

Richard Gaughran
James Madison University
gaughrre@jmu.edu

Taking Sides with a Macedonian Film:
Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain*

Perhaps the most widely respected contemporary filmmaker from the relatively tiny country of Macedonia, Milcho Manchevski has directed four feature films, including the ambitious *Dust* in 2001; *Shadows*, a kind of M. Night Shyamalan exercise in 2007; and *Mothers* in 2010, as yet unavailable to a wider audience. But Manchevski's work arguably has yet to surpass the power of his first film, *Before the Rain* (1994, nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign-Language Film). On its most immediate level, that first film is prophetic, issuing a strong moral warning about the destructiveness of ethnic hatred and prejudice. For a while *Before the Rain* seemed especially prescient given the ethnic violence that erupted in Macedonia in the spring and summer of 2001, violence that brought the country to the brink of civil war. In fact, Manchevski, as he denounced the violence in his country before a British interviewer in the spring of 2001, could not help but joke about his film's connection to the conflict: "I'll let you into a secret. That fighting in Tetovo is all my fault. I bribed them [the Albanian guerrillas] for publicity for the film and they just got a little carried away" (qtd. in Gibbons).

Even if these unfortunate events in the tiny country of Macedonia had not taken place, *Before the Rain* would deserve a closer look. The film is complex in its structure and levels of meaning. This complexity, the film's various interlocking themes, and the way it reveals these themes are worthy of study. Especially distinctive is the way the film prods its viewers into participating in its construction. The film's insistence on engaging

the viewer deepens its central theme, a universal one speaking to the need for moral courage and decisive action.

The plot of *Before the Rain* is itself complex: Alesandar Kirkov (Rade Šerbedžija), a prize-winning Macedonian photographer working for a London agency, is emotionally scarred from covering the war in Bosnia, so he quits his job and returns to his village in Macedonia after a sixteen-year hiatus. His married English lover, Anne Wentworth (Katrin Cartlidge), is indecisive about accompanying him, unsure how to end her marriage to Nick (Jay Villiers) and how to handle the fact that she is pregnant, most likely with Kirkov's child. Over dinner she tells Nick she is pregnant (with Nick's child, she says unconvincingly) but wants a divorce anyway, and minutes later Nick is killed by a stray bullet to the face, a shot fired by an enraged restaurant patron evidently from the Balkans.

Not knowing what has occurred in the restaurant, Kirkov arrives in his home village to find it riven by ethnic mistrust and tension between Macedonians and Albanians, each side's neighborhood guarded by young men wielding automatic weapons. In this atmosphere Kirkov tries futilely to renew a relationship he once had with an Albanian woman, Hana Halili (Silvija Stojanovska), who in the intervening years has married and had children, though she now is a widow. Tensions in the village dramatically worsen when Hana's daughter Zamira (Labina Mitevska) kills a Macedonian shepherd, Kirkov's cousin Bojan (Ilko Stefanovski), with a pitchfork, probably as she defends herself against a sexual attack. The Macedonians form a vigilante group to hunt down Zamira, whom they apprehend and hold captive. Kirkov tries to remain neutral in the incident but takes action after Hana visits him at night and

pleads for help in saving her daughter. He marches into the hut that serves as Zamira's jail, boldly leads her out, evidently intending to present her to legal authorities for protection and justice, but he is shot in the back by his cousin Zdrave (Petar Mirčevski).

Zamira escapes to a nearby monastery, where she sneaks into the cell of a young monk, Father Kiril (Grégoire Colin), who has taken a vow of silence. Kiril soon learns that he has an uninvited guest but, in spite of his inability to communicate with the Albanian girl, determines to keep her presence a secret, both from his religious superiors and from the vigilantes who soon unsuccessfully search and then surround the monastery. Meanwhile a funeral for Kirkov proceeds in the village, witnessed from a distance by Anne Wentworth, who has returned, too late, presumably to take up life with her lover. At night Father Kiril's superiors find Zamira in his cell with him and expel the two, who manage to tiptoe through the sleeping and drunken vigilantes. Kiril breaks his vow of silence when his monastic life ends, but there is still a language barrier between him and Zamira. Nevertheless, he announces that they will seek help from his uncle, a famous photographer in London. The duo is suddenly surrounded by Zamira's grandfather Zekir (Abdurahman Šalja) and other Albanian relatives, who are just as heavily armed as the Macedonian vigilantes. Zekir threatens and beats Zamira for stirring up trouble, perhaps starting a war, he says. She defiantly proclaims that Kiril loves her, and as he walks off after being ordered to do so, she runs after him but is shot in the back by a member of her family.

