

Angelina Ilieva

University of Chicago

The Circle is Not Round: National Myth and Narrative Form in Milcho Manchevski's Before the Rain

Intended as a warning against the dangerous virus of the war, Milcho Manchevski's 1994 film *Before the Rain* succeeds in challenging the nationalist practice of mobilizing a mythic past as a model through which to understand and negotiate contemporary historical problems. My paper will offer a brief outline of what I see as the director's creative intervention in this practice. I maintain that *Before the Rain* performs some aspects of the traditional national myth and so lures its viewers into comfortable identification with the familiar national mythic chronotope, only to submit the myth to structural shifts through which the myth's terrifying aspects become apparent. Through this journey from the familiar (canny) to the strange and frightening (uncanny), the film confronts us with the "repressed violence" inherent in the national myth. The key to this accomplishment lies in the work's complex narrative form. *Before the Rain's* circular form stages the cyclicity inherent in the nationalist mythic paradigm in a way that disjoints the myth at crucial sites that are most productive of its capacity to regenerate its conceptual categories in the present contexts. I read Manchevski's work, therefore, as one that consciously and stubbornly refuses to support either a purely pessimistic or a purely optimistic interpretation, but (as in the garden of forking paths) maintains *both* the pessimistic and the optimistic narratives *at the same time*. The film's effect, I argue, hinges upon their co-temporality. In staging the vicious circle of violence, the director undermines the mythic (cyclical) paradigm's capacity to fill the transcendental vacuum of a chaotic present and to alleviate the existential crisis, most immediately engendered by the traumatic dissolution of Yugoslavia, and provokes (at least the more perceptive of) its viewers to seek disengagement from the re-cycling of the myth in their present.