

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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## MRI / RMN (2022)

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** *RMN* is a 2022 movie directed by Cristian Mungiu. It premiered at the Cannes Festival in May 2022. It received several awards: The Golden Tower for Best Film at the Palic Film Festival (2022) and a Special Mention at the CineAst Film Festival in Luxemburg (2022). The movie could be dubbed a psychological thriller, dramatising the fear of foreigners in the collective subconscious of the village community. All the fantastic images which appear – Rudi's vision and the multiplicity of bears – could be taken to symbolize a projection of this inner fear and xenophobia of the villagers. These symbols are also verbally expressed in the movie, but Mungiu's foremost idea is that no good comes from violence, only more evil (and fear). The title is the Romanian acronym for a medical scan (similar to the English 'MRI'), which Matthias' father has. The title could also be interpreted as an abbreviation of 'Romania', as the director's x-ray of Romania's social health.

**BACKGROUND** *RMN* is a plea against xenophobia and racism. It shows the tensions ready to explode in a Romania with mixed communities. In a small village, ethnic Romanians, Hungarians and Germans live together. They all seem to get along reasonably well until other outsiders appear, which shakes the frail balance of the community. Mungiu tackled the delicate issue of minority nationalities and languages living in the same place. The main national minority in Romania are Hungarians, who represent almost 60% of all minorities in the country. Then comes the Roma community, representing 30%. Germans make up only two percent of the minority total. Other significant minorities are Ukrainians, Russians and Turks. Most of these minorities speak both Romanian and their own language. In the film, Mungiu shows that behind polite and civil appearances lies antipathy between Romanians and minorities.

#### SYNOPSIS

A thirty-year old man of German origin, Matthias, is at work in a butchery in Germany, away from the country of his birth, Romania. One night, losing his temper, he knocks out a co-worker by hitting him in the head. He is forced to return to Romania, where he is greeted coldly by his wife and silent child. He learns that the child has suffered a trauma after seeing something strange in the woods and no longer speaks. Matthias starts taking care of the child but his rough and violent ways seem to scare his son even further. In the meantime, Matthias resumes his affair with his ex-lover, Csilla, who is now the head of a bread factory and has divorced. Matthias' relations with his wife remain cold, yet respectful.

Three men from Sri Lanka to work at Csilla's factory. They are met with cordiality by Csilla and her boss, Mrs Denes, but the villagers are a lot more hostile. It all culminates one night as they are having dinner in their hosts' house when someone throws a fireball into the dining room. A local gathering is called by the mayor who lets everyone speak their minds about the Sri Lankan men. With the exception of Csilla and Mrs Denes, all are against their stay and vote in favour of ousting them from the village. As they are having their heated discussions, the villagers are informed that Matthias' father has killed himself. Matthias takes his father's corpse, which was hanging on a tree, back home and watches over him. Matthias hears

some strange noises and goes to Csilla's house with his shotgun. Csilla thinks Matthias wants to kill her, when, in fact, Matthias aims at a bear just behind her in her yard. The movie ends as Matthias shoots at the bear and, as he approaches the animal, several other bears appear.

## CHARACTERS

*Matthias* – a young man of German origin

*Csilla* – Matthias' lover

*Ana* – Matthias' wife

*Rudi* – Matthias' son

*Mrs Denes* – Csilla's boss

*Papa Otto* – Matthias' father

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **Matthias**

Matthias is the main character of the movie. He is a tough man who used to work as a butcher in Germany, but returns to his home village in Romania. He is the typical macho man, unfriendly and angry almost all the time. He likes to plan ahead and is wary of other people's ideas.

*Unfriendly* Matthias is not very friendly with the people in his village. Except for a couple of other men his age, the only friend he has is Csilla. When present in the community, he barely speaks and does not interact with the other villagers. He is cold towards his wife, Ana. Matthias is also unfriendly towards his co-workers in Germany. He even hits one of them on the head.

