

## *Graduation*

***Graduation or Family Photos*** is a 2016 Romanian film written and directed by **Cristian Mungiu**. The main roles were played by the actors **Vlad Ivanov, Maria Drăguș and Adrian Titieni**.

The premiere took place on May 19, **2016** at the **Cannes Film Festival**.

**Cristian Mungiu** (b. April 27, 1968, Iași) is a contemporary Romanian film director, producer and screenwriter.

### **Biography**

He was born in the city of Iași in the family of doctor Ostin Mungiu, an university professor at the University of Iași, and Maria Mungiu, a teacher of Romanian language and literature. His sister, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, a psychiatrist by profession, became known as a political scientist, civic activist and political analyst. Cristian Mungiu studied English and American language and literature and worked for a period as a teacher, as well as as a journalist and moderator on radio and television.

In **1998** he graduated from the Academy of Theater and Film in Bucharest, then contributing as a second director to well-known films such as *Le Capitaine Conan* (1996, directed by Bertrand Tavernier) and *Train de Vie* (1998, directed by Radu Mihăileanu).

He directed several short films, for which he received several awards, including the one for best director, at the Dakino Festival, in 2000, for *Zapping*. The film *Occident* (2002) was presented in the section *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* at the Cannes Film Festival, obtaining the Grand Prize at the Transilvania International Film Festival.

**The film *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* (2007)** made Cristian Mungiu famous, by his selection by the jury of the Cannes Film Festival. After receiving the Prize granted by the International Federation of Film Press and the award given by the administration of national education in France, the director Cristian Mungiu won on May 27, 2007 the Grand Prize of the Cannes International Film Festival - Palme d'Or. The film was also nominated for the „Golden Globe” awards.

On May 28, 2007, the president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, conferred in a decree the National Order „Steaua Românie” in the rank of Knight to the director Cristian Mungiu, „for his contribution, by which he was highlighted as an exponent of the young generation of Romanian directors, at the worldwide promotion of national cinema”.

The next project was the film *Memories of the Golden Age*, which consists of 6 short films produced by Mungiu and directed by him and other young directors, among them Hanno Hofer.

In 2013, Cristian Mungiu was part of **the jury of the official competition of the 66th edition of the Cannes Film Festival** chaired that year by director and producer Steven Spielberg.

## Awards and distinctions

The award for best director at the Dakino Festival (2000), for the short film *Zapping*.

The Grand Prize at the Transylvania International Film Festival (2002), for the film *Occident*.

The prize granted by the International Federation of Film Press at the Cannes Film Festival (2007) for the film *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*.

The prize granted by the administration of national education in France at the Cannes Film Festival (2007) for the film *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*.

Grand Prize „Palme d'Or” at the Cannes Film Festival (2007) for the film *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*.

„The best European director” for the film *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*, prize offered by the European Film Academy, 2007.

The prize for best screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival (2012) for the film *Beyond the Hills*.

Award for directing at the Cannes Film Festival (2016) for the *Bachelor* film.

On October 19, 2017, Cristian Mungiu was awarded the Legion of Honor as a knight, the decoration being handed over by the French ambassador to Bucharest, Michele Ramis.

## Activity

Even if it is considered that the director **Cristi Puiu** is the one who gave the start of the New Romanian Cinema of the years 2000-2010, with his film „Marfa si Banii” / „Stuff and Dough” from 2001, and he is also the one who opened the way for the important film awards, in Cannes, with „The death of Mr. Lazarescu” (trophy of the section *Un certain regard*, 2005), the reality will always remain that the author **Cristian Mungiu** is the first Romanian filmmaker (and the only one so far) distinguished with the supreme distinction of the Cannes Film Festival, Palme d'Or (at which the Romanian directors did not even dare to dream until then), in 2007 for the film „*4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*”.

A very good short film author, Cristi Puiu broke into Romanian cinema in 2001 with „Marfa si Banii” / „Stuff and Dough”, after completing his film studies at the School of Visual Arts in Geneva, where he made the school short film "Before Breakfast" (after O'Neill). During this time, however, Cristian Mungiu, a graduate of ATF Bucharest in 1998, made some exceptional, extremely solid short films, laying out in fact the foundations of what will be called „the new wave” of Romania and of his style later: „*Corul pompierilor*” / „*The firemen's Choir*” (with a subtle Czech influence), „*Zapping*” and „*Nicio intamplare*” / „*Nothing by chance*” are just a few examples. The same as in „*Occident*” (2002), in a way the first film (chronologically) from „the new wave”.