As though the plot is not complex enough, *Before the Rain* is a "tale in three parts," as the opening frames indicate. Not immediately obvious to the first-time viewer, however, is that the parts do not unfold chronologically. In fact, the final event in the

film's chronology, the killing of the Albanian girl Zamira, occurs at the end of Part I, the section called "Words." In other words, my three-paragraph summary is chronological, but the film presents the events of my three paragraphs in 2-3-1 order. That is, the action of the third paragraph of my summary is presented first. Viewers have no context for what they are seeing until the two subsequent sections unfold, called "Faces" and "Pictures" respectively, parts that are subsequent on the screen but antecedent in "real" time. Scrambling of time in art is nothing new, of course. Any work that uses flashbacks to tell its story does something similar. This and other kinds of fragmentation are conventions of modernist art. Novels such as William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) spring to mind in this regard, films such as Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1951), Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* (directed by David Jones, 1983), or Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). All such works make demands of the reader/viewer: it is impossible to remain passive and still participate in such art. We must enter it consciously, reassembling the work mentally, filling gaps, supplying connections, gathering clues, drawing conclusions.

However, *Before the Rain* takes this fragmentation a step further. The film ostensibly forms a circle. It begins and ends with the same scene: Father Kiril is picking tomatoes in the monastery's garden, a fly bites him on the neck, and one of his elders predicts that it is going to rain. However, there is a serious rupture in the circle. In my plot summary I omitted some inconvenient details, chief among these being that when Anne rummages through photos in the London agency, she glances at some that we recognize as shots taken at the site of Zamira's murder. Remember, Father Kiril still resides at the monastery when Anne appears at Aleksandar Kirkov's funeral. In other

words, an event that happens *after* Anne arrives in Macedonia, the death of Zamira, also happens *before* Anne arrives in Macedonia!

Most obvious of *Before the Rain*'s themes is the moral one mentioned earlier: ethnic hatreds and divisions kill. More specifically, such divisiveness is *self*-destructive. The film, in its three major segments, especially in the first and third, shows family members paradoxically killing one of their own, though they purportedly oppose another group in the name of protection of the clan. Actually, even in the killing of Nick in Part II, his wife Anne is complicit in pulling the trigger: she repeatedly insists that they remain in the restaurant, in spite of Nick's desire to leave after the first eruption of violence, before it becomes lethal. It is reasonable to assume that she finds this stranger from the Balkans mysteriously attractive, perhaps a reminder of her lover Kirkov. This attraction helps kill her husband. It is hardly a big leap, given the setting of the film, to say that this moral applies to nations as well as to villages or extended families. As has been said in a different context, a house divided cannot stand.

Chief among the film's themes, however, is a more over-arching one—the role of the viewer/reader. Most movies require little from their viewers. They ask us merely to pay for a ticket or rent the video, and sit back and enjoy the ride. *Before the Rain* allows for no such passivity. Given the fact that the film's structure is a challenging one, we viewers must organize its contents. Even more so, since the film has the aforementioned impossibility at its core, viewers must intervene and supply the film with logic itself. *Before the Rain* is, in effect, a non sequitur. Yet, it conveys profound meaning. How, if not through the intervention of the viewer? This is not a purely academic point. For, to be sure, viewers are the ones with the choices in the very themes being presented. Do we

remain passive in the face of absurd violence and hatred? Or do we, to quote more than one of the film's characters, "take a stand"? With *Before the Rain*, the viewer must become an active creator of meaning.

The term "non sequitur," "it does not follow," refers to linguistic constructions, to the logic, or illogic, of language. *Before the Rain* bombards viewers with language itself, confronting them with the idea of language to a degree that no foreign-language film I can think of does. Ordinarily, films are presented in their original language with appropriate subtitles or, less desirably, dubbed. Surely, some for whom English is a first language might possess enough proficiency in a second language to ignore subtitles. *Before the Rain*, however, does not exist in any form without *some* subtitles. There are too many languages spoken in the film. The sections "Words" and "Pictures," Parts I and III of the film, take place in Macedonia, where two principal languages are spoken, Macedonian and Albanian. Part II, "Faces," takes place in London and is almost entirely in English. So, *Before the Rain* is a foreign-language film with three major languages. In addition, French is spoken in the film, as well as German. Furthermore, a children's choir in a London church sings in Latin, while the Orthodox priests in Macedonia chant in Old Church Slavonic. And this list omits the presence of dialects, slang, local references, and other subdivisions within a given language.