*Planner* Matthias is a good planner. His motivations might not be the best, but he plans his actions with care. When he realizes the extent of his child's trauma, he begins to train him to face dangers like a man. He takes Rudi to the woods and to a lake to teach him masculine tasks. He fires his shotgun in the air to scare away any possible intruders. He also puts a trap in the middle of the forest in order to catch the man his child seems to have seen.

*Angry* Matthias is angry because of the situation created around his son. He acts rashly and aggressively when he fires the shotgun and when he sets up the trap. When he hears that Ana sleeps in bed with Rudi, he gets angry and scolds Ana. He is also furious when he hears that Csilla is hosting the Sri Lankan men.

*Cautious* Matthias is a cautious man. We see this in his interaction with other people. Most of the time, he lets the others speak before he says anything. He does not brag about his love life but tries to keep it secret as much as possible. He is a man of few words, and his fear of other people might be the reason for his reticence.

### **Csilla**

Csilla is the head of the bread factory work force and also Matthias' lover. She also has an artistic side; she loves music and plays the cello. She is friendly and cooperative. She is an independent woman, who has divorced and tries to make the best of her new life

*Cooperative* Csilla collaborates well with Mrs Denes, the owner of the factory. Moreover, she offers to take in the Sri Lankan workers after their hosts no longer want them. Csilla is also understanding in her relationship with Matthias and does not demand that he leave Ana, for instance. She is open and discusses matters in a cooperative way.

*Friendly* Csilla is also friendly. She takes care of the Sri Lankan men, finds them a host, dines with them and eventually takes them into her home. She is also friendly towards Matthias, in spite of his rough ways. She is also friendly with Mrs Denes, a Hungarian like herself, and she opens up to strangers in a way no one else in the movie does.

*Sensitive* Csilla is a sensitive woman. She plays the cello and listens to classical music. She makes sure that the children in the village attend art classes.

**Ana** Ana is Matthias' wife and Rudi's mother. She is a quiet, tranquil woman, who does her duty as wife and mother. She is helpful, loyal and serious.

*Helpful* Ana helps Rudi with his trauma as much as she can. She is there for her son, taking him to school and sleeping with him at night, as he no longer can sleep alone. When Matthias was in Germany, she carried all the responsibility of raising the child herself. Now that Matthias is back, she still has to help her child in spite of Matthias' rough behaviour.

*Loyal* Although she knows Matthias has cheated on her with Csilla, Ana stays loyal to her husband. Not only does she not cheat on him, but we see from her modest, reclusive ways that she does not seek attention, even though she is a beautiful woman. She stays loyal to Matthias even after he renews his affair with Csilla.

*Serious* Ana is serious all the time, mainly because she is worried about the well-being of Rudi. She constantly pays attention to her son and is consumed by the worry that something bad might happen to him. She is also closer to Rudi than Matthias is as Rudi tells her first what it is that he saw that day in the forest.

### **Mrs Denes**

Mrs Denes is the owner of the bread factory and a serious and organized woman. She is of Hungarian origin and speaks in Hungarian most of the time.

*Serious* Mrs Denes is serious, and we never see her laugh or as much as smile. She is preoccupied with the success of the company she owns and she does not seem to have time for triviality or playing around. She is the typical manager of a company, dressing smartly and behaving appropriately for her position.

*Organized* Although her motivations might not be the best, Mrs Denes is organized. She hires the three Sri Lankan men with the purpose of having them work for lower wages than those given to the villagers. She is the typical capitalist producer who will do a lot in order for her company to thrive.

### **Papa Otto**

Papa Otto is Matthias' father. He is an old man suffering from neurological problems. He is lonely and apathetic.

*Lonely* Papa Otto lives alone, probably after his wife has died. On the one occasion that Matthias visits him, he finds Papa Otto lying inert. Matthias then begins to consider taking his father to the city for an MRI scan. Papa Otto kills himself before this happens, probably out of the depression caused by loneliness.

*Apathetic* We never see Papa Otto speak or act about. The first time we see him, he is lying unconscious and the second time, he hangs from a tree after killing himself. He stands for all the parents left alone and abandoned by the children who went to work abroad.

