Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* and the Ethics of Listening

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From Seeing to Listening

A genuine artistic achievement and a "hugely successful movie" with both international audiences and reviewers at the time of its release, *Pred doždot* (Before the Rain, 1994), scripted and directed by Macedonian-American Milcho Manchevski, won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and was nominated for the Academy Award as best foreign film. It is one of a very few films—if indeed not the only one—that art cinema audiences may associate with the term *Macedonian cinema,* and it has engendered considerable and sustained critical interest.[1]

Set in the early 1990s, the film concerns war photographer Aleksandar Kirkov (Rade Šerbedžija), who, after resigning from his job in London following an assignment in violence-ravaged Bosnia and Herzegovina, returns to his native Macedonian village, now torn by ethnic division, saves an Albanian girl, Zamira (Labina Mitevska), from Macedonian village men (who accuse her of murdering one of them), and is consequently shot to death. Zamira hides in an Orthodox monastery where Kiril (Grégoire Colin), a young Macedonian monk, helps her until she is discovered by the other monks. They leave the monastery and are captured by a group of Albanian villagers, and Zamira is shot and killed by her brother Ali.

The narrative twist lies in the radical disjunction between this real-time story and the *sujet,* or the way this story is actually shaped by the film's own temporal enfolding. The film's first segment, "Words," revolves around Zamira's hiding in the monastery and ends with her death; the second part, "Faces," depicts Aleks's London encounter with his British lover Anne (Katrin Cartlidge), and Anne's later meeting with her husband in a restaurant where an unrelated shooting spree leaves him dead; and the final part, "Pictures," begins with Aleksandar's return to his Macedonian village and ends with his dying under an open sky as the first drops of rain begin to fall—the same rain that the fleeing Zamira will use to

I would like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for their inspiring and thorough comments, to Mark D. Steinberg for his expertise and goodwill, and to Jane T. Hedges for her superb editing of this article.

1. *Before the Rain* is described as a "hugely successful movie" in Péter Krasztev's article "Who Will Take the Blame? How to Make an Audience Grateful for a Family Massacre," in Andrew James Horton, ed., *The Celluloid Tinderbox: Yugoslav Screen Reflections of a Turbulent Decade* (Shropshire, Eng., 2000), 27, at www.kinoeye.org/03/10/celluloidtinderbox.pdf (last accessed 3 December 2010). Regarding this film's role in the visibility of Macedonian cinema, Dina Iordanova wrote: "Macedonia, a country whose entire film production consists of about 50 feature titles, came onto the spotlight with the celebrated film by Milčo Mančevski *Pred doždot* (*Before the Rain,* 1994)." Dina Iordanova, "Introduction," Horton, ed., *The Celluloid Tinderbox,* 12.

wash her face as she approaches the monastery. The end thus precedes the beginning and the beginning is the end in this circular structure that has been discussed elsewhere.[2]

Revisiting *Before the Rain,* I would propose that the focus of our new experience of it be removed from the role of seeing itself—as paradoxical as this may seem in a discussion of a visual medium and given the fact that the "ways of seeing" are also additionally and repeatedly emphasized by the film's thematic and formal features. After all, the central character, Pulitzer-prize winning war photographer Aleksandar Kirkov, is a professional "viewer" himself, and the film reflects on the ways in which people see, try to see, think they see, or are made to see something, and on the ways in which visual objects—including photographs, films, and Medieval frescoes—relate to the violence, the ways in which the distant viewers may "process" the violence coming to them via its visual encapsulation, and on different levels of politics, from private to international, related to all this visual activity. Criticism of the film has also largely focused on the viewing, watching, or gaze present in or allegedly constructed by the film, some of it discussed as intersecting with the western perception of and "gaze" at the violence in the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, connected with the broader western discourses on the Balkans and related politics.[3]

And yet, as with all other aesthetic achievements that are relevant and inspirational to wide audiences and different times because they are not

2. *Before the Rain* is available in The Criterion Collection edition (2008). For a more detailed summary, see Erik Tängerstad, "Before the Rain—After the War?" *Rethinking History* 4, no. 2 (July 2000): 175–81.

3. While some of the critics perceive the film as, in Slavoj Žižek's phrasing, offering "to the Western liberal gaze . . . precisely what this gaze wants to see in the Balkan war—the spectacle of timeless, incomprehensible, mythical cycle of passions, in contrast to decadent and anemic Western life," Victor A. Friedman gives a welcome corrective, commenting on the viewers "seeing grim outcomes where no fatalism was meant," as Dina Iordanova sums up Friedman's interpretation, who himself asserts that this seeing of grim outcomes was "not a failure of the film but of the [viewer's] gaze." Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," *New Left Review* 225 (September–October 1995): 38; Victor A. Friedman, "Fable as History: The Macedonian Context," *Rethinking History* 4, no. 2 (July 2000): 143, cited in Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London, 2001), 84.

Conceptually centered around the tropes of seeing, watching, being watched, and the demands of the eye or gaze, and often related to some aspects of postcolonial criticism, much of the criticism of the film is connected with issues of the western discourses on the Balkans. However, while one can read a film set in a specific space and time as creating a specific representation of that space and time, and thus participating in the creation of a discourse about them, to do so is a result of a chosen interpretive approach and not of the film itself, or of cinema in general. Such a critical approach often negates or diminishes a film's essential nonliteral or aesthetic dimension that functions outside the sphere of immediate and recognizable political and cultural concerns. For more on this, see "Introduction" in Gordana P. Crnković, *Imagined Dialogues: Eastern European Literature in Conversation with American and English Literature* (Evanston, 2000). Also see Russell A. Berman, *Fiction Sets You Free: Literature, Liberty, and Western Culture* (Iowa City, 2007). Milcho Manchevski addresses this issue in some of his interviews; see, for instance, Keith Brown, "An Interview with Milcho Manchevski," *World Literature Today* 82, no. 1 (January–February 2008): 12–15.

primarily, most importantly, or sometimes not at all about the literal place and time in which their stories may be set, *Before the Rain* goes beyond the early 1990s Balkan setting of its story to articulate and make apparent realms and dynamics that are present and active on a much larger scale. In order to become aware of one of these realms, I would suggest that we put aside the various issues of seeing to be able to sense the subtler presence of *listening* in this film. After all, in contradistinction to the central character who is a viewer par excellence, the film also revolves around another character who is often overlooked in critical accounts of the film, and who is not a viewer but rather a listener—though a listener in a broader sense than merely auditory—the young monk Kiril (see figure 1). The film as a whole not only functions as a visual event but also creates a space, social environment, ethics, and politics of deep listening. In other words, I would suggest that *Before the Rain* be approached not primarily as a visual but rather as an aural event, though aural in a more philosophical sense denoting an attitude characterized by an openness and receptiveness to—or by "listening to" and "hearing"—whatever comes to a person, as opposed to an attitude characterized by the forceful application of preestablished categories (or "discourses") onto that something.

