



Shadows **½

BY [ANDREW SCHENKER](#) ON JANUARY 28, 2009 [JUMP TO COMMENTS \(0\)](#) OR [ADD YOUR OWN](#)

Shadows, the third feature from celebrated Macedonian director Milcho Manchevski, is in many respects a masterful bit of filmmaking. Manchevski affects his (mostly tight) framing, his cutting, and his handling of mood with striking precision, while calling on a series of increasingly expressive imagery to make his film course with a palpable visual pleasure. But it's all placed in the service of what amounts to some silly hokum about souls forced to wander the earth, a premise that, despite the director's restrained handling of narrative event, comes off as both underimagined and, in the particulars of its plotting, more than a little trite.

Starting off as a thriller, the film soon shifts to a more lyrical mode, which is probably for the best since Manchevski's pacing is far too languid to invite suspense. Returning to his apartment one night, Skopje doctor Lazar Perkov (Borce Nacev) finds a withered old woman sitting on his couch, whispering something in an ancient dialect. From there, the spooky details begin to mount: An old man with blood dripping from his feet and carrying a bawling infant becomes a constant presence in Perkov's building, and a woman appears with a deep neck bruise one day that mysteriously vanishes the next. Before too long, we learn that all these odd apparitions are ghosts, forced to wander the earth restlessly, a plot twist that the director (who also wrote the screenplay) seems to find rather revelatory, but, like most of the film's highly telegraphed revelations, should register as old hat for the viewer.

Eventually Perkov strikes up a romance with one of the ghosts, a comely young woman with a pixyish haircut and a wry grin. The pair's necrophiliac couplings bring a new note of grace to the film, colored by the knowledge of the inevitable brevity of their time together and cemented by Manchevski's counterpointing of their lovemaking with delicately framed shots of rain falling against windows and peppers roasting. But as lovely as this sequence may be, its impact is slightly undercut by the troubling sense that the director views this whole supernatural world as little more than a sort of sexual wonderland for his protagonist, of which this romantic encounter represents the lyrical culmination.

From the film's start, Lazar can't walk five feet without running into beautiful, provocatively dressed women. From the nurses at the hospital and their impossibly short skirts, to the mysterious woman in his apartment building who beds her boyfriend in the hallways and shoots him an inviting smile when he catches her, to his eventual lover who is all too quick to flash her breasts, Manchevski has created a world of constant sexual provocation, a temptation to the unhappily married Lazar who eventually can no longer resist. Even when making love to his wife, his ghost lover mysteriously shows up to turn the proceedings into a threesome. Ostensibly about putting souls to rest, *Shadows* at times seems more about making sure our hero (and director) gets his rocks off. Which would be fine, except that Manchevski posits the film's central romance as some sort of love for the ages, when it really just seems like a few bouts of hot sex. Still, given the director's ability to transform that lovemaking into a surpassing gorgeous five minutes of screen time, I'm willing to cut him a little slack.

-
- DIRECTOR(S): Milcho Manchevski
 - SCREENPLAY: Milcho Manchevski
 - CAST: Borce Nacev, Vesna Stanojevska, Sabina Ajrula-Tozija, Salaetin Bilal, Ratka Radmanovic, Filareta Atanasova, Dime Iliev, Petar Mircevski, Vladimir Jacev
 - DISTRIBUTOR: Mitropoulos Films
 - RUNTIME: 119 min.
 - RATING: NR
 - YEAR: 2007