Nothing from „*Occident*”, a comedy in Tarantino's style with „stories interwoven”, did not announce the blow he was to give in 2007 with „*432*”, a profound human drama that goes beyond the historical frame of communism, for which he will be awarded with Palme d'Or. It will follow, in the same line, „*Beyond the hills*” (2012, awards for screenplay and female performance at Cannes), about the episode Tanacu, and this excellent „*Bacalaureat*” / „*Graduation*”, for the first time focused on a male character.

## Storyline

„Bacalaureat” brings the story of Dr. Aldea and his daughter Eliza. As the movie opens, someone throws a stone at the window of the Aldea apartment. We have no idea why. We then get to know Dr. Aldea and Eliza (Aldea’s wife Magda remains in the background due to real or perceived illness). Eliza is about to graduate and she already has two offers from great UK universities (with a full scholarship). All that stands between her and the UK are her last finals, where she needs to average a 9 out of 10 to be eligible for the scholarships. Then, one day before the first final, Eliza is assaulted during an attempted rape attack. That obviously overwhelms Eliza, and even though she is in no state to sit for the final, her dad insists that she does anyway. She only scores an 8.

When not everything goes to plan, the doctor faces a moral dilemma: to try and influence the result, something that goes against everything he stands for and has taught Eliza, or do nothing and risk losing Eliza’s opportunity to study in England. The movie approaches this dilemma in a nuanced way, and there is no easy „black or white” answer or solution. Along the way we get to know a number of secondary (but important) characters, including Eliza’s boyfriend, the doctor’s lover, and others.

„Graduation” is also a film about the relationship between a father and his daughter (at the critical age of adolescence and moral purism), a relationship he loses and rebuilds several times during these days. Stylistically, Mungiu succeeds to create a terrible tension during the two hours of film, by pure exposition of the facts that make up the mechanism of corruption and moral degradation.

There are two main themes in the film: First it's about the generation gap, about parents sacrificing everything for what they perceive as best for their kids - but is this „everything” the best or even good? Same as in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, the film that brought him the Palme d'Or, the hero of Mungiu's latest film crosses the borders of law and buries his own moral rules in order to help. It's just that here it's not about helping the best friend, but his own kid but by doing this he becomes the master of her destiny - is this really for her good? His goal is to save her from the generalized atmosphere of corruption, from the endless chain of relations the Romanian society and life seem to be built upon, but in order to save her from the system he needs to become part of it. This is the second important theme. The Romanian director seems to look around in anger, at his own broken dreams, at the lost opportunities of his generation who could have made a difference but did not have the courage to do it, ending in compromise.

It includes universal themes such as well-meaning parents over-planning their children's future plus a challenge to the belief that „the grass is always greener” somewhere else. And of course, the saying "O, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive” is well played out in the narrative.

Cristian Mungiu’s film, „Graduation”, should have the purpose of awakening, if possible, all those at the age of 40 years old, the generation of the director. The idea of this „too late” (which was also the title of Lucian Pintilie’s 1996 film) comes back periodically in the discussions between the characters of Cristian Mungiu’s new film, „Graduation”, especially in those within the family of the doctor Romeo Aldea (49 years, about the age of the director), the main character. Periodically, Romania is acutely feeling the impossibility of any change, the total collapse of the

previous melioristic efforts. It was the situation in the 90's of Pintilie, but it is also, here, and now, after another 30 years, and about this situation the new film of Mungiu is about.

„Graduation” works as an irreproachable x-ray of the current Romanian society, as well as of all the problems that a 40-year-old man can face here, in the middle of a „circuit of life”, as one would say. It is the film that Romania needed, it could be said.

In the early 1990s, the couple Romeo and Magda Aldea (Adrian Titieni and Lia Bugnar) had left the country, but they returned in 1991 to „change something here”, as they remember now. Currently, aware of the impossibility any real change, all they want is to send away from their country their 18 year old daughter, Eliza (Maria Drăguș), in order not to face in life what they have faced here. The girl has already won a scholarship to a university in England and all she has to do is to pass her baccalaureate, theoretically a mere formality. A serious accident suffered on the day before the exam will, however, make things gradually, more and more complicated.