Articulating the fundamental quality of hearing, Martin Heidegger writes: "We wrongly think that the activation of the body's audio equipment is hearing proper. But then hearing in the sense of hearkening and heeding is supposed to be a transposition of hearing proper into the realm of spiritual."[4] And this from Hans-Georg Gadamer: "Openness exists . . . not only for the person to whom one listens, but rather *anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without this kind of openness to one another there is no genuine human relationship.* Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another."[5]

Such proper listening and the related proper hearing seem to be rarely achieved in *Before the Rain:* the forceful application of rigid, pregiven private or social notions onto another person or group precludes the possibility of actually listening to and hearing that other person or group. Anne's mother and husband seem unable to hear anything she is trying to tell them; the Albanian youngster Ali does not listen to his grandfather Zekir when he asks him to uphold the traditional customs of community hospitality and kiss the hand of the visiting Aleksandar; and Zekir himself does not hear his captured granddaughter Zamira when she says that Kiril loves her. Macedonians do not hear each other, Albanians do not hear each other, Macedonians do not hear Albanians and vice versa, and this ubiquitous lack of listening and hearing imbues the film and shapes its tragic outcomes: Aleksandar is killed by his own cousin Zdrave who does not hear him, Zamira by her own brother who does not hear her.

4. Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking,* trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York, 1975), 65.

5. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* trans. W. Glen-Doepel, John Cumming, and Garrett Barden (London, 1979), 324, quoted in Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening,* trans. Charles Lambert (London, 1990), 8.

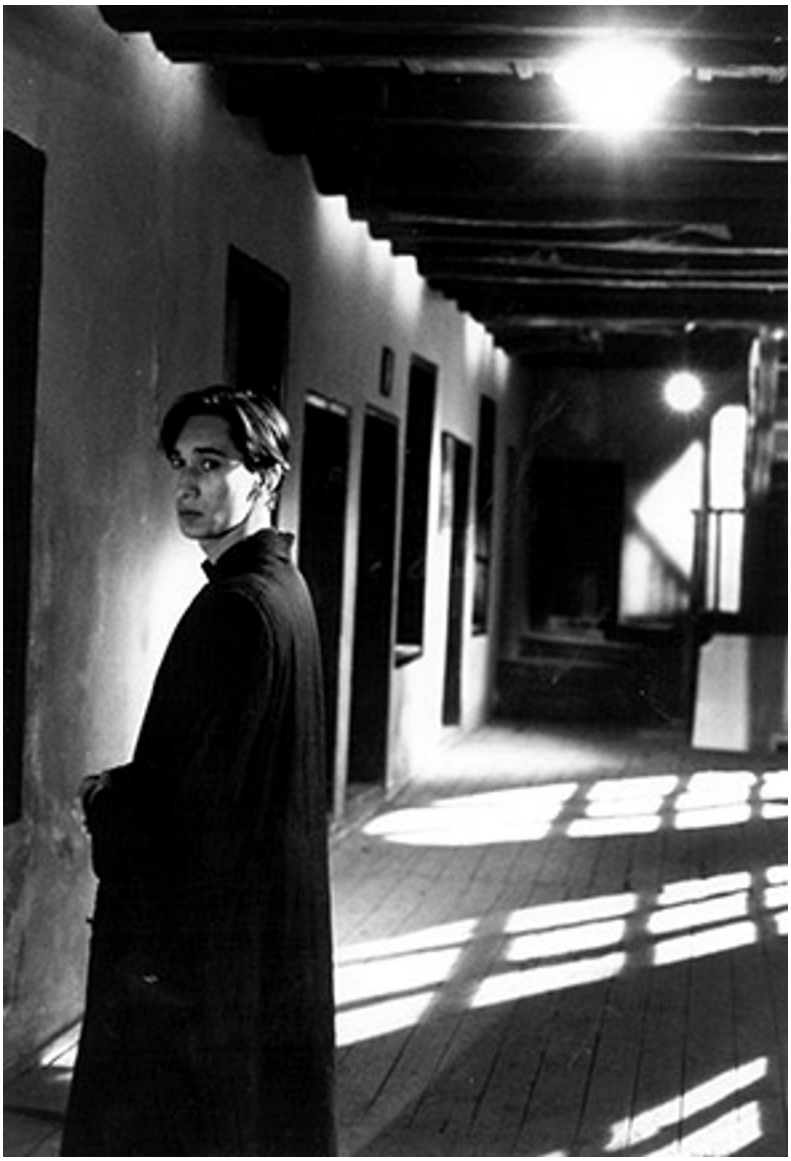

Figure 1. Kiril. Used with permission of Milcho Manchevski.

And yet, *Before the Rain* also articulates several poignant instances of proper listening and related proper hearing that are particularly noticeable given the pervasive inability or unwillingness to listen. These instances profoundly affect a "listening" person and often result in radical ethical and political acts. The most intriguing example of proper listening, the center of the whole first part of the film, is Kiril's genuine listening to Zamira, listening that hears Zamira without Zamira's even having to employ

any words at all. (And, at any rate, Kiril does not understand Albanian nor Zamira Macedonian.) Kiril thus listens to and hears not Zamira's *words* about herself and her situation, but rather Zamira herself, in her significance and her tragic predicament. Kiril's listening thus sidesteps, as it were, the realm of words and verbally engendered concepts—words that claim, for example, that Zamira murdered a Macedonian man—and goes back to the perhaps original relating outside or before language, the relating that should both precede and ground any relationship, the relating of proper listening and hearing. As Gemma Corradi Fiumara reminds us in her *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening,* "proper hearing" is explored in Heidegger's discussion of the Greek word *legein:* "Among the possible meanings of the verb *legein* (besides the prevalent ones related to saying) there are meanings of a different nature, such as to 'shelter,' 'gather,' 'keep,' 'receive,' which would surely be more conducive to a cognitive attitude based on 'proper hearing.'"[6] Such hearing is "listening, hearkening, attending to what is said (or unsaid)" and "is preeminently social," presupposing "the worldly condition of being-with-others."[7]

Silence and the Monastery

Let us step back for a moment to consider Kiril's environment, or the physical, social, spiritual, and artistic space that allows him to properly listen. The Orthodox monastery and church on Lake Ohrid (composed of several actual settings but presented as one location in the film), is itself a place quite "unreal, closer to a mythical land than to current-day Macedonia."[8] With its profound silences, this setting creates a unique environment in which one can hear properly. The classic Greeks distinguished *sigaô,* denoting a general absence of sound, from *siôpaô,* referring to the absence of human speech.[9] Adjusting these terms to modern times, it becomes apparent that the monastery creates both *sigaô,* the absence of the intrusive noise of modern life (traffic, industry, machines, media), and *siôpaô,* the absence of verbal noise. Situated in a breathtaking but rugged terrain accessible only by foot, the monastery offers the silencing of the modern world's noisy everyday life and its multiple voices and demands for attention, or, in other words, a reclaiming of that silence which has

6. Corradi Fiumara, *Other Side of Language,* 1. Corradi Fiumara here refers to Heidegger's discussion of proper hearing in his *Early Greek Thinking.*

7. Gerald L. Bruns, *Heidegger's Estrangements: Language, Truth and Poetry in the Later Writings* (New Haven, 1989), 21.

8. "In order to reinforce the fact that this is not a documentary about contemporary Macedonia, I treated the film—to a point—like a fable, stylistically. The country was made to look like a fairy-tale land in the way it was photographed. Blues and visuals suggestive of Byzantine art dominated the first third . . . we wanted to create even more heightened reality composed solely of wonderful landscapes, a place obviously unreal, closer to a mythical land than to current-day Macedonia." Milcho Manchevski, "Rainmaking and Personal Truth," *Rethinking History* 4, no. 2 (July 2000): 131.

