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Film Review

By Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

Shadows

Directed by Milcho Manchevski
 Strand Releasing 01/09 Feature Film
 Not Rated

Many cultures maintain that we must heed the voices of our ancestors and honor the dead. In modern Western societies where time is money, these concerns are out of sight and out of mind. Not so in this unusual film by Milcho Manchevski whose first work [Before the Rain](#) (1994) won over 30 awards. *Shadows* is Macedonia's Oscar entry for Best Foreign Language Film in 2008. It is a complex and multidimensional drama about one man's quest for meaning and healing when he receives a message that unsettles his soul. Here is a story drenched with death, fear, and the wanderings of the dead.

Lazar Perkov (Borce Nacev) is called "Lucky" and his life has proved the veracity of his nickname. He is a physician who, in the opening scene of the film, survives a car crash that involves a close encounter with death in the form of a journey down a long tunnel with light at the end. After a year of recovering at his mother's beautiful villa, he leaves his wife (Filareta Atansova) and son to return to Macedonia's capital city of Skopje and his work at a hospital.

Lazar is often disoriented and unable to function as well as he did in the past. One day in his apartment, he encounters an old woman (Ratka Radmanovic) who speaks an ancient dialect. She delivers to him a message that he cannot decipher. At the university, Lazar meets Menka (Vesna Stanojevska) who claims to be a linguist. She gives him a translation of the message: "Return what's not yours. Have respect."

He begins a passionate affair with her despite the mystery surrounding the wounds on her neck. She is a very erotic woman and surprises him with her ease with physical pleasure. Lazar also encounters a man (Salaetin Bilal) in the apartment building with bloody feet and a

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crying infant in his care. These three restless souls are from the land of the dead; Lazar (whose name means Lazarus) can see them thanks to his close encounter with death. In the process of deciding what to do about his debt to the past, this physician comes to grips with personal responsibility and with his lust for life.

In one of the eeriest scenes in *Shadows*, writer and director Manchevski has Lazar pass by a cemetery where people are celebrating the Night of the Dead. In this region of the world, individuals spend the evening with departed mates, siblings, and friends. They serve food and drinks to the souls of the dead. The ritual enables those who participate in it to acknowledge the fact of death and its importance in their lives. The scene is a perfect match to the mysterious tone of the film, signifying more than meets the eye.

Manchevski describes his film in this way:

"It is scary, but offers no cheap thrills, sound bites nor easy solutions. It is about a man trying to have a dialogue with the dead, and becoming more alive for that experience."

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