Language and languages are not merely something for the viewer to sort out. The film's characters frequently discuss or confront the nature of language, its ability or inability to convey meaning. The first character we meet, in fact, Father Kiril, does not use language, having taken a vow of silence. But it is not true to say he has completely foresworn language, since he does understand the language of others and responds to it.

Furthermore, he uses a substitute language, when he nods his head, smiles, or extends his hand to another person. We can assume, however, that Kiril, like any ascetic who takes a vow of silence, views speech as a barrier to a deeper reality. His mentor, Father Marko (Josif Josifovski), disagrees with this view in the opening sequences, however, when he tells Kiril that he too once took a vow of silence but that beauty—and here he refers to the Macedonian landscape and sky—requires words to describe it. This statement provides the segue for the title of the first section, “Words.”

Elsewhere in Part I, characters attempt to communicate, for the most part without really connecting, using scripted speech. Orthodox liturgy is a kind of script, and whether that speech reaches its intended celestial destination is a topic beyond the scope of this essay. But in one particular scene characters talk to each other in formulaic speech, namely when the vigilantes enter the church, interrupting the service in progress. Mitre (Ljupčo Bresliski), the leader of the group, leans on one particular phrase, “an eye for an eye,” when explaining their mission, whereas Father Damjan (Kiril Ristoski) responds with a prescription from elsewhere in the Bible, “turn the other cheek.” When Mitre counters, “we already have,” Father Damjan can only furrow his brow and look to the side, underscoring the confusion and pointing out the limitations of language.

Later in Part I, after Zamira enters Kiril’s life, she directly mentions the language barrier between them when she proclaims that she is Albanian, he Macedonian, and they cannot understand each other. Kiril makes a similar statement after they leave the monastery and he has broken his vow of silence, when he announces his plan of going to Skopje, and then London, smiling as he realizes that she does not comprehend a word he is saying. In the case of Zamira and Kiril, however, the inability to communicate through

the convention of language does not present a barrier to communication. They manage to love each other. (Admittedly, this love is about as substantial as that between their originals, Romeo and Juliet, and also doomed.) This love is communicated in non-verbal ways: through a gift of tomatoes in the middle of the night, through a smile, a hand extended, an embrace, Kiril's silence concerning her presence in the monastery. In contrast, Kiril's spoken vow just before they are surrounded by members of Zamira's clan, "No one will find you! No one!" is patently false and ironic given what immediately follows. Then, after Zamira is shot and lies expiring on the ground, Kiril kneels over her and says in Macedonian, "Forgive me." In response she raises one figure to her lips in the universally understood sign meaning "Be quiet." So "Words" begins and ends with a debate about the efficacy of language itself.

If the debate is between silence and speech, the evidence at this point would seem to be on the side of silence, given the fact that those who understand each other's speech, such as Mitre and Father Damjan or Zekir and Zamira, fail to communicate, whereas Zamira and Kiril do, though they are unable to understand each other's speech. But the debate is not over, as it extends into Part II, "Faces."

At one point in Part II, set in London, Anne subtly argues that the use of many words does not constitute communication. As she and Alex ride in a cab, Alex trying to convince her to move to Macedonia with him, he says he will teach her the language. She then demonstrates that she already has learned a few phrases, which she utters and we hear without the aid of subtitles. She says, "*Idi ebi se. . . . Te sakam. . . . Dosta.*" That is, "Go fuck yourself. . . . I love you. . . . Enough." The "*Dosta*" seems to say that there is not much one needs to do with language, that the two previous expressions are sufficient.

Anne adheres much less to this position later, however, when she insists that she and her husband Nick “need to talk,” even though, as he points out, there is nothing left to say. Along with her aforementioned curiosity about the mysterious foreigner in the restaurant, her insistence on “talk” gets her husband killed.

Earlier in the restaurant scene Nick dramatizes that a common language is no guarantee of communication or a common cause. Attempting to be clever, he says to the *maitre d'* (Peter Needham) concerning the combatants in the restaurant, “At least they weren’t from Ulster.” After a pause, the man replies, “No sir. *I’m* from Ulster.” Here Nick makes a faulty assumption, based, among other things, on his hearing of another person’s speech.