9. J. H. H. Schmidt, *Handbuch der lateinischen und griechischen Synonymik* (Amsterdam, 1968), 73, quoted in Silvia Montiglio, *Silence in the Land of Logos* (Princeton, 2000), 11–12.

"today . . . become an endangered species," as contemporary acoustic ecologist Gordon Hempton puts it.[10] In terms of the verbal noise or, as Corradi Fiumara calls it, the "environmental degradation . . . with regard to the world of language," that is, "an unmonitored saturation of written or spoken words and . . . a concomitant lack of silence," the complete absence of things such as electronic media allows the creation of *siôpaô,* or the silencing of this endlessly proliferating "saturation of words."[11]

Marked by the absence of non-diegetic sounds or the soundtrack music present in other segments, the parts featuring monks and their space contain long silences punctuated only by sparse diegetic sounds. At the film's beginning and after a sequence portraying the monks in prayer, the next sequence shows them walking together across an open area to their cells for the night, without any talking whatsoever. From the first shot of the church on a lake to the scene in which Kiril finds Zamira in his cell and gasps, and aside from the old monk's wishing Kiril good night, there is almost a full minute and a half in which the only sounds are crickets chirping, then Kiril's steps on the wooden floor, his undressing, and the pigeons' cooing on the roof above. Kiril's later outing with the old monk Marko is marked by another long stretch of silence, with only Marko's few words surrounded by almost two minutes of silence in which just a few diegetic sounds are heard. After Kiril's return to his cell, this silence is broken by Zamira's sparse "My name is Zamira. You are good." And the film's last sequence featuring monks, the one in which they take leave of Kiril and Zamira, contains another long stretch of silence punctuated by the music blasting from a boom box of one of Zamira's armed pursuers. Kiril ties his suitcase; as the monks look at him, he walks down the stairs; the old monk Marko embraces him; father Damjan fetches Zamira, slaps Kiril on the face and instantly afterward firmly embraces him, tells him "Good luck," to which Kiril responds with his first words, "Thank you, father. Forgive me." These remain the only words spoken as Zamira raises her eyes to look at the two other monks who return her look and then almost imperceptibly smile at each other and as the two young people leave. From Kiril's tying his suitcase to the onset of non-diegetic music accompanying the couple's final exit from the monastery, the silence lasts for what seems an interminably long period of three minutes and fifteen seconds.

The beginning of the second part of the film, "Faces," set in London, further emphasizes the monastery's silence by the loud contrast. The uptempo soundtrack song, diegetic radio news, and telephone calls overlap with the rushed movements and nervous high-pitched voices of the people in Anne's office. After leaving her work space, Anne appears in the background of a shot that foregrounds heavy machinery, traffic, and masses of people on the street and is filled to the brim with all of their noise. Sharing a cab with windows closed, Anne and Aleks are depicted from the start as people who try to carve out not only their own space

10. Gordon Hempton and John Grossman, *One Square Inch of Silence: One Man's Search for Natural Silence in a Noisy World* (New York, 2009), 1.

11. Corradi Fiumara, *Other Side of Language,* 98.

but also their own silence in the midst of this environment. And the fact that both a teen in London's graveyard and a member of the Macedonian search party are listening to the same abrasive tune underscores the "connection by noise" of these seemingly different spaces.

In opposition to such an environment and its ubiquitous "saturation of words," the only words spoken in the monastery are those uttered by the monks themselves, and their own speech is characterized by extreme pithiness and precision, allowing, as pointed out above, long periods of absolute silence. When they do speak, the monks' words are either familiar ones, yet to be considered over and over again (the words of prayers), or extremely limited and to the point. When the leader of the Macedonian search party, Mitre, announces that they are looking for an Albanian girl who killed one of the village men, Father Damjan responds: "In the monastery there have only been refugees from Bosnia. The Muslims. In front of God we are all the same," and when Mitre presses on, the abbot replies: "Turn the other cheek." The words the abbot directs to the other monks are also economical: "Did anyone see her? I just ask to know if she is here," with this particular line intimating that the monk is seeking to find out the facts, not to give the girl up to the irate men looking for her. Speaking in a calm and slow manner, the way all the monks do, he does not significantly increase either the volume or the pitch of his voice, and this delivery marks him as someone who is able to listen, contrasting him with the excited, loud, and nonlistening villagers. The inflammatory nationalist phrases uttered by the men from the nearby village (for example, "they [the Albanians] will overwhelm us") are completely absent in the monastery. Aiding ourselves with another classic Greek insight about the ability of corrupt words to literally *infect* the listener—criminals in ancient Greece were not allowed to speak to the public lest their words contaminate others—we can see that the absence of such speech helps the monks remain impervious to the nationalist virus taking hold of the space outside the monastery. Though they ask Kiril to leave with Zamira, the monks themselves help the young pair escape.[12]

The monastery's silencing of external and physically audible noises allows the more important internal absence or silencing of the distracting noises of modern life on the one hand and of the voices of this or that dominant contemporary ideology, such as nationalism in this case, on the other hand. While the red-haired Macedonian youngster Stojan obviously just repeats the words he has heard a number of times and now uses as his own ("what about the five centuries of Turks [meaning Muslim Ottomans but now transferred onto Muslim Albanians]?"), the monks and Kiril are not possessed by, nor do they become the mouthpieces of, such internal-

12. Irena Makarushka's "Religion, Ethnicity and Violence in *Before the Rain*" sees this issue differently and reads the film's take on the monastery's seclusion and separation as mainly negative. See www.manchevski.com/@page=press_essey&sub=therain&sub2=essays&body.htm (last accessed 3 December 2010). My own sense is that the film as a whole perceives the monks and their space in a positive light: Kiril proves heroic in his hiding of Zamira, the monastery itself provides shelter to Bosnian Muslim refugees, and all the monks help Zamira and Kiril escape from the Macedonian men pursuing her.

ized noise that would destroy the needed silence and prevent them from listening properly. The monastery thus creates an environment of deep external and internal silence conducive to better listening and hearing that enables the "transposition of hearing proper into the realm of spiritual" Heidegger talks about.

And if such genuine hearing may also be diminished or tempered by the noise of one's own speaking, of one's own words, then a profound rebirth of listening as one's fundamental openness may sometimes require a complete cessation of speaking as well, something akin to a vow of silence. And it is precisely this vow of silence that characterizes and has deeply shaped Kiril who, when we first meet him in the film, has not spoken a word in two years.