Romeo believes that it is his duty to do everything possible to ensure that Eliza will get the mark required for admission to the scholarship that allows her to leave the country. He thus calls for the circle of „relationships”, which he has faced all his life in Romania until then. As in Caragiale's time, the „chain of weaknesses” works flawlessly in this „mountain city” in which the action takes place and in which no one bribes, but everyone „serves” everyone. But the situation is complicated and, in these 4-5 days, „from the life of Romeo Aldea”, the man feels that everything collapses around him and he loses everything he had: family, relationship with his wife and daughter, even the one with mistress (Magda, played by debutante Malina Manovici), professional integrity (as in a real „descent into hell”).

But the roots of the bad situation are much older and have been throughout the character's life so far. Despite what one might think, „Graduation” is not a film about Eliza's generation (even if the film ends with a group photo of the promotion and, in the background, the song „Years of high school”) - a generation that it is not the future, but already the present of Romania - but about that of Romeo, those of the past 40 years, who chose „then” to stay in the country in order to change something. Gradually, the film turns into a meditation on compromise and in a flourishing of moral problems and ethics of „transition”.

In order to let his daughter escape a corrupt country, the lead character in „Bacalaureat” has to immerse himself in the corrupt system he despises. That's the central paradox and the moral dilemma in this film. Doctor Aldea, a surgeon in a small town in Romania, has one goal in his life: to let his daughter escape to „civilisation”. This goal has come within reach when she is selected for a scholarship in Britain, provided she passes the exams with excellent results. When she is violently attacked a few days before the exams, there is a serious risk she won't pass the test. So the doctor decides to pull some strings.

Romeo wants to determine the „without compromises” future of Eliza precisely based on a compromise, and this fact is rejected by his wife and, especially, his daughter. In the end, Eliza says „I handled” – „to handle”, is the miserable verb that defines Romanian destinies -, as if in a kind of acceptance of the „curse of Wallach” that governs this place. „Parents and children” (as Turgheniev said), generations (of sacrifice) after generations ... Here is the place where nothing changes.

Mungiu says that „If you tolerate your own compromise you will tolerate the compromise around you. You will lose the moral power to speak out, because deep inside you know you have done something that is not so moral. We all complain in Romania about the level of corruption without understanding that we are responsible for it.” Though there are no consequences apparent for any of the wrongdoers, many unanswered questions are simply left hanging, and the film's abrupt ending is less than satisfying, Mungiu succeeds in exposing the favoritism, influence trading, and codes of silence that permeate Romanian society, an exposé that may just be the catalyst the country needs to rebuild a more just and ethical society.

Romania is the sort of place where if you have the right connections you can make things happen and so after a lifetime of doing the right thing Romeo finds temptation knocking on his door, that is to do the wrong thing but, in his heart, it is for the right reasons. But the doctor has to cope with the moral consequences afterwards. Is the father still able to look his daughter in the eye, after having told her all her life that corruption is wrong? And what about his wife, who has made a point of never lowering her standards of integrity, and has paid for her righteousness with a low-paid and uninteresting job? Besides, how can he defend high moral standards when he is conducting an affair with a much younger woman? The doctor defends his moral integrity: the attack is an unforeseen emergency, and so exceptions to the rule are permitted. But does he believe so himself? Things are made more complicated because of his daughter's boyfriend, and her own doubts about the need to go to Britain.

The film looks at all sides of moral integrity, and doesn't offer straightforward solutions. In fact, a lot is left unanswered, as if the director wants to say that things are never very clear, and there is always room for doubt.

#### **Sources:**

<https://www.fullhdfilmsitesi.pw/mezuniyet-izle.html>

[https://adevarul.ro/cultura/arte/prea-tarziu-bacalaureat-filmul-nevoie-romaniavideo-1\\_573ed86d5ab6550cb81fa112/index.pdf](https://adevarul.ro/cultura/arte/prea-tarziu-bacalaureat-filmul-nevoie-romaniavideo-1_573ed86d5ab6550cb81fa112/index.pdf)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2eocor1m4Q>

conferința de presă a filmului Bacalaureat, care a avut loc la Cannes

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