

A Shootist for VMRO – Two Redemptions and One Sin

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Milcho Manchevski's film tells the story of the salvation of a small-time criminal, Edge, who during a burglary is converted to a caring and loving "grand son" of Angela's, a 95 years old lady, by being half forced by Angela's Colt and half seduced by her promise to reveal him a golden treasure if he listens to her story and fulfils her last wish. The story Angela tells is the story of the salvation of Luke, a would-be head-hunter who in 1900 odd travels from somewhere in Midwestern US to war struck Macedonia in the quest for luck, money and a new life. However, fate arranges Luke's conversion to a freedom fighter and to an avenging angel for the death of his former target and victim: A school teacher who leads a band of Macedonian nationalists against the troops of a fierce Ottoman captain. Luke does not survive the final shoot-down. The material and the spiritual reward of his sacrifice, the golden treasure and teacher's new born daughter, come into the custody of his brother, Elijah, and are brought back to New York where the circle is closed with Edge's burglary 95 year later.

The film has all the ingredients that make out a great piece of cinema that picks up the tradition of the sociocritical Westerns of the Italian school. Nevertheless it is a bad piece of cinema, not in terms of the state of the art, but in a moral sense. And this in spite of the fine irony that pervades it. More precisely, it is a piece of cinema that has fallen into sin, because it has missed the sense of the cinematographic tradition it claims to belong: The sociocritical Italo-Western deals namely with the birth and the establishment of the civic society in northern America, namely in the United States and Mexico of the late 19th and early 20th, by telling the stories of "heroes" who oppose more or less successfully the arbitrariness and the power of rich landowners, corrupt and tyrannical governments, and desperate criminals. The world that emerges is, however, a world without any other historical and traditional roots than the ideas of the enlightenment and reformation. The sociocritical Western tells us the story of the "Birth of a Nation" from the social scrap of the Old World cemented solely by the ideals of human rights, root democracy, equality and the denial of any other superindividual power than God.

The situation in the Balkans of the early 20 th century was on the other hand completely different. It was the more or less simultaneous birth of several nations, of the Greek, the Turkish, the Albanian, the Serb, the Bulgarian, the Romanian and last but not least the Macedonian nation. All these particular processes included both the formation of a civic society in each nation and their mutual cultural and territorial demarcation that took place in the territory of an empire that had mixed all those ethnic groups that were the predecessors of the Balkan nations for at least four centuries. Milcho Manchevski's film, however, assigns each nation a single social role: the Ottoman Empire, the pendant of a corrupt and tyrannical ancienrégime, is represented by the Turks and the Greek orthodox church. The desperados are Albanian and Greek partisans. And finally the honest and upright people are the Macedonians. This view neglects the fact that each ethnic group can tell the same story from the viewpoint of the upright people and assign the roles of the bad and the ugly to the other nations. And it neglects also the fact that peace in the Balkans was achieved only when each nation refrained from telling its story in that manner. Milcho Manchevski's film scratches on wounds that the Balkan nations try to heal. Thus it misses the moral target of its great example, the sociocritical Italo-Western, and

missing the moral target is the definition of sin in the common religious tradition of the European nations.