Outside Language

A more detailed recounting of the chronology of events (in real time) may be in order: Zamira stands accused of the murder of a Macedonian villager Bojan by the man's relatives who have assembled a band of armed men to search for her. (The film never reveals whether she has indeed committed this murder, nor does she speak about it.) She is captured by these men and guarded in a sheepfold, from where Aleksandar frees her; his cousin Zdrave shoots at the two and kills Aleksandar but the girl manages to flee, later arriving at the monastery where she hides in Kiril's cell. Startled when he discovers her at night, Kiril calms himself in a moment by crossing himself, and then looks at her as she tells him something in Albanian while protecting herself with her arms as if expecting a blow, before she turns off the light. Kiril leaves and goes to the elderly father's cell, presumably to alert him to Zamira's presence; just as he is about to knock on the monk's door he stays his hand and looks back toward his cell, where he sees Zamira looking at him through the bars of his window. When the other priest suddenly opens the door and asks Kiril, "What are you doing here?" Kiril neither speaks nor reveals anything but simply heads for the outdoor toilet with this monk who assumed that this was the reason of Kiril's coming to his door. Kiril stays in the latrine for a time, presumably pondering what to do next; still he does not betray Zamira and eventually returns to his cell, placing next to the girl, now lying on the floor, some tomatoes which she devours as soon as she hears him lying down. Nor does he reveal her presence the next day, when the Macedonian search party comes to the monastery looking for her, and he remains silent when the abbot asks if anyone saw her. Kiril pushes the armed man who he thinks is about to shoot Zamira (and who was actually about to shoot and kill a cat, which he does after hitting Kiril) and vomits upon seeing the horrible killing of the cat. The day after, Zamira is discovered by the monks, and the couple leave the monastery together at night. Fleeing the area and pausing for a moment in a mountainous landscape, the two are overtaken by Zamira's family search party the following day, and she is soon machine-gunned by her brother Ali while running after Kiril, who had been chased away by the men in her family.

As envisioned and embodied by the film, the strong connection between the monk and the girl is outside a shared ethnicity (he is Macedonian, she is Albanian), outside a context that could provide some more conventional character motivation (he does not know anything about her and only realizes that she is hiding and does not want to be found), and outside history: though existentially affected by current events, both Kiril and Zamira seem to exist apart from them, in a kind of a transhistorical realm where they are in a "world of their own." Their connection is also outside sexuality, partly because they both appear very young, almost like children, she with her boyish physique and very short hair, dressed in loose pants and blue Adidas T-shirt, and he appearing like a child among the other much older monks.[13] Their one touch is that of his hand briefly holding hers, their one kiss that of his brushing her cheek with his lips, and their one embrace, hers of him, is asexual and much too strong and direct to be sensual, like that of a child expressing love.

Their connection is, aside from all else, fully outside language: they share no common language and there is no verbal communication between them whatsoever.[14] If they can be seen as a symbolic Romeo and Juliet on account of their belonging to two feuding groups and forging the strongest connection despite their respective groups' total enmity, then they are Romeo and Juliet without words. He adheres to his vow of silence even in moments of profound shock, such as when he finds her asleep in his bed, and she quickly realizes both that they cannot understand each other, and that, for whatever reason, Kiril does not speak at all: "Are you dumb? . . . you do not speak Albanian, I do not speak Macedonian." In addition to their not understanding each other's language, she assertively demands complete silence—the absence of any talking—at the beginning of their being together and at the end of their togetherness. Her first gesture to him in his astonishment at finding her in his bed is to quickly put her finger to her lips, whispering "shhhh!" and that very same gesture, now in slower movement, will also be the last one she will make for him as she lies dying with him touching her face and saying "forgive me." They hardly talk to each other in the period between her words at the very beginning of their initial encounter ("you do not understand me . . . "), and his words at the end of their ill-fated escape ("afterwards, we will go to my uncle, in London . . . no one will find you, no one . . . you do not understand me?" and his final "forgive me"). Yet even these very few words function much more as a theatrical monologue for the audience, explaining things to the viewers, than as a communication between two young people who understand nothing of what the other is saying

13. As Victor A. Friedman clarifies, Zamira's wearing pants should not be interpreted as her being clad in men's clothing, because "*çitjane* or *çintijane,* a kind of loose pantaloon . . . are characteristic everyday household wear of [rural] Muslim women in Macedonia and elsewhere in the Balkans." Friedman, "Fable as History," 136.

14. Friedman's article provides the historical background for this situation in which younger people of different ethnicities do not know each other's language, as opposed to their older family members who do: Zamira's mother and grandmother, Hana and Zekir, know Macedonian, and Aleksandar knows some Albanian. Ibid., 136–37.

and who pointedly say as much at the beginning and end of their being together—Zamira's "You don't understand Albanian, I don't understand Macedonian," and Kiril's "You don't understand me."

The absence of speech and the presence of a deep silence mark their relationship and are crucial for their connection, which seems to appear, not despite of, but rather because of this silence. First, Kiril's silence to the others with regard to Zamira's presence in the monastery, his repeated heeding of her first admonition to remain mute (about her, to the others), is his own act of heroism, showing Zamira that Kiril is "good" and selfless in his protection of her, that he loves her.[15] Second, silence profoundly imbues the very relationship between the two and allows proper listening. The silence of the world (their encounters happen at night), the silencing of the language around them (Kiril's nonacceptance of Mitre's assertion that "she [Zamira] killed our brother," and Zamira's own dismissal of her brother's violent words regarding all Macedonians), and the absence of language between them, actually helps the two young people to "hear" each other clearly. Kiril hears or heeds Zamira's need for protection, her basic innocence, and her claim on his love; Zamira "hears" Kiril's goodness. This genuine listening reveals itself to be stronger than the potentially divisive agencies of ethnicity and contemporary politics and in no need of a potentially connective pull of sexuality or language itself. Thus, the dying Zamira's admonition to Kiril not to talk and be silent not only reminds him and us of the beginning of their connection; Zamira's final gesture primarily invokes the silence between the two of them that has so profoundly abetted their proper hearing of each other and their togetherness, a connection between the two that not only has been subjective and internal but was also acted upon decisively and with enormous personal courage.[16]

15. Being silent in this way, Kiril becomes part of a vast and ancient community of those whose silence is "the expression of knowledge, willpower, or even heroism," as André Neher puts it. André Neher, *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz,* trans. David Maisel (Philadelphia, 1981), 13.

16. The film complements its endorsement of silence by repeatedly showing the violent or even lethal potential of words when handled improperly in their making or their reception. The several instances of different, life-affirming uses of words, most notably in a conversation between Aleksandar and Hana (the woman Aleksandar loves and Zamira's mother), a conversation that leads to Aleksandar's rescuing of Zamira, are characterized by the presence of deep listening by the interlocutors, listening that hears not only the actually spoken words, but also the whole realms of another person's existence and one's own related ethical decisions. But the film repeatedly features "non-listening words" and failed communications; Venko Andonovski talks about the empty words and "damaged communication." Venko Andonovski, "Semiološkata fobija od tugoto: Semiotikata na sličnostite i semiotikata na razlikite vo filmot *Pred doždot* na Milčo Mančevski," *Kinopis* 12, no. 7 (1995): 21–27. Words are also associatively connected with or lead directly to death: Anne has an utterly nonfunctional verbal communication with her husband, punctuated by verbal outbursts and marked by what seems to be his total inability to hear her, which precedes the violence that erupts in the London restaurant and claims his life. The restaurant shooting itself appears to be caused by a conversation gone bad: the two men, speaking a variant of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, seem to be having a not unfriendly conversation that quickly veers into a quarrel, physical fight, and shooting. And it is not so much a concrete event, the murder of the Macedonian man Bojan, that, however horrible it may be, results in

