

WORLD PREMIERE in the Official Competition of the 77th Venice International Film Festival



PLUTO[®]
FILM

IN BETWEEN DYING

by Hilal Baydarov





A FILM BY HILAL BAYDAROV
Azerbaijan 2020, 88 Minutes

PRODUCED BY
Ucqr Film
In co-production with
Splendor Omnia Studios and Louverture Films

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SCREENING SCHEDULE

GALA SCREENING: 11 Sep 2020 @ 16.45 - SALA GRANDE

PRESS & INDUSTRY

Date : 10 Sep 2020
Cinema hall : SALA DARSENA
Time : 19.45 & 22.00

Date : 10 Sep 2020
Cinema hall : PALABIENNALE
Time : 20.00 & 22.15

ALL ACCREDITATIONS

Date : 11 Sep 2020
Cinema hall : SALA PERLA 2
Time : 20.00

Date : 12 Sep 2020
Cinema hall : SALA PASINETTI
Time : 8.45 & 11.00

PUBLIC SCREENINGS

Date : 11 Sep 2020
Cinema hall : ROSSINI 1 & IMG CANDIANI 1
Time : 18.30

Date : 11 Sep 2020
Cinema hall : ARENA LIDO & ARENA GIARDINI
Time : 22.30

LOGLINE

IN BETWEEN DYING is the love story of Davud, a young man trying to find his 'real' family, who completes his life cycle in a single day. When he does find Love, it's in the place he has always lived. But it is too late.

SYNOPSIS

Davud is a misunderstood, restless young man in search of his 'true' family, those whom he feels certain will bring love and therefore meaning to his life. Over the course of one strange day, pursued by men he has crossed and sure this day will be his last, Davud's search leads him to encounters with a number of unexpected deaths and a series of women striving to liberate themselves from subjugation. As he journeys, each death and each liberation causes invisible memories and self-constructed narratives to rise to the surface of his consciousness. Davud is propelled into a journey of self-discovery that leads him finally back to the place he has always lived, and the love that was always there.

Director Hilal Baydarov takes us on a dreamlike and enigmatic journey through a world of shifting structures, resisting narrative in favour of empathy, reason in favour of intuition, and irony in favour of curiosity. Shot against the vast landscapes of rural Azerbaijan and accompanied by an exquisite soundscape, IN BETWEEN DYING is a powerful visualization of humanity on its fundamental quest for meaning.

TECHNICAL DATA

Original title	SƏPƏLƏNMIŞ ÖLÜMLƏR ARASINDA
English title	IN BETWEEN DYING
Genre	Drama
Country of production	Azerbaijan
Year of production	2020
Length	88 Minutes (25fps)
Shooting format	HD/4K
Screening format	DCP 2K (2048x858) (1:2,39; 5.1, un-encrypted)
Language(s)	Azerbaijani
Subtitles	English
Color or b/w	Color
Production Company	Ucqar Film
Co-Production Companies	Splendor Omnia Studios, Louverture Films
Production Countries	Azerbaijan Mexico USA

CREW

Directed by	Hilal Baydarov
Written by	Hilal Baydarov
Co-writer	Rashad Safar
Director of Photography	Elshan Abbasov
Sound Mixer	Orkhan Hasanov
Edited by	Hilal Baydarov
Music by	Kanan Rustamli
Produced by	Hilal Baydarov, Elshan Abbasov
Co-produced by	Carlos Reygadas, Joslyn Barnes
Executive Producers	Danny Glover, Susan Rockefeller
Associate Producer	Sarah D'hanens
Production Sound Mixer	Orkhan Hasanov
Supervising Sound Editor	Daniel Timmons
Sound Effects Editor	Ben Kruse
Production Company	Ucqar Film
Co-Production Companies	Splendor Omnia Studios, Louverture Films
World Sales	Pluto Film Distribution Network GmbH

CAST

Davud	Orkhan Iskandarli
Bride	Rana Asgarova
Blind Girl	Rana Asgarova
Woman in Black	Rana Asgarova
Davud's Mother	Maryam Naghiyeva
Gusi	Huseyn Nasirov
Isa	Kamran Huseynov
Musa	Samir Abbasov
Doctor	Murvat Abdulazizov
Rabid Girl	Kubra Shukurova
Road Watcher	Narmin Hasanova