Part III, “Pictures,” continues examining the limitations of language. As he takes a bus through the Macedonian countryside, Aleksandar Kirkov is joined in conversation by a soldier. The soldier does not gain much information, however, since Alex indicates by his mode of response that he does not trust language’s ability to enlighten his interlocutor. The soldier asks where he is going. To a baptism, he answers. Whose? My own, he says. When the soldier sees a photo of Anne and Alex together, he asks if the woman is Alex’s wife. His response: “She died . . . in a taxi.” We viewers can interpret what he means here, since we know that it was in a taxi that he failed to convince her to join him. The soldier, however, remains bewildered. As for Alex’s impending “baptism,” even viewers must wait to decode that remark.

The next scene provides an interesting counterpart to the episode in Part II when Nick commits his *faux pas* with the *maitre d'* of the restaurant. As Alex exits the bus and walks towards his village, he is confronted by an armed Macedonian guard who wants to

know his business there. When Alex responds in the local dialect, the guard is momentarily pleasantly surprised, saying, “You’re one of us.” Then he instantly ignores this linguistic connection and directs the gun at Alex with more conviction. Again, language fails to matter.

But it does matter elsewhere in Part III, or it would matter if a language barrier did not exist. Anne, back in England, tries to telephone Macedonia with a message for Alex, presumably that she is coming to Macedonia—more than mere supposition given the fact that she does indeed arrive. She phones the village post office and has a frustrating exchange with a woman who speaks to her in Macedonian and German, while Anne sighs in exasperation, “Oh God, German!” and tries to communicate in English and French. We can speculate that if Anne knew more than her three phrases of Macedonian, events might have turned out differently.

So, in numerous scenes *Before the Rain* underscores the limitations of the conventional uses of language, without decisively concluding that language is not necessary. The film begins with an epigraph from Meša Selimović, in fact, one that seems also to comment on language: “With a shriek birds flee across the black sky, / people are silent, my blood aches from waiting.” The epigraph seems to indict people for their silence, as the speaker is waiting for someone to speak up, literally or figuratively.

The characters in *Before the Rain*, then, illustrate the very problem viewers have in making connections, in creating meaning from the film. As mentioned earlier, the most immediate problem is how we reassemble the film’s parts and create a chronology we can have some confidence in, even if our reconstructed timeline will always have frustrating gaps and inconsistencies. But even as we view and hear individual scenes, we must enter

the narrative and participate in making sense of it. The film as a whole is a non sequitur, but non sequiturs abound in individual scenes as well. One of the most striking conversations in this regard is one already mentioned, the one between Anne and Alex in a London taxi. It begins with a comment from Anne that seems utterly without context: “I keep having this dream since you left: there are palm trees growing in Oxford Street.” She then continues with questions that would appear to put the conversation on a logical course, but the colloquy, especially Alex’s side of it, does not follow strictly logically:

So what happened in Bosnia? Why are you back?

I’m free, I resigned this morning.

Oh yeah, you can just resign from taking photographs, eh?

Let’s fuck.

You be serious, Alex.

I’m serious.

You were born to be a photographer. You can’t do anything else.

That’s true. I’m a bum. I could have been a pretender. I’ll write a book,

Zen and the Art of Tomato-Growing; you’ll wash and cook for me.

No I won’t.

I’ll teach you Macedonian.

Alex’s responses here are not straightforward answers to direct questions but a collage of allusions and suggestions. He takes Anne, and us, into another film, *On the Waterfront* (1954), identifying himself with boxer Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando), who recognizes that he has betrayed his values and his own talent. Brando utters his famous lines in the back seat of a taxi as well. Alex uses the word “pretender” instead of

“contender,” giving the allusion an additional comic twist. Then he gives us the title of the book he will write, alluding to Robert Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974). Furthermore, by doing so here, in the center of the film, he reminds us that *Before the Rain* begins and ends with the camera closing in on Father Kiril picking delicious-looking tomatoes on a Macedonian hillside.

Somehow Anne understands the import of his indirection—that he wants to make a romantic escape with her to Macedonia—since she says, “Macedonia isn’t safe.” His response is hardly logical: “But of course it is. It’s the place where the Byzantines captured fourteen thousand Macedonians, uh, uh, they poked their eyes out, and sent them home like that. Twenty-eight thousand eyes.” How can he seriously mean to convince someone that a place is safe by immediately referring to a gruesomely violent event believed to have happened there? The answer must be that he means to convey something else with this reference to an event in the distant past that has assumed legendary status in Macedonia, namely, that Macedonia is a place of legend. He is not scaring her off with a reference to violence but, in effect, delivering a romantic’s sales pitch.