The Ways of Listening and a Reclining Body

Although Kiril shares all the silent times of the monastery and of the other monks as discussed above, he also creates—with his vow of silence—his own even more intensified practice of silence and listening. Introduced in a series of oppositions to at least minimally talking characters, Kiril keeps silent while walking with the older monk Marko who talks and also tells of Kiril's vow of silence, then during the monks' chanting, and later in his encounter with the (at first) briefly talking Zamira. His appearance alone creates silence: when he arrives late to the morning prayer, the prayer comes to an end and a silence more than twenty seconds long ensues, in which close-ups of frescoes are juxtaposed with close-ups of Kiril's face, as silent as the figures on these frescoes. Kiril is clearly likened to them, not only through this visual juxtaposition of his face with their figures and faces, but also through their shared silence. The sequences centering on Kiril are marked by long silences and the presence of only diegetic sounds characteristic of the monastery and its monks. In the second night of Zamira's hiding, the sequence showing Kiril in his cell is marked by almost complete silence, in contrast to the search party's talking and shooting on the outside. In the two scenes in which Kiril encounters Zamira that echo each other—the first one a dream, the second almost completely identical but real—they do not say a word, and the soundtrack during their silent, almost two-minute-long encounter(s) is a very few sustained notes on a violin, bracketing away and silencing the outside diegetic sounds, and marking the "heightened reality," as Manchevski calls it, of the two young people's connecting with each other.[17]

Not enclosed by noise and noise-making words, Kiril is fully "open" to and thus truly experiences, or hears on a highly sensitized level, the miracle of the giving and silent earth, the tomatoes he has nurtured and is now harvesting, the sun, and the gift of life these create together. As Corradi Fiumara puts it, "the speech act selects *an aspect* of reality simply by speaking about it," that is, the words usher one out of a myriad of simultaneously coexisting aspects of reality, and thus prioritize that one aspect, thereby putting into the background of invisibility (or inaudibility) the unspoken realms.[18] With no words, Kiril's experience of the world is more bodily and direct, more in tune, as it were, with the matter itself, and less dependent—or perhaps not at all dependent—on the many possible conceptual or discursive constructions and self-confident words that may not be getting there at all, that may enwrap the matter and the living body in the cloak of invisibility, displace it, and replace it.[19]

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further acts of violence, but instead a specific set of *words* attached to it, alongside a very specific interpretation of these words, as will be discussed later in this article.

17. Manchevski, "Rainmaking and Personal Truth," 131.

18. Corradi Fiumara, *Other Side of Language,* 24.

19. A prime example of such an erasure of the living body by strident words happens with the group of armed Macedonian men, who by labeling Zamira an "Albanian whore," become unable to grasp that she is in a way still just a child.

Kiril is the one who retrieves and restores the "life-enhancing role of listening," because, to paraphrase Corradi Fiumara, he approaches in an accepting manner, or lets himself be accosted by, whatever faces him, and thus allows its existence and further articulation.[20] His listening and openness to the world around him—to plants, the sky, a landscape, the frescoes in the monastery, the pigeons' cooing on his roof, Zamira—are marked by his responsiveness to, his receiving and sheltering of, this world, and these combine to allow him to properly hear this world.[21] A precondition of saying, a precondition of doing, or even of seeing, listening is gathering, sheltering, heeding, and the path to proper hearing.[22] This silent listening and proper hearing come first, as the origin of anything that follows; the next step (saying, doing) may or may not arrive, but the initial hearing as sheltering has to be the source, the root of whatever comes next. Literature or philosophy cannot themselves be the silence and the wordless listening to whatever faces us. They can *talk* about or even tell this way of being (as in poetry), but they cannot themselves *be* this silent, wordless mode: by speaking or writing, through the use of words, they can talk about silence but cannot be silent themselves. Though sometimes brought about by words, as the "unspeakable" brought about "by clearly displaying the speakable" (Ludwig Wittgenstein), this silent being is, as silence, the absence of language; its silence excludes language. The medium of film, on the other hand, can create something that language-based forms cannot. Film has the capacity to put before us and shape the silent listening that is called for and talked about by the philosophers. Their ideal concepts get their embodied, concrete reality in *Before the Rain*.

Consider the following fragments from Heidegger's *Early Greek Thinking* (the first two citations), and Corradi Fiumara's *The Other Side of Language: Philosophy of Listening* (the last citation):

> Who would want to deny that in the language of the Greeks from early on *legein* means to talk, say or tell. However, just as early and even more originally . . . it means what our [German] similarly sounding *legen* means: to lay down and lay before. In *legen* a "bringing together" prevails, the

20. "We can retrieve and restore the life-enhancing role of listening. To the extent that we approach in an accepting manner, or let ourselves be accosted, we allow the existence and further articulation of whatever faces us." Corradi Fiumara, *Other Side of Language,* 16.

21. To repeat: "Among the possible meanings of the verb *legein* (besides the prevalent ones related to saying) there are meanings of a different nature, such as to 'shelter,' 'gather,' 'keep,' 'receive,' which would surely be more conducive to a cognitive attitude based on 'proper hearing.'" Ibid., 1.

22. Saying that proper hearing is a precondition of seeing may sound counterintuitive: after all, we see what we see and that's that. But things are not that simple: one sees what one thinks one is seeing, and the presence or absence of hearing what one is looking at is a crucial component in the creation of what one thinks one sees. For more on this topic, see a discussion of *Chinatown* in Gordana P. Crnković, "From the Eye to the Hand: The Victim's Double Vision in the Cinema of Roman Polanski," *Kinoeye: New Perspectives on European Film* 4, no. 5 (29 November 2004), at www.kinoeye.org/04/05/crnkovic05.php (last accessed 3 December 2010).

> Latin *legere* understood as *lesen,* in the sense of collecting and bringing together. *Legein* properly means the laying-down and laying-before which gathers itself and others.[23]
>
> *Legein* . . . means just this, that whatever lies before us involves us and therefore concerns us.[24]
>
> requirement that we dwell with, abide by . . . that we aim at coexistence with, rather than knowledge-of.[25]

In *Before the Rain,* the notions of "laying-down and laying-before which gathers itself and others" or of "just this, that whatever lies before us involves us and therefore concerns us" come back from their abstracted philosophical meaning, where the literal laying down of the physical bodies before us becomes the figurative "laying down" of something in front of our minds. *Before the Rain* returns these abstracted notions to earth, where laying down and laying before—and receiving, sheltering, and coexisting with—become the basic descriptive words expressing the relation between two living, human, and increasingly connected bodies. The two night scenes involving Kiril and Zamira in his cell can best be described as scenes of Zamira lying in front of Kiril or laying down before him. On the first night, she lies sidewise on the bare wooden floor, her body curled, with her hand under her head, parallel to Kiril's bed and his body; the two are turned away from each other. On the second night, she again lies on her side on the floor parallel to him, but the two are turned toward each other. This time Zamira props her head on her hand and just looks at him lying on his bed, his face and body turned to hers, looking at her. She looks at him for a long time and then smiles. From a point behind the triangle made by her arm propping her head, a long shot emphasizes her perspective: Kiril is seen through that triangle made by Zamira's body and is framed by her supine position.