THE DIRECTOR: HILAL BAYDAROV

Hilal Baydarov was born in 1987 in Baku, Azerbaijan. During his high school years, he won the National Championship of Mathematics twice in 2004 and 2005. In 2011 he led the Azeri team at the International Olympiad in Informatics. After graduating with a Master's degree in Computer Sciences, he left for Sarajevo to study film at Sarajevo Film Academy. He was a student under acclaimed Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr, who founded the film.factory school in Sarajevo. Baydarov's debut feature film *HILLS WITHOUT NAMES*, which he wrote and directed, premiered at the Montreal Film Festival in 2018. The same year, he won the Docu Talent Award at the Sarajevo Film Festival for his second documentary film *BIRTHDAY*. *WHEN THE PERSIMMONS GREW*, Baydarov's third documentary film, received the Interreligious Award and a Special Jury Mention when it premiered at the 2019 Visions du Réel film festival in Nyon and it won the Heart of Sarajevo for Best Documentary at the Sarajevo Film Festival. *MOTHER AND SON*, his fourth documentary film, premiered in the main competition at IDFA 2019 and *NAILS IN MY BRAIN*, his fifth documentary film, is the last film in the "Katech" trilogy of documentaries set in Katech, Azerbaijan, which also includes *MOTHER AND SON*, and *WHEN THE PERSIMMONS GREW*. Baydarov's second feature, *IN BETWEEN DYING* will premiere in the main competition of the 2020 Venice Biennale Film Festival.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

A central concern in all my work is the person who is trying to understand the reason he is alive, present, here, in this world. The person who can't love, yet only believes in love. The person who is trying to find his real family, certain that this will bring real meaning to his life. Davud is the person in this story, who reminds us of the possibility of love. I wanted to visualize his path somehow, and it became the film *IN BETWEEN DYING*.

I always keep in mind Bresson's emphasis: „feeling before understanding“, and so I've always focused on moments of inspiration. There is no doubt in the moment of inspiration, questions can destroy all my concentration. It helps therefore to work consistently with a group of colleagues who have come to understand this process and embrace it as their own. Also, I'm shy, and find it hard to communicate with people I don't know – so because of this, most of the people I work with consistently are in fact my family and close friends. In an environment like Azerbaijan, there can be many restrictions, but actually, I have to confess that I love the restrictions and limitations. In a way, they have forced me, and all of us, to find new ways to express our feelings. Hopefully, that comes across in the films.

FILMOGRAPHY (Selection):

- 2020 *IN BETWEEN DYING* (feature)
- 2020 *NAILS IN MY BRAIN* (documentary)
- 2019 *MOTHER AND SON* (documentary)
- 2019 *WHEN THE PERSIMMONS GREW* (documentary)
- 2018 *BIRTHDAY* (documentary)
- 2018 *ONE DAY IN SELIMPASHA* (documentary)
- 2018 *HILLS WITHOUT NAMES* (feature)



INTERVIEW WITH HILAL BAYDAROV

Davud is fleeing but also searching for something at the same time, it's the most unusual road trip. How did you get the idea for the film?

I have a lifetime project which is called „Portraits“. I want to make a series of films one day of the people whom I know the best. Just one day of a person only in their home. Just like Rembrandt, I want to make these portraits of the people each year to see myself, to see how I changed. Because one can only see himself when he looks at others. Human beings are mirrors.

I was deeply influenced by the story of Buddha. It was a simple story that said Buddha was the son of the King, always inside the palace, never seeing old, ugly and sick people in the palace because his father always tried to show him only beauty. One day he accidentally left the palace and met with ugly, sick people and death. These encounters completely changed him so that he never returned to the palace again. He lived in loneliness, committed to enlightenment and eventually reached nirvana,

where he found true „beauty“. Everything happens in one day and accidentally in our film as well. And this leads Davud to a new path. There is only one difference between Davud's and Buddha's story – Davud returns to his starting point which is where he finds „beauty“.

Davud never knows where the nebulous road and his strange journey will lead him. But he still doesn't seem to lose hope – what motivates him to keep going? Can you describe his character?

He doesn't have time to think. He has to run. But with every escape, he feels that he is dragged to a certain point, that he starts questioning his life. With every death he encounters, he changes slowly and he comes closer to himself. Escaping the deaths somehow means arriving with himself.

Davud is asking himself a lot of philosophical questions about identity, belonging, and especially about love. Why did you choose to explore these existential themes in your film?

Honestly, I didn't know that I talk or write „philosophically“ till the premiere of WHEN THE PERSIMMONS GREW. In Nyon, at Visions du Réel, an audience member asked me: “Do you and your mother usually talk philosophically in daily life like in the film?” Still, I don't think we talk philosophically, we are just a simple mother and son who talk about what we see. I thought carefully why people think the dialogue in my films seems to have an existential dimension – people rarely think about death, they rarely think about why they are here in this life, they usually try to spend their time without thinking about anything much, always trying to distract or entertain themselves. So when you talk about „death“ or „life“ it is perceived as philosophical. It is not philosophy, it is a basic reality – we will all die. There are three graveyards near our house in the village and we see death every day. We joke that in ten years or maybe tomorrow we will be there in the graveyard. It is a joke for us, but a „philosophical and existential“ thought for other people.