Later in the conversation, Alex more directly urges Anne to drop everything and move with him to Macedonia. But the scene concludes in further indirection and in a seemingly absurd reaction. When Anne asks Alex what happened to him in Bosnia, he says, in what seems to be a direct statement but later turns out to be anything but, “I killed.” The next comment is not rendered in words but through intensely passionate love-making in the back seat of the cab, interrupted by an elderly lady who bangs on the window, asking, “Excuse me, is this cab free?”

Again, viewers must fill gaps and make connections where otherwise there do not appear to be any. We must engage in interpretation. In just one short scene we are confronted with several questions: What does *On the Waterfront* have to do with *Before the Rain*? What about Robert Pirsig's novel? Tomatoes? Byzantine tyrants? What is aphrodisiac about a person's confession that he is a killer?

Indeed, throughout the film, though language and structures do not deliver according to conventional expectations, the language of allusion to other texts, indeed the film's references to itself, provide the viewer with alternative languages and structures, other ways of constructing meaning.

Allusions to other films abound. The opening frames of *Before the Rain*, for example, echo the opening of Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969). In Peckinpah's film, children wielding sticks poke scorpions on an anthill. Later they set the hill on fire. In Manchevski's film, children use living tortoises as toy tanks. Later they surround the tortoises with a ring of fire, into which they toss bullets. Viewers might consider that in both films children are drawn to and mimic the violence of their elders. At what age is human innocence lost, we might wonder, if it ever existed at all?

At least twice in *Before the Rain* viewers are asked to ponder the significance of George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), as first Alex and then the village postal carrier ride a bicycle while whistling "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head." Perhaps there is nothing more here than a playful cross-referencing of titles about rain, just as the title *On the Waterfront* could be construed as a synonym for "Before the Rain" (admittedly with some effort), just as Alex whispers to Anne, for no readily apparent reason, the title of Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain is Gonna Fall." Perhaps this is

only playfulness, except viewers might also consider that all these titles are associated with violent contexts and can be seen as variations on apocalyptic purges.

The other ways *Before the Rain* communicates through similar indirection are too numerous for an exhaustive list. But surely it is significant that the camera focuses on a fresco of Judas kissing Jesus' cheek immediately after Father Kiril denies knowing anything about an Albanian fugitive. Similarly, the vigilantes camped outside the monastery cast dice on someone's coat in order to pass the time, just as Roman soldiers are said to have done at the Crucifixion. We might also notice that when Anne's mother (Phyllida Law) reminds her daughter that she is married, the indecisive Anne quotes Hamlet, the prince of indecision: "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all."

As I have pointed out, *Before the Rain* defies conventional logical structure; however, it insists on another kind of structural symmetry through various repetitions and what we might call emblems of cultural identity. In at least two of the film's three parts the main character swats a fly with his hand; in each of the three parts the main character vomits. In Part I, Father Kiril hallucinates that Zamira has reappeared in his room before he falls back to sleep and reawakens to find the dream a reality. Similarly, in Part III Alex first conjures an image of Hana, then rubs his eyes when he realizes that the actual Hana has indeed entered his room at night. In Part II a sixteen-rayed star decorates the doors of the London restaurant, a repetition, perhaps, of the sixteen-rayed star on the flag that appears in Macedonia. And Father Marko's epigram, which he utters in the first and last parts of the film, appears in the London sequence as well, spray-painted on a city wall: "Time Never Dies, The Circle Is Not Round." This paradoxical saying (slightly altered in Part III) comments on the film itself, on the rupture in its circle of logic, on the way its

time is scrambled. It further comments on the theme of the film, the absurdity of violence, as Father Marko first speaks the words when he observes the children constructing their ring of destructive fire around the tortoises.

I use the term “emblems of cultural identity” to refer to those objects, rituals, even words, that give a place or a people its distinctiveness. *Before the Rain*, for example, depicts a traditional Macedonian wedding, as well as a traditional funeral. These rituals employ Macedonian symbols, for example on flags, in the use of wine and brandy, and Macedonian musical instruments, the traditional *tapan* (drum) and *zurla* (horn). The traditional music is reinforced, of course, by the soundtrack from the Macedonian folk group Anastasia, whose atmospheric songs provide another level of meaning throughout the film.