Not standing, moving, or even sitting, a reclining body is the furthest removed from movement and action, the most unprotected and vulnerable, the most open to whatever it lies in front of. Zamira's body lying in front of Kiril is not a sexual body, nor a body in simple repose; it is the body that is "laying in front" of Kiril in the most profound way that "involves" him and "therefore concerns" him. Kiril "receives," "shelters," and "keeps" Zamira, and he dwells with and abides by her, shaping his being with her as a coexistence rather than an indifferent distance and noninvolvement. Such coexistence implies a shared destiny of flight and exile, marked by their now shared physical appearance: having relinquished his monk's robe, Kiril becomes like Zamira, dressed in a pair of pants and a striped Adidas T-shirt, the same as hers except that his is red and hers is blue (see figure 2). Slapped or threatened by both the Macedonian and Albanian pursuers of Zamira, Kiril indeed shares her fate, and, in the end, it seems like chance that she is killed rather than him or both of them.

23. Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking,* 60.
24. Ibid., 62.
25. Corradi Fiumara, *Other Side of Language,* 15.

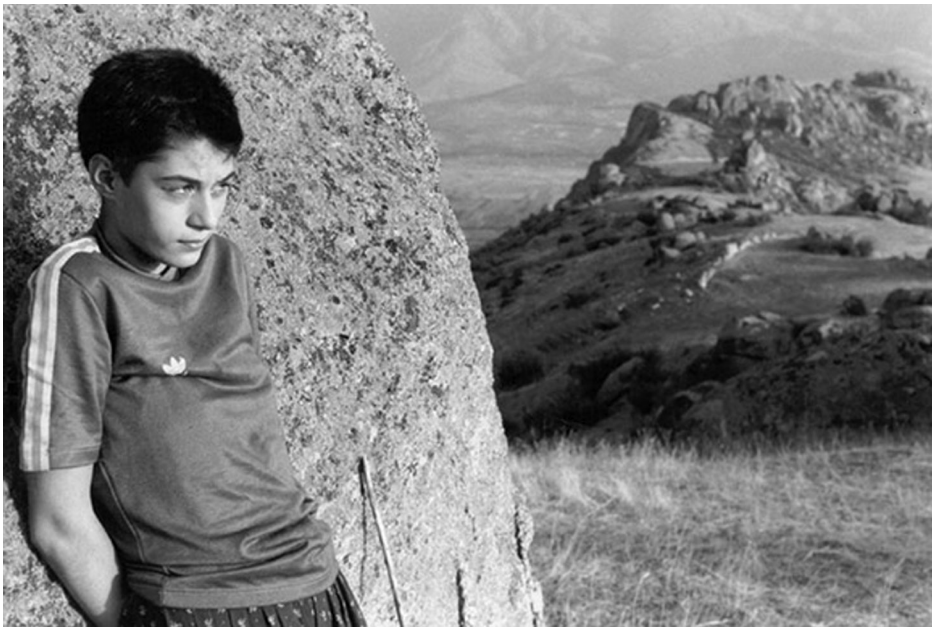

Figure 2. Zamira. Used with permission of Milcho Manchevski.

Silent Children and Nature, Talking Children and Their Games

Although young adults, Kiril and Zamira can also be seen as symbolic children on account of their youth, lack of explicit sexuality, and childlike appearance. Zamira's extremely sparse talk, even with her own family's male members, also likens her to a child who does not explain or argue but only repeatedly asserts the most basic and important things. After eating the tomatoes Kiril brought her, Zamira lies down on the floor and says: "My name is Zamira. You are good." When eventually apprehended by the men in her family and repeatedly hit by her grandfather Zekir who accuses her of killing Bojan and being a "whore" for having been accompanied by Kiril, she simply states: "He saved my life, grandpa, he hid me," and keeps repeating, despite Zekir's slaps, "He loves me. He loves me. He loves me." Zamira never tries to explain that Kiril is a monk, that he never touched her until he gave her that light kiss on the cheek seen by her family's men, that he did not reveal her hiding in his cell despite the grave danger to himself, that he got beaten by a Macedonian man and left his monastery because of her. Her talk is not discursive, explanatory, argumentative, or apologetic; she utters only the most basic truths: "You are good." "He helped me." "He loves me."

Furthermore, Kiril and Zamira's predominantly silent, wordless existence helps strengthen both young people's metaphorical closeness to the quiet of nature, plants, and animals, a closeness intimated by both the film's narrative elements and its visual articulation of scenes featuring the two young people. From the very start Kiril is associated with the

cultivation of plants, and with the silence that connects them to him, a being equally mute. A poignantly long close-up shot of Kiril's well-tanned hands picking ripe tomatoes opens the film, and his very first contact with Zamira, the first thing he does for her, is place tomatoes on the floor next to her—as many tomatoes as he could carry. In the same way in which he has worked in the monastery's garden, Kiril is now caring for and protecting Zamira. She is in turn repeatedly associated with a cat or a hunted animal. The party of Macedonian men searching for her is introduced with a close-up shot of a man's boot stepping right next to a cat and scaring it away; one man's looking for the cat echoes his search for the hidden girl, and the final brutal killing of this cat with a machine gun reflects the desire to kill Zamira, echoes the chronologically earlier (though later in filmic time) shooting at Zamira that missed her but killed Aleksandar, and prefigures her eventual murder. Like a cat, Zamira is nocturnal, able to hide and move well at night, meeting Kiril and being sheltered by him the first night, making contact with him the second night, leaving the monastery in search of rescue and safety the third night, and being overtaken and killed in the full light of the day after, deprived of her nocturnal protection. Zamira's body language is catlike as well: she is flexible, quiet, capable of being still for a long time, and she crouches like a cat, on all fours, while looking through the barred window at Kiril walking to the senior monk's cell, presumably to inform on her.[26] Tamed like an animal would be, with food (she eats the tomatoes Kiril brought to her using both hands simultaneously, hungrily biting into one tomato and then into another), Zamira is pursued by one (Macedonian) group of armed men and then found, captured, and killed by another (Albanian) group of armed men. Both of these groups resemble hunting parties, whose long-distance weapons are trained on a single defenseless creature. Her death has the overtones of a ritual sacrifice as well, as she has been likened to a newly born lamb: right after observing the birth of the two lambs, we see the two girls on the hill above the sheepfold, one of whom is presumably Zamira.

The film's "fairy-tale" mode ("the film is shot, seen, colored . . . like a fairy tale"), strengthens this associative connection between, or the metaphorical sameness of, two silent children and silent plants and animals.[27] After all, fairy tales often include the archetypal relationship between children or good (innocent) people on the one hand, and animals and plants on the other. (A familiar fairy-tale motive is that of a young girl who has to remain silent and not speak a word for a certain number of

26. The association between Zamira and a cat is also clearly present in Manchevski's vision of her character, as evidenced in, among others, the published fifth revision of the screenplay for *Before the Rain*. In a description of one scene that did not end up in the final version of the film, Zamira, while running, gets hit by a branch and licks blood off her hand, "1ike a cat." Milcho Manchevski, *Before the Rain/Pred dožd*ot (Skopje, 2002), 189. Manchevski also mentions the "feline quality" of the actress Labina Mitevska in his director's commentary on the Criterion DVD edition of *Before the Rain*.