### **Rudi**

Rudi is Matthias and Ana's son. He is a silent boy with a lot of imagination. He has seen a man hanging from a tree in the woods and this event has made him anxious and frightened.

*Imaginative* We can tell that Rudi is imaginative from the way he reacts after he has seen the man hanging from a tree in the forest. His imagination prevents him from sleeping at night and from going to school by himself. He might also have extra-sensory powers since he may have seen in advance his grandfather's body hanging from a tree.

*Anxious* Because of what he has seen, Rudi is an anxious little boy. When his father takes him to school, leaves him and tells him to go on alone, he keeps on turning back to see if his father is still there or if anyone is watching. He is afraid of sleeping alone at night and does not seem to like the violence his father tries to teach him.

## THEMES

### SOCIETY

**Identity** The movie's main theme is that of national identity. Three different ethnic groups live in a village in Romania: Romanian, Hungarian and German. To make things more complicated, three foreign workers from Sri Lanka arrive, which brings out the worst in terms of ethnocentrism in the village. This is revealed in meetings at the church with the Catholic and Protestant priests, as well as with the mayor. On all of these occasions, the villagers reveal their prejudice not only of the foreign visitors but of their own neighbors. Although the pastor says they should all read the service in their own language (Romanian, German or Hungarian), he starts speaking in Hungarian, which does not permit the Germans and the Romanians to understand the sermon. The villagers seem to get on together well, in spite of the differences stirred up among them by the priests and the mayor who also turn the locals against the Sri Lankan men. This then makes room for arguments among the villagers, who open old nationalistic wounds and insult one another. However, when it comes to personal interests, it all becomes different. Moreover, the love triangle in the movie is made up of the three nationalities present in the village: Matthias is German, Csilla is Hungarian and Ana is Romanian. This complicates the relationships among the three of them. For instance, Csilla does not want to be seen in public with Matthias because he is German (the other reason is that he is still a married man).

**Race** The issue of race is poignant in the movie. The arrival of the three Sri Lankan workers at Mrs Denes' factory reveals the racism and narrow-mindedness of the villagers. Although Mrs Denes and Csilla have no problem in receiving them and try to help them adjust as well as possible to their new life, the same does not hold for the rest of the villagers. On Christmas Eve, as they were having dinner in their hosts' home, the men and Csilla are attacked by men wearing Klu Klux Klan clothes. They are shocked and refuse to keep the men in their home thereafter. Csilla takes them to her home. However, she is told off for this by Matthias, who does not like the idea of men living under the same roof with his lover. Then, the whole village boycotts the bread factory. At the church gathering, almost all of them vote in favour of expelling the Sri Lankan men from their village, after a tumultuous discussion in which all of them reveal their racism by assuming that the Sri Lankan men are dirty, criminal, sick and invasive.

**Language** Language is an important aspect in the racial discrimination and identity issue. Not by chance, the director chose to use a mix of languages – Romanian, German and Hungarian – in order to show the diversity of speech in a small, close-knit community. He also probably wanted to show that each culture is holding firmly to its traditions, especially through language. For instance, Mrs Denes, the manager of the bread factory, knows Romanian and can speak it well, but she prefers speaking in Hungarian. The ones speaking most Romanian are the Romanians themselves and the Germans. Of all three ethnic groups, the Hungarians seem the most adamant in keeping with their own language. Matthias, who is German, speaks in Romanian with Csilla, who is Hungarian. Ana, who is Romanian, speaks Romanian. Csilla speaks both Hungarian and Romanian. Language becomes an obstacle in the communication among people and we can see that there are many problems among the villagers because of it. The director wanted to show the problems that may arise in a small community where many languages are spoken at the same time.

