

Title: “Wild, Young Cinema:” Zornitsa Sophia’s *Mila from Mars*
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Written, directed, and co-produced by Zornitsa Sophia (b. 1972), *Mila from Mars* (2004) marks a distinct departure from the tragedy of fragmented subjectivity associated with a whole body of Bulgarian films from the 1990s and early 2000s. Despite its thematic preoccupations with escape, displacement, and broken social and family structures, the film, nevertheless, manages to transform the notions of loss and abandonment into a possibility of physical and psychological landscapes of self-discovery and re-birth through kindness and love. The film’s imaginative editing and framing places at its center the marginalized “border” identities of abandoned children and grandparents. At the backdrop of deserted towers, Romanesque buildings, churches and houses, they pick up the ruins of distant and recent history (collapsed kingdoms, empires, and states) to build a new holy family, organized around the newborn Risto (Hristo/Christ) whose mafia-boss father buys and abuses his 16-year-old orphan of a mother (herself an unconventional modern palimpsest of a Mary and a Mary Magdalene). A cultural icon of post-brain-drain Bulgaria, Mila both draws strength from and empowers those who have been rendered “useless” by the turbulent transitions accompanying the country’s efforts to join a united Europe. With much humor and warmth, *Mila from Mars* provides an engaging commentary on Bulgaria’s search for roots and routes, zooming in on those who remained in the country during the decade and a half of brain-drain and socio-political and economic volatility after 1989. At the same time, the film explores the possibility for a return to—a kind of resurrection of—the reality of an individual and family consciousness that could revive the barren Mars-like landscapes of national identity.