27. Milcho Manchevski, in a director's commentary on the Criterion DVD edition of *Before the Rain*.

years in order to break an evil spell; while under her own vow of silence, the child is approached and befriended by meek forest animals—such as squirrels, birds, and a doe who help her and feed her, accepting her as one of their own.) In the film's screenplay, the opening scene showing Kiril's hands' picking ripe tomatoes includes a simple event in which the hands identify and then prop up a broken twig with a stick, thus in effect healing the plant, and also ascribing the character of cultivator and nurturer to the young man. The poignant metaphoric association of the two silent children with plants and animals endorses Kiril and Zamira by making them fluent with nature and also opens up the scope of the film toward broader insights into ways in which the humans' specific relating to other humans corresponds to their relating to nature. The nonlistening aggressive violence toward Kiril and Zamira is related to the nonlistening aggressive violence toward nature, the violence that is as unwilling to hear and heed this nature (killing the cat and turtles) as it is unwilling to hear Kiril and Zamira.[28]

Before the Rain's contrast between life-affirming ways of silence and listening on one hand, and the violence of nonlistening and speaking on the other, is also embodied in a profound division between "silent" and "talking" children. The two silent children, Kiril and Zamira, are contrasted to the talking children, who do not merely aid the Macedonian men's pursuit of Zamira but actually initiate that pursuit with their words. After all, no one (including us, the viewers), ever sees what actually happens to Bojan or who kills him; as the writer and director Manchevski comments, "the film never shows us anything; we see two girls on the hill near the sheepfold and yes, one of them is Zamira, but the film never gets a close-up of her, so we can at best only surmise that it is she, not know it."[29] With its vagueness and lack of clear information, the film accurately articulates the situation on the ground: there was no factual knowledge or any positive eyewitness' account that identified Zamira as a murderer. Instead, there were only very specific words, allegedly spoken by children—"the children saw her [Zamira] with him"—and then received and interpreted in a very specific way by a group of Macedonian villagers—"Zamira is Bojan's murderer"—that lead to the pursuit and capture of Zamira, and the killing of Aleksandar who frees her. And it was another set of words disclosing Zamira's hiding place (Mitre's "the children told me she hid in

28. The rendering of nature in *Before the Rain,* and this link between the two main characters and plants and animals in particular, could be a topic of another whole work focusing on the issues of ecocriticism, whose insights deeply concern listening and silence. Identifying Maurice Merleau-Ponty as one of ecocriticism's main predecessors, for instance, Louise Westling writes that "Merleau-Ponty called for a reawakening to the world around us, that requires listening to the other voices that we have forgotten to hear, voices that arise in what we may have formerly assumed to be silences." Louise Westling, "Literature, the Environment, and the Question of the Posthuman," in Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer, eds., *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism* (Amsterdam, 2006), 39.

29. Milcho Manchevski, in a director's commentary on the Criterion DVD edition of *Before the Rain.*

the monastery") that lead to the search of the monastery, the escape of the two young people, and the eventual death of the girl.

The children use words to first focus the men's shock and disorientation upon finding the murdered Bojan by singling out Zamira as the suspect, and later to direct the men's hunt with a new piece of information regarding her hiding place. Even though we never see these transactions of words between children and grown-ups and can thus assume that, for example, the children only truthfully answered questions posed to them by the elders, the way these children were previously introduced in the film (in their brutal game of taunting and then killing two captured turtles), the fact that we have observed two girls—not one—near the sheepfold (although the children allegedly mention only one girl, Zamira), and the way in which the scenes involving these children's words are filmed (as if an absent master gives an order, "the children tell me . . . [and thus I am here]"), combine to convey the uncomfortable impression that these children are more than the omnipresent eyes of the grown-ups appearing in a number of scenes.[30] Instead of being solely the adults' surveillance tool, the "talking children" themselves initiate the adult hunt and direct the search with their own words—the hunt so much like playing tag, the search so much like hide-and-seek—with the real puppet masters, the children, appearing barely but ominously as distant handlers of the grown-up executors of their games.

These talking children not only symbolically command and cause adult aggression: their own violent games repeatedly mirror grown-up games, creating a rich internal echo in which the children's games acquire an unmistakably grown-up aspect, and adult pursuits have a childish side, in a way that corrupts and perverts them both. The children reveal the potential to be cruel in an "adult way," with real bullets and real killings: they surround two turtles with a circle of brushwood, play with them pretending that the two turtles are two tanks fighting each other, and then set the twigs around them on fire and throw bullets into it. The scene ends with a close-up of two turtles on their backs, dead and burning, and with the sound of children's laughter. This killing of animals prefigures the killing of people associated with defenseless animals, such as Zamira, and is shown as a part of the chain of murders that includes the cat, Bojan, Aleksandar, and Zamira. While the children behave like violent adults, the adults themselves appear like unaware children in their seeming inability to control their weapons or be conscious of the predictable consequences of their use. Echoing the symbolic dynamic of the film, a man is separated from both his silence and his animal, a small donkey whom he holds in an embrace, by being given a gun that literally seems to take hold of him, making him shoot into the air (the sound of the machine gun mixed with that

30. We see a boy taking a photograph of the double funeral of Bojan and Aleksandar and then turning around and seeing Kiril running down the hill, which would seem suspicious and could lead to the discovery of Zamira's being in the monastery; the two boys observe Aleksandar's visit to Zekir and Hana, and the few boys emerge from behind the rocks when Zekir hits his granddaughter Zamira, which indicates that it was perhaps again the children who watched her and informed on her movements.

of the laughter of nearby children) or at the cat on the roof. Aleksandar's cousin Zdrave is also unable to hold a gun without using it and eventually shoots at Zamira, only to end up killing Aleksandar; and Zamira's brother Ali, unable to hold his sister back with his voice and also unable to control his gun, shoots at and kills Zamira. In both of these killings, the men end up doing something they never intended to do—killing their own cousin or sister—and looking like dumbfounded children when faced with the real effects of their use of these weapons. After shooting at Zamira with his machine gun (after she starts running after Kiril), and seeing her felled, her brother is in a speechless wide-eyed state of shock, as if it indeed never occurred to him that shooting someone could actually kill them even if this was unintended. And after shooting and gravely wounding Aleksandar, Zdrave exhibits an even more childish reaction, leaning in disbelief over Aleksandar and repeating "Don't you worry, Aleks, you'll be fine," as the bleeding man lies dying on the ground.