**Work** Work is another important issue in the movie. When the movie begins, we see Matthias at work in Germany as a butcher. Through the example of Matthias, the director shows the hard lives of those living and working abroad. The camera pans on the corpses of animals and Matthias is himself violent towards one of his co-workers (he hits him in the head because he is upset with what the co-worker has told him). Because of this issue at work, Matthias is forced to return home, to Romania, to a reluctant wife and traumatized child. Moreover, the issue of work reappears with a vengeance with the arrival of the three Sri Lankan men in the village. In the heated debate at the church, the villagers are worried that the three men are stealing their jobs and that they will bring more immigrants to work there. They mock the French for their openness to the immigrants, saying that now they can no longer get rid of them or integrate them. Work becomes a matter of life and death, and we see people enraged by the idea that some foreigners might take away their jobs.

## RELATIONSHIPS

**Loyalty/Disloyalty** We see the issue of loyalty/disloyalty portrayed in the Matthias/Ana/Csilla love triangle. Matthias, who is married to Ana, is in love with Csilla, with whom he had an affair before leaving for Germany. Ana knows about this affair and asks Matthias if he has seen Csilla since his return. After Matthias left for Germany, Csilla divorced and she still seems attracted to Matthias. This leads to the renewal of their affair, when Matthias visits Csilla one night. Although Ana never reproaches Matthias for anything, we see that his cheating on her affects her and she is estranged from him. It's hard to tell whether Csilla is in love with Matthias or merely attracted to him, but we can see she is pleased with the arrangement. The only thing keeping Ana living in the same house with Matthias is their child, Rudi. Matthias is disloyal towards Ana but loyal towards Csilla, whom he forgives for everything. We see in this contemporary community a certain flexibility towards extra-marital affairs and no person judges either Csilla or Matthias, although their affair is well-known by everyone.

**Marriage** The question of marriage is also posed in the movie through Matthias' and Ana's relationship. Their marriage remains intact even if the relations are cold between them (they do not seem to be making love anymore), and Matthias has been having an affair with another woman. In spite of this, Ana sticks with the marriage. Also, she has a different nature than her husband's: while he is rough and tough, she is calm, kind and caring. This contrast comes through in their quarrel about how they should raise their child and how to treat him in his moment of crisis. After Matthias resumes his affair with Csilla, there would be, technically, no reason why Matthias and Ana should not split up. But they don't. Why is it? Is it because Ana is too weak and fears her husband's reaction? Probably not, since she responds calmly, but assertively, to him. Is it because she fears the community's judgment? Again, probably not, since the whole community knows about Matthias' affair with Csilla. I think the director wanted to show the behavior of certain (Romanian) married women who, for the sake of the children and their own reputation, turn a blind eye to their husbands' affairs.

**Love** The issue of love is hard to pinpoint in the movie because the two characters involved – Matthias and Csilla – are described as rather simple, rudimentary characters driven more by their instincts than by their heart and mind. So, if there is love, it is a basic kind of love, which is a mix of sexual attraction, physical tenderness and the need for gratification. Whatever her motives are, Csilla agrees to have an affair with a married man even if she is not head over heels in love with – we can tell this by the way she rebukes him when she is upset with him. As for Matthias, he is unable to tell Csilla he loves her in his mother tongue, which might indicate the fact that he does not really love her. Ana does not seem to be in love with Matthias anymore either, probably because she knows about his affair. The real love we see in the movie is Ana and Matthias' love for their son, Rudi. They both care for him very much and do the best they can for him to recover. Ana reaches him better through her tenderness and is the one to whom he confides what/whom he had seen in the woods.

**Desire/Lust** The relationship between Matthias and Csilla is filled with desire/lust. Before getting back together with Csilla, we see Matthias masturbating in the back of her house. The other scenes are erotic and full of lust between them. Both of them are passionate persons, Matthias is quick-tempered and lusty, and Csilla is a woman aware of the beauty of her body and takes advantage of the sex life as much as she can. The desire of Matthias in the film makes the character more humane, more approachable. A grim, serious and quick-tempered man, Matthias would appear as a mere brute were it not for his passion for Csilla. When he is with Csilla, he is tame and kind and affectionate. The same goes for Csilla, a spick-and-span business woman, who runs the bread factory. Her secret private life tones down her otherwise serious, uncompromising, matter-of-fact nature. However, Csilla is not as passionate as Matthias and their arguments stem from this discrepancy. Mungiu shows the sexual freedom of people living in a traditionalist, peasant community through the relationship of Matthias and Csilla.