The camera focuses on several other of these emblems and details. The aforementioned tomatoes, indeed, are particularly treasured in Macedonia. The fact that tobacco and peppers are drying outside the houses also speaks in a way that conventional language does not. In fact, the camera frequently picks out images that communicate a sense of place non-verbally: in the outrageously dyed hair we see on the streets of Skopje; in the head coverings of some married women; in a gypsy riding by on a white horse; in stray dogs; the incongruity of one of the vigilantes’ donning of an Anaheim Angels’ baseball cap; graffiti on a Skopje city wall that reads, in Cyrillic, “Burek, Da!”--a terse expression of appreciation for a well known, and widely consumed, oily, stuffed pastry; the ritual tray of welcome that Hana presents to Alex when he visits her home, a tray containing a very sweet morsel, in this case *lokum*, i.e., Turkish delight, and a glass of plain water.

The tobacco mentioned above grows throughout certain regions of Macedonia and is one of the country's principal exports. A visitor from outside might also notice that it is widely consumed by the country's inhabitants. *Before the Rain* makes particular use of this fact. When Aleksandar Kirkov lives outside the country, he does not smoke cigarettes. When he returns to Macedonia, he is offered a cigarette on more than one occasion but announces that he has quit smoking. In the language of the film, to smoke is to identify with the place and its people; to not smoke is to stand to the side, to remain an outsider, a passive observer. When Hana visits Alex towards the end of the film, she accuses him of passivity. She says, "Don't you see what is happening with our people?" "I see," he replies. "You only see," she says. She then pleads with him to help her daughter Zamira, "as if she were yours." She then leaves, but she has made an impression, since Alex resolves to do something, to step out of his role as passive observer, to "take sides." As if to signal this transformation, he first vomits, then desperately hunts for a cigarette, finds one and lights up. He then destroys the photos of his "killing" a man in Bosnia, which he intended to send to Anne. By now the viewer has learned that his "killing" of this man was committed through passive observation, since the execution was carried out to satisfy Alex's desire for a dramatic photo. "I took sides. My camera killed a man," he says. After destroying the photos, while smoking, he goes off to rescue Zamira. And get himself killed in the process.

The dialectic between passivity and action is another of the film's recurring motifs. The phrase "take sides" refers to various activities in the film, running the gamut from avenging five hundred years of Muslim rule, to making a stand for peace, to leaving one's husband and running off to Macedonia, to rescuing a captive Albanian girl, to

taking a photo. Or, one can take the advice of Anne's mother when she discovers that her daughter is caught in a classic love triangle: "No problem is so formidable that you can't just walk away from it." In the film's terms, however, to walk away is also to take a side. There is no escaping involvement.

And so it is with viewers of *Before the Rain*. In order to deal with a circle that is not round, with non sequitur, we must enter the void, "take sides," in a sense, as we create meaning out of what we see. Doubt and uncertainties remain. Just how did those photos of Zamira's corpse get into Anne's hands? Perhaps the three parts of the film are not even coherent within themselves. Perhaps Anne has returned to England and looks at those photos sometime in the future. In that case, the next scene, Alex's entering his cab for Heathrow Airport, appears coincidentally, being the next thing randomly thrown at us in this montage of jumbled time. But we naturally yearn for greater order than that, even illusory order, just as our eyes automatically fill the gaps between individual frames on a reel of film and create the illusion of fluid motion.

One of *Before the Rain*'s repeated allusions is a refrain from a hip-hop song by the Beastie Boys, "So What'cha Want" (from their 1992 album *Check Your Head*). One of the Macedonian vigilantes gyrates to its rhythms as he camps outside the monastery in Part I. In Part II we hear the same line—"So what'cha what'cha what'cha want"—coming from a young woman's transistor radio. It punctuates the scene in which Anne, in her uncertainty, resists Alex's urging that she take a plane to Macedonia with him. "Take sides," he says as they part for good, and he hands her a plane ticket. In Part III the same phrase from the song is audible as Alex marches into the hut to rescue Zamira.

Before the Rain places a considerable burden on its viewers. It demands that we reassemble the film and create order from it, and, more importantly, it requires that we act on its themes. Or, we are free, if we like, to follow Anne's mother's advice and merely walk away from it. In short, on several levels *Before the Rain* poses a question to its viewers: "So what'cha want?"

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