

Critic's Notebook

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Life's But a Walking Shadow

MOVIE REVIEW

Shadows (2008)

By ROBERT LEVIN

Critics should generally avoid grandiose pronouncements, particularly this early in the year. But here goes: Milcho Manchevski's "Shadows" will be the best Macedonian supernatural erotic thriller of 2009. It's a quality entertainment that stands apart from the recent work of Mr. Manchevski's countrymen like Ivo Trajkov by being more fully invested in Hollywood genre conventions than anything specific to life in the former Yugoslav republic. In its blending of haunted spirits, naked flesh and operatically shadowed locales it affectionately pays tribute to the work of Roman Polanski and Adrian Lyne.



Mitropoulos Films

One year after a car accident that nearly robbed him of his life, strange things start happening to Dr. Lazar Perkov (Borce Nacey). He sees and begins interacting with three odd individuals: a decrepit elderly woman (Ratka Radmanovic) who demands – in an unfamiliar dialect – that he returns what's not his, a mysterious man (Salaetin Bilal) wielding a baby and an attractive, sexually-aggressive younger woman named Menka (Vesna Stanojevska). The picture chronicles the doctor's uncovering of the source of the strangers' anguish and the development of his own personal torment.

Mr. Manchevski and cinematographer Fabio Cianchetti opt for an ultra glossy visual conceit, focusing on lovingly rendered threesomes, helicopter shots of lush coastal homes and stylistic images of Dr. Perkov's mental breakdown. The filmmaker makes clear from the opening frames that we're in movie land and he stays there throughout. Even the metaphoric imagery lacks much subtlety. In the picture's most repeated visual motif, the camera adopts the perspective of a car speeding through a tunnel towards a white light on the other side.

Sometimes a movie demands the sledgehammer approach, not the scalpel one. Mr. Manchevski bathes "Shadows" in the highly-charged, melodramatic atmosphere and renders the trashier touches with aplomb. Not every film has to be socially-conscious high art, even those borne out of the tumultuous historical legacy of the Balkans.

SHADOWS

Opened on Jan. 30 in Manhattan.

Written and directed by Milcho Manchevski; director of photography, Fabio Cianchetti; edited by David Ray and Martin Levenstein; music by Ryan Shore; production designer, David Munns; produced by Mr. Manchevski, Amedeo Pagani, Corinna Mehner, Nermin Gladers, Martin Husmann, Dimitar Gochev, Gerardo Herrero and Mariela Besuievsky; released by Mitropoulos Films. In Macedonian, with English subtitles. Running time: 2 hours 10 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Borce Nacev (Dr. Lazar Perkov), Vesna Stanojevska (Menka), Sabina Ajrula-Tozija (Dr. Vera Perkova), Salaetin Bilal (Gerasim Pasoski) and Ratka Radmanovic (Kalina).

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