## PSYCHOLOGY

**Fear** Fear appears in the movie through Matthias' son, Rudi. Because Rudi had seen a hanged man as he was going to school one day, he has become mute and afraid of going through the woods by himself. Moreover, he is afraid of sleeping alone, so his mother sleeps with him. Matthias opposes this way of dealing with Rudi's fear and, by contrast, exposes his son to immersion into fear by taking him through the woods again. Matthias' way of coping with Rudi's fear is by taking a rifle with him and teaching his son

how to fight enemies. He even sets up a trap so he will catch whoever has scared his son. These methods do not work, however, and Rudi remains silent and fearful. This fear is unresolved at the end of the movie when Rudi sees the body of his hanged grandfather. He hugs his father and starts crying. Rudi's fear can also be explained in terms of the trauma of children left behind in the country by parents who go to work abroad. It is not by chance that Rudi's exposure to danger happened while Matthias was absent from home. Rudi's story is in line with the main idea of the movie, namely, that violence will not resolve problems, only aggravate them.

## SCENES

### **MATTHIAS RETURNS**

*MATTHIAS WORKS IN A BUTCHERY* In a butchery, tens of corpses of animals hang from hooks in the roof. Several men work there. One of them, Matthias, seems to be supervising the job done by the others. He walks about in silence, accomplishing several tasks.



*MATTHIAS HITS HIS CO-WORKER IN THE HEAD* Matthias goes out of the butchery and talks on the phone. The conversation clearly disturbs him and, when a co-worker comes and greets him, he loses his temper. The co-worker says something in German, which offends Matthias even more. He says, 'What did you say?' and hits the man in the head.-----



*MATTHIAS HURRIES BACK HOME* After this incident, Matthias is forced to flee Germany. He probably does not have money to take the plane, so he hitchhikes home. He goes on foot along the road until he finds a car that picks him up.



*MATTHIAS ARRIVES HOME* Matthias returns to his family home in the Romanian village. It is the same house we saw in the beginning of the movie. He is met coldly and with indifference by his wife, who asks why he has come home without informing her. His son has become silent because he got traumatized by something frightening he had seen in the woods on his way to school.



## EX-LOVER CSILLA

*CSILLA IN HER HOME* We see Csilla, a woman who is the head of a bread factory, alone in her home. She listens to music and has dinner with a glass of wine. She starts playing the cello, but she looks bored and stops.



*MATTHIAS AND CSILLA MEET* Matthias goes to visit Csilla at her work. She comes out in the chilly winter day and greets him. She seems happy to see him. They know each other from before. Csilla tells him that she has divorced since he went to Germany.





**CSILLA SEES MATTHIAS AT THE BACK OF HER HOUSE** Matthias goes at night to the back of Csilla's house and begins to masturbate. Csilla hears noises outside and goes out to see what is happening. She sees Matthias and tells him never to come back to the house again.



**MATTHIAS AND CSILLA RESUME THEIR AFFAIR** After the quarrel with his wife, Matthias goes to visit Csilla. He approaches her casually and we realize they used to be lovers before. They make love again and resume their affair.



**MATTHIAS AND CSILLA MAKE LOVE AGAIN** After resuming their affair, Matthias and Csilla begin to see each other constantly. One night, while they were lying naked in bed, Csilla tells Matthias to say he loves her in German. Matthias says he can't but that he can say it in Csilla's mother-tongue, which is Hungarian. Csilla gets upset.



#### **MATTHIAS AND HIS SON RUDI**

**AMATTHIAS WALKS RUDI THROUGH THE FOREST** After he hears about his son's trauma, Matthias takes Rudi for a walk through the forest on Rudi's way to school. Matthias shoots his gun in the distance to scare away any possible intruder. When they get close to the school, Matthias lets Rudi walk alone. Rudi looks back at his father anxiously.



