

Interview: Milcho Manchevski

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Oscar-nominated director on his latest feature film

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Lazar (Borce Nacev) and Menka (Vesna Stanojevska) embrace in scene from Milcho Manchevski's film *Shadows*. (Bavaria Film)



TORONTO◆Premiering this past fall at the Toronto Film Festival, and a likely European Oscar contender for best foreign film, *Shadows* has been quietly receiving rave reviews. We had a chance to sit down with the Oscar-nominated director, Milcho Manchevski, and talk about his latest creation.

Epoch Times (ET): Could you, please, tell us how you came up with the idea for the *Shadows* film?

Milcho Manchevski (MM): Well, I wanted to make a scary film, but I like old-fashioned scary films: slow, simmering, slow-boiling, not films with shocks, nor films with gore. And then as I started working on it, I realized that one of the scariest things that could happen to a person is having to deal with responsibility, and having to do it through assuming responsibility for the ones he loves. So this is a scary film about love and it deals with death and sex, and a few things in between.

ET: There are a few dead people the character communicates with. How did they emerge?

MM: I am not sure what the symbolism is, because when I write, and then later translate it into film, I never create symbolism on purpose. It's sort of like music◆it either feels right or it doesn't. And when it feels right, you sort of run with it; when it doesn't feel right, you hone it, and work on it until it makes sense. It felt right that Lazar is the one these dead people find to talk to. After he survives the car crash at the beginning of the story, and as he is traveling through limbo to the afterlife, he is encountered by these shadows, who had been stuck there, because of the actions of his mother. He wants to go back, they help him to go back, but he promises to help them while he is with the living. That is the beginning of the story, although we do not realize it until much later.

ET: Lazar (the lead character) was partly dead before his rebirth. Do you believe that only extraordinary circumstances can change the course of a person's life?

MM: Well, extraordinary circumstances certainly help to wake us up from the routine that we get stuck in, and the routine usually happens because we are afraid of a little bit of pain, or a little bit of

discomfort and a slight offense to our ego. Pain is good, fear is good, when facing them helps us grow up. That's what the film *Shadows* is about. It is really about Lazar growing up. And the dead help him grow up a lot more than the living in this particular case because they show more love than his mother does, or his wife, or even his father.

ET: What is the human element to *Shadows* ?

MM: It's about taking on your responsibility, which in a funny way seems to be less and less the case as we get more and more in a situation where satisfying our very basic, prime, pagan needs is not only easier to achieve but it's also more and more stimulated, because that's a really good way to support a consumerist trade. It is about taking on your responsibility, which in turn will make you more human, which in turn will make you and people around you happier. Now, that is not easy♦it usually hurts. These are some issues the film tries to deal with, but it tries to do it in a very easy, very approachable way. I like art that's simple to understand♦simple art that is at the same time deep.
