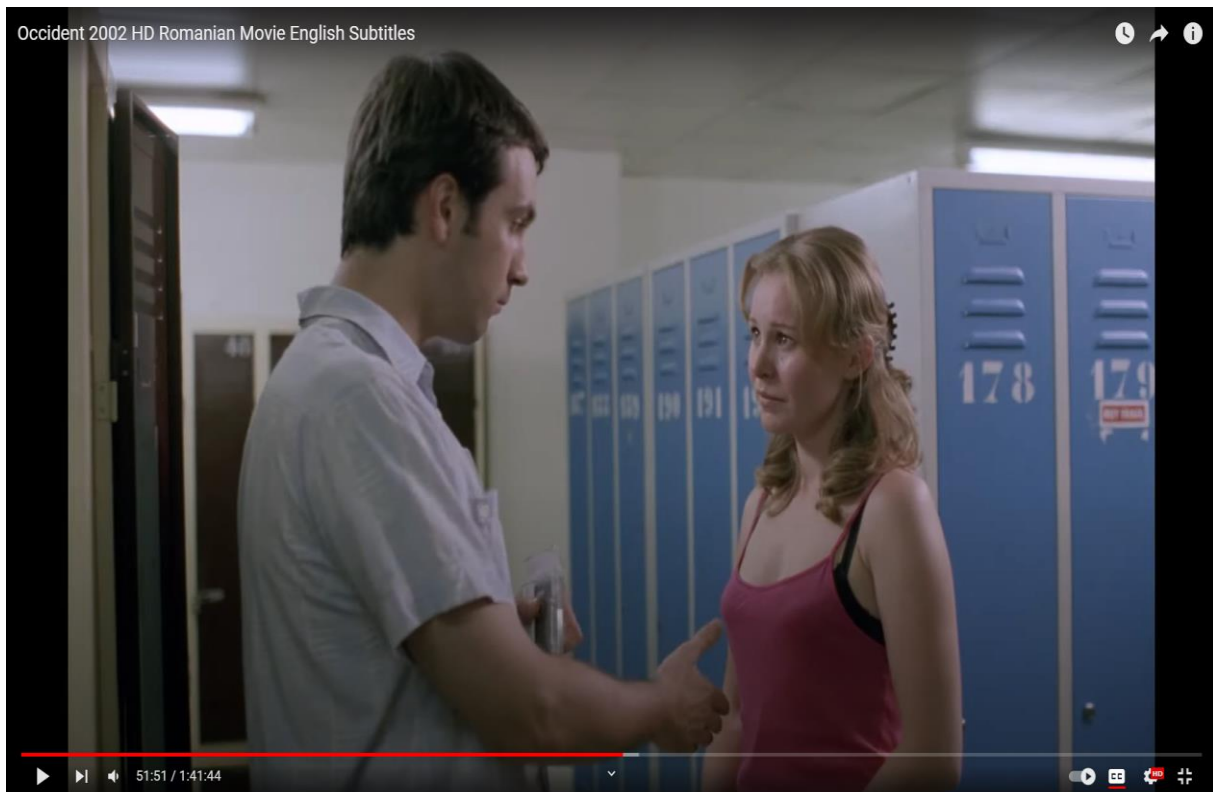


THE SUITOR However, when the doorbell rings, everyone has a shock: the suitor is an African from Mozambique who later immigrated to Italy. In spite of the shock, the Italian man is invited to dinner, where he has a chance to introduce himself. He is courteous and well-mannered. We learn that his father is a comparative linguist in Rome and he is very attentive towards Mihaela. At first, Mihaela decides to leave with him for Italy but changes her mind at the last moment and goes to Germany instead.



MIHAELA LEAVES LUCI TO GO WEST

Before leaving for Germany, Mihaela visits Luci one last time. She looks at him with regret, but words do not come to her mouth to tell him that she is in love with him. Luci is casual and somewhat cold, and it seems that nothing of a romantic involvement crosses his mind. The two part on friendly terms.



LUCI'S FRIEND NEVER COMES BACK Nae remembers his attempt to cross the border with his friend Nicu. Nae tells Mihaela's father, a police chief, about Nicu's death. The friend, Nicu, is also Aunt Leana's son. Nae tells the story of him and his friend to Mihaela's father and to Luci, while having a beer in a pub.

YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO GO TO WEST Although Mihaela's parents had made plans to live close to their daughter in their old age, they realize it is best for Mihaela to leave the country. Her father, the police chief, tells Nae to take Mihaela along with him when he leaves. Mihaela agrees, probably in an attempt to start a new life after the failed wedding.