Mirroring each other with the same absence of listening, the violence of words and action, and fascination with weapons, both adults and children end up corrupted by a disturbing hybridization with the other realm, with children appearing like masked grown-ups and adults like perverted children. The fatal outcome of this mutation, where children are not children any more nor adults adults, is most clearly revealed in its final results, which are classically known as the grossest violations of nature—the murders of close relatives, of a cousin or a sister. Adults stop being adults when they allow themselves to be led by children, real or symbolic, and thus become unnatural children themselves, obsessed with new toys/guns and exciting games and unable to foresee the consequences of their violent actions—unable to answer Aleksandar's question, "And what after?" Children stop being children when they start playing their games—hide-and-seek and tag—in the adult arena, playing with infantile adults and playing the adults as their own tools of finding and catching. Using words to fuel and direct violent games, these "talking children" are contrasted to the silent children (Kiril, Zamira) and the children who bring silence—as the boys' choir in a London church does, echoing the Macedonian monks' prayer and space and bringing a moment of peace and composure to the pregnant Anne. But it is the adults, of course, who preserve and protect the spheres of both adulthood and childhood by preserving and protecting the separation between the two or, rather, by protecting the environment in which children are allowed to grow and ripen in silence and thus learn and nourish their own ability to listen and hear, which they can carry into adulthood as their own best foundation. The adults either affirm the sanctity of childhood and its silence, disarming the children and asserting their distinctiveness (Aleksandar's taking the guns away from young Stojan and a little boy and his repeating that Zamira is a "child") or, on the contrary, draw the children into the sphere of corrupted borders by arming them, as Mitre does when he gives a gun to his nephew Stojan and to a somewhat feeble-minded childlike man who later shoots the cat.

The division between the silent and the talking children is another embodiment of the film's symbolic division between life-affirming listen-

ing and aggressive nonlistening. The choice between silent hearing and loud shouting-down of what is in front of us lies much deeper than the sphere of adult politics and begins much earlier, during the period in which a person establishes her or his grounding in the world. Only by recognizing and protecting the sphere of childhood as the sphere where silent listening to the world is learned can one hope to foster a lifelong listening attitude that may resist distracting or aggressive noises and be capable of opposing violence.

Inner Listening and the *Daimon*

Before the Rain is an inspiring and profound cinematic meditation on silence and proper listening and their opposition to the advent of the world of noise, violence, assertive words, and the lack of hearing. Not listening to and not hearing nature and people creates the first, original erasure of them, and the "real" physical destruction often comes about as a consequence of that primary erasure. The "nonlistening" words produced by objectifying discourses, and those that initiate and shape the violent games, make a large part of the noise that destroys the silence necessary for proper listening. *Before the Rain* can thus be experienced as implying the overall need for the reclaiming of silence and the possibility of proper listening allowed by that silence.

The Macedonian villager with cropped hair who shoots in the air and kills the cat is characterized by his noticeable inability to endure silence once he gets pulled into the vortex of violence—he is always making noise himself or else wrapping himself fully in it, as when he puts a boom box turned up very loud right next to his ear. He is a metonymic representative of an environment in which noise works against any possibility of sensing and recognizing the need for proper hearing against and outside this omnipresent noise. The silence in *Before the Rain* thus involves, first, a removal of the listening garbage that distracts and explodes the person.[31] Kiril's silent monastery allows such an absence of noise; Kiril can thus "hear" outside and beyond his time with its distracting or violent noises. In a sea of silence, the daily prayers are basic and make one, perhaps, ponder their meaning and scope over and over again; Kiril's silent ways thus help him hear Zamira properly and immediately.

Second, silence can also bring the removal of one's own talking, or the need to verbally justify or explain oneself when no words are available. Kiril's vow of silence thus allows both his openness to whatever or

31. As Corradi Fiumara puts it, our noise-laden environment may cause a person's numbness or the complete "inhibition of our listening potential," which happens simply in order for one to survive or "protect one's inner self." Corradi Fiumara, *Other Side of Language,* 82. Or, this environment brings about the subconscious metabolization of the vast quantum of messages, which can again mightily distract one from his or her own proper hearing and being in the world; or one can deal with this dense and overwhelming noise critically, but then dealing with it may make one spend so much of oneself and one's time in this sphere that there is much less chance for the development of the proper listening to the voices that become audible only when noise is silenced.

whoever accosts him and the removal of the imperative to immediately explain, justify, put into words, or verbalize himself. This imperative is crushingly hard in novel situations that do not yet have proper words and with the dominant discourses pushing their own words. As Simone Weil puts it, "the effort of expression has a bearing not only on the form but on the thought and on the whole inner being."[32] Being able to not speak, Kiril does not have to translate his hiding of Zamira into words intended for the senior monks, an act that may have in itself been so painful and difficult for Kiril that it could have stopped him from doing the right thing and helping Zamira.

Third, silence allows not only hearing the world around oneself and other people but also the more original, primary, or basic listening to oneself or to one's own "messages from within." Silence can thus facilitate the rebirth of listening to one's own "inner self," or what one may call the Socratic *daimon*.

In her chapter "On Inner Listening," Corradi Fiumara writes:

> And at least *one* of the salient features of Socrates the philosopher can be identified in his relationship with the inner *daimon* to whom he constantly listens. And if this type of relationship tends to disappear during subsequent flights in our philosophical history, perhaps we do not ask with sufficient curiosity why it is that, after Socrates, messages *from within* which inspire, advise and direct us are no longer "audible" . . . we become compulsively dependent on external messages and incapable of letting any inner message spring to life. . . . Possibly the apex in the trajectory of western thought, our culture does in fact tend to ignore this voice, whose only concern is for the "health of the soul." And thus the most credible voice is ultimately represented as the most negligible. . . .
>
> Rather than proceeding toward it, therefore, one should simply let oneself be approached by it.[33]

Being "approached by it," sleeping Kiril hears the voice speaking the twenty-third Psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: For thou art with me." "Thou" is God as love and the deepest me, in the identity between the God and the *daimon,* the divine and the demonic. "Plato, in the speech of defense, even makes Socrates connect the two and call the phenomenon 'a divine and demonic element' . . . and even 'the sign of the God.'"[34] Kiril then dreams that he is waking up in his bed and that he sees Zamira in front of the window filled with rain: the "you" of Zamira is now connected with the "you" of God, of Kiril's own innermost voice or *daimon,* with his love flowing to "you." The silence of the monastic life, of the exclusion of the external noises of society and of Kiril's own words, has allowed the real listening and heeding of "you" (God, love, Zamira), being at the same time the profound listening and heeding of his own innermost voice, his *daimon*.

32. Simone Weil, "The Power of Words," a nonreferenced quote from Weil in Siân Miles's preface to this essay, in Miles, ed., *Simone Weil: An Anthology* (London, 1986), 239.

33. Corradi Fiumara, *Other Side of Language,* 127–31 (emphasis in the original).

34. Paul Friedlaender, *Plato. I. An Introduction,* trans. by H. Meyerhoff (London, 1958), 33. As quoted in Corradi Fiumara, *Other Side of Language,* 130.

Before the Rain participates in a long and rich tradition of the philosophical, spiritual, and artistic emphasis on the need for nourishing silence and the proper listening enabled by it. Evading the noises of the world, of assertive speeches, and of one's own words, young Kiril is able to properly listen to and hear himself and his own clear inner voice, to hear Zamira, to love and help her, and to show us that a way out of the circle of violence lies in reclaiming the environment and the state of mind of deep listening, which many of us have forgotten ever existed.