**MATTHIAS TAKES RUDI TO THE LAKE** In order to teach his son survival skills, Matthias takes Rudi for a boat ride on the lake. He teaches Rudi basic survival skills. Rudi listens but never speaks.



*MATTHIAS MOUNTS A TRAP* Seeing that nothing he does helps his son recover, Matthias takes Rudi to the forest once again. There, he sets a trap in order to reassure his son. The trap is supposed to catch all unwanted intruders. Rudi watches everything carefully but does not speak a word.



*MATTHIAS AND ANA QUARREL* Ana admits that she sleeps in the same bed with Rudi at night because Rudi is afraid to sleep alone. Hearing this, Matthias gets mad and forbids Ana to ever sleep in the same bed with Rudi. Ana insists, saying that the child needs this.



#### **FOREIGNERS IN TOWN**

*SRI LANKAN MEN ARRIVE* At the bread factory, Csilla and Mrs Denes greet a group of Sri Lankan workers who have come to work in their factory. The men are polite and the two women are cordial. Everything goes very well.



*A FRENCHMAN ARRIVES* After the arrival of the three Sri Lankan men, a Frenchman arrives in the village. He is invited into one of the villagers' homes for lunch. They converse casually in English.



*THE HUNGARIAN SERMON* In the small village, the church is the central meeting point. All the villagers gather there on Sunday morning and a Hungarian priest gives the sermon. The priest says they can all pray in their own tongue; however, he speaks solely in Hungarian. The ones speaking Hungarian, and who have always spoken mainly in Hungarian, understand him. But the others, the Romanians and the Germans, do not.



*ATTACK ON THE SRI LANKAN MEN* On Christmas Eve, Csilla is having dinner with the Sri Lankan men working in her factory. Everything is peaceful until something thrown through the window explodes in the room. They jump to their feet, scared to death.



*THE VILLAGE KLU KLUX KLAN* Csilla goes outside to see who has thrown the fireball. There she is met by a group of villagers who wear Klu Klux Klan costumes and bear torches. She tells them off and threatens to call the police.



***MATTHIAS GETS MAD AT CSILLA*** After the attack, the hosts of the Sri Lankan men say no longer want to keep them in their home. Having no other solution, Csilla receives the three men in her own home. Matthias hears about it and gets angry. He goes to Csilla's door and reproaches her sharing the same house with other men.



***MATTHIAS IS BROUGHT IN FOR INVESTIGATIONS*** The police start making investigations concerning the Klu Klux Klan attack. Matthias is asked to give a deposition because a friend of his who is a suspect said that he had been with Matthias that night. As usual, Matthias is cautious and uses few words to give his deposition.



**THE MEETING WITH THE MAYOR** The villagers have all begun boycotting the bread factory for the hiring the Sri Lankan men. After the attack, a crisis has emerged that has to be solved: the villagers are angry at the arrival of the Sri Lankan men. The mayor summons everyone and they all have their say on the matter. Most of them are against the presence of the Sri Lankan men in the village.



**MATTHIAS' FATHER KILLS HIMSELF** As the discussions continue and get heated, someone bursts in and announces that Matthias' father has killed himself. They all go to the forest where they find the old man hanging from a tree. Matthias takes his father in his arms and carries him back to his home.





*MATTHIAS IS ALONE DURING THE VIGIL* Matthias is in his father's room, watching over his dead body. He is alone because the villagers will not come to the bedside of a man who has killed himself. There is only one person who comes to pay his respects. It is the Frenchman, who says a prayer and crosses himself.

## **BEARS**

*MATTHIAS TAKES A REAL SHOT* Matthias goes back to Csilla's house. She is visibly frightened and troubled at seeing him. He is carrying his shotgun and points it at her while she stands in her backyard. She screams, 'Please forgive me!' just then he shoots. But he has shot at a bear that has appeared behind Csilla.



*THE MULTIPLE BEARS* Matthias keeps on shooting at the bear. As he draws closely to the bear, he notices another bear appear. Then another and another, until a whole group of bears appears from the woods.

