

Pleasure of Cinema: BEFORE THE RAIN

by Kyoko Hirano

First, I would like to send my heartfelt congratulations on the 30th anniversary of BEFORE THE RAIN to Milcho Manchevski and his collaborators who brought BEFORE THE RAIN to this world.

Kiril's monastery superior mentions the rain referring to the shooting in a distance. Certainly, the film's all three episodes show the bloodbaths — the first and the third ones are especially tragic as Zamira in the first gets killed by her own family members, and Alex in the third by his cousin. The film shows that people can hate their own people. Their hatred becomes intense, feeling betrayed, when they see their family members and relatives transgress to help their enemy. Once the society is divided, people want to perpetuate this division. After this film was made thirty years ago, how many such examples have flooded in the world?

The second episode shows Anne's husband Nick become a victim of a random killing at a restaurant in London. This situation presents a question as to the motivation of this killer — a foreigner speaking a foreign language. Is this murder caused essentially by the perpetrator's sense of alienation, chooses a mass murder as a revenge, beyond his personal feud with the waiter? The film does not present the clear answer but shows that random killing can happen any time anywhere, thus, a part of the contemporary human life. In the preceding episode, turtles become the victims of children's random play with fire. Killings can be seen ubiquitously and this starts from young ages' casual act.

BEFORE THE RAIN encourages its viewers to induce multiple interpretations, thus, making cinema more pleasurable and profound. There are also enigmatic scenes. What is a boy in the hill capturing by his camera? Presumably he took the pictures of Zamira and Kiril as well as some uniformed men probably investigating the case. However, how could these images show up at Anne's photo studio desk? We also see a woman standing on the hill overlooking the funeral, and we later learn that it is Anne probably flying to Macedonia following Alex. However, I am not sure because I am confused by the crisscrossing timelines. We are reminded by the statement delivered by the monastery's monk, which is later again seen on the wall in London: "Time never dies. The circle is never round." The film does not give easy answers and urge the viewers to think.

Certain overlaps of some images are intriguing, guiding us from one episode to another. The turtle in the water tank in the restaurant in London reminds us of the turtles victimized by children near the monastery. The bonsai tree decorated in the same restaurant connects us to

the striking images of the tree behind Zamira's body, and another distinctively shaped tree in the view from the sheep shed's door and near Alex's body.

I was much impressed by Milcho's cinematic technique — intercutting of the fluid tracking shot of the two lovers in the taxi taken from outside of its windows is remarkable with the image of the two in the seat, repetitiously going back and forth between these images. The swiftly drifting urban landscape reflected on the window glasses, overlapping with the image of Anne and Alex, is evocative as well as somewhat precarious. Another striking scene is taken inside of the monastery when a group of armed villagers barge in — a series of close-up images of the villager faces are intercut by the ancient images of the saints on the wall. This sequence emphasizes that even peaceful sanctuary could be invaded by unreasonable violence and it has been repeated historically.

The film starts with a citation from Mesa Selimovic's literary work: "With a shriek birds flow across the black sky, people are silent, my blood aches from waiting." As a non-specialist on the Balkan history and literature, I am unable to capture its deep connotation in relation to the film. However, I feel that these lines set the tone of the film — anticipation, anxiety and apprehension. These abstract concepts and emotions are hard to visualize in cinematic imagery, however, Milcho performs it excellently throughout the film.

I believe that films should inspire their viewers to see and hear beyond what their screen's visual and auditory images present. *BEFORE THE RAIN* does it so eloquently, reminding us of cinema's limitless possibilities.

Even some details are indicative. The mention of "Ulster" in the conversation between Nick and the head waiter in the restaurant immediately bring us to the image of upheavals in North Ireland, thus, reminding us of constant violent battles here and there in the world. When I heard Alex on a bicycle whistling the melody of "Raindrops Falling on My Head" from 1969 film *BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID*, my mind leapt to the image of the pleasure of rain, then, to Alex's discreet love to Hana paralleling Butch's hidden affection for Etta. We also see another bicycle rider, the village's letter delivery man, whistling the melody of *INTERNATIONAL*, a revolutionary song urging international solidarity of workers. This time, we may be reminded that people's solidarity is not an easy task at war. Milcho offers us various sources to expand our thinking, while making *BEFORE THE RAIN* a timeless testimony of the human conditions.

(Note): The author would like to thank Yoichiro Takahashi and Ayako Oku for our stimulating discussion on BEFORE THE RAIN.