



Before The Rain

(Criterion)

Reviewed by [Noel Murray](#)

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Upon its release in 1994, Milcho Manchevski's debut film *Before The Rain* was often compared to *Pulp Fiction*, because it came out around the same time, and also featured a three-part narrative structure founded on a fractured timeline. Fourteen years later, when fractured timelines have become so common that even TV sitcoms use them, the structure of *Before The Rain* doesn't seem quite so novel, and frankly, its repetition of images, sounds, and characters from storyline to storyline now recalls the overly familiar "everything's connected" meta-irony of movies like *Crash* and *Babel*. Time and imitation have sapped some of *Before The Rain's* vitality. And yet the movie is *still* tense and moving, perhaps because there's something undeniable about its bleak depiction of ancient tribal conflicts in the Balkans.

In the film's first section, "Words," Grégoire Colin plays a young Macedonian monk who discovers an Albanian girl hiding in his quarters, and attempts to hide her from a local militia. In the second section, "Faces," Katrin Cartlidge plays a London photo-agent who's been having an affair with one of her foreign photojournalists, and struggles with how to tell her husband. In the third section, "Pictures," the photojournalist, played by Rade Serbedzija, returns to his Macedonian village and becomes embroiled in centuries-old skirmishes. Each section "rhymes" in different ways. There's a rumble of thunder in each, as well as a character vomiting, turtles, a snippet of Beastie Boys' "So What'cha Want," and the repeated line, "Time never dies... the circle is not round." For most of the movie, Manchevski subtly suggests that each section is taking place at roughly the same time; in the final five minutes, he reveals exactly which scene goes where, and underlines the idea that in the former Yugoslavia, it doesn't matter whether a person tries to help or stay neutral. Trouble ensues either way.

Manchevski trowels on the melodrama. In a scenario that already has people drawing guns on old friends and neighbors, there's really no need for a London interlude in which a couple's attempt to break up is interrupted by an armed maniac. But at the same time, Manchevski excuses some of his own broadness with sequences that pay homage to Hollywood Westerns like *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid* and *The Wild Bunch*. In retrospect, maybe *Before The Rain* is less a profound statement on the human condition than an artful, operatic action film. Which means it may have a lot in common with Quentin Tarantino after all.

Key features: A commentary track by Manchevski and scholar Annette Insdorf, a short assortment of on-set footage and interviews, plus samples of Manchevski's photography and his award-winning video for Arrested Development's "Tennessee."