Davud says “Your whole life can change in a single day”, but also that “nothing can ever change” – Are there two different forms of change and how could they be described?

I don't believe that human nature can change. Joy is always joy, pain is always pain. It is true for the people who have lived a thousand years ago and will be true for the people in the future. I also believe that you can't educate human nature, there is no true development in human nature. Yes, you can lead a person in a way that they can be useful and helpful to the world, or that they can create great works of art. But human life is full of uncertainty and contradictions, what we are seeing is the color when the essence of human nature is colorless – it is like light split through a crystal prism, we see a rainbow when we look at light fragmented, but the origin is pure and colorless.

The three men chasing Davud add an almost comical element to the dramatic chase. What is their purpose and how would you define the genre of your film?

They follow Davud in his circular journey. It is not only Davud's circle, but it is also theirs. As Davud changes, they also change slowly. It is a path of purification for everybody, not just Davud. I wanted to show that Davud is reflective of all humans, he is not unique or special.

I always try to make a film as if it were the first film ever made, as though cinema has not been invented yet. Of course, I am very aware of the history of film, but I always try to forget that when I start filming. So I can't say anything about the structure or the genre of the film.

Where did you find your main actor Orkhan Iskandarli?

He is my very close friend. We made five films together and his name is always Davud in the films. I wrote some poems when I was in High School under the pen name „Davud“ and it is also the name that Orkhan's mother wanted to give him at first. I thought that I was stronger than him when we met. Then I realized that I am the weak one and I can learn from him. But somehow I feel that we both want to be Davud because we know that he is on the right path. He will always be the lead role in my films. Even if he appears for only 2-3 seconds or just one glimpse, it will be the lead role. If he is not in the film, we will understand that his disappearance is the lead role.

Davud encounters different female characters on his trip, some seem to gain empowerment, some seem to find salvation by meeting him. What is Davud giving them they couldn't find before?

In a single word, it is love. They all are the same woman, the „woman in black“, just in different shapes, bodies. Actually, there is no empowerment or salvation though. The result is always the same – filling the emptiness in the soul, finding the missing part of the soul. Unity.

Which women in your personal life influenced you the most and do they resonate in the female characters in your film?

My mother. Because she found an interesting path to the source of life that you can't find in books or art, or with deep thinking. You can only see it through life, only with the living, living with an awareness of death. I can add many women artists like Larisa Shepitko, Seraphine Louis, but you know life is always stronger than art. Always.

Family plays a big part in your films, like in your Katech-trilogy, why do you focus on this type of relationship?

First of all, family is the only real subject in life. You can find every type of relationship and feeling within family structures. There is always a strong family subject or someone who is trying to find their „real“ family in the middle of every film I admire – like MOUCHETTE, WINTER LIGHT, THE MIRROR, THE ONLY SON and so on. Secondly, day by day I realize that I start to look like my father. I don't know how it happened but it's almost impossible to stop it. He died when I was in high school and I didn't feel a thing then. But after 7-8 years I started to feel it. Sometimes I feel that it is not me but my father sitting here instead. The words I choose, the structure of my sentences, even my facial expressions resemble him. Sometimes when I walk, I start to run because again I feel that it is my father walking not me and I try to outrun that feeling. But I see there is no escape, I became my father. I can name more than 100 composers and conductors by heart, I went to piano school, I watched major operas



thousands of times but none of them inspire me like the music I listened to with my father, the very amateur local folk songs. Sometimes I want to say that it is not me, it is my father who made my films.

We follow Davud through nebulous, almost dreamlike natural landscapes – which role does the environment play in your cinematography?

Nature is one of the main characters in our films because it has a soul. I like to build the harmony between the characters, the feelings that I want to express in a scene through nature. In literature, you can write many pages to create the character, you describe everything: The clothes, the environment, the light, the movements etc., but in cinema when you open the camera everything is just there. That is why I never believed that cinema is visual art or that it is about visible things. It is mostly about hidden feelings, about unseen sides of human nature which are right in front of our eyes.

The minimalist soundscape is very interesting: the recurring monotone sound of the motorbike, the off-commentary, and the atmospheric music. How did you get the idea for that?

The sounds are very magical and mystical because we don't fully understand what they are. I always think about the physical space of the film. Where does it start and end? When we look at paintings or books – they are physically there, but where is the film? What is the distance between the image and the sounds? The film becomes whole when they meet at one point, when the images and sounds and words and characters unite in harmony. The voice-over is interesting because it remains unclear who talks, where is he, where is this space, and what the distance is between us and between the sounds.

You've made quite a few documentaries in the past – how does your experience differ in making feature films?

Honestly, I didn't know that I was making documentaries. I never started with the intention of making a „documentary“ or „fiction“ film. I could never decide where my film belongs to. I couldn't find a place to show my films for years because of it. Still, I don't know that I am making feature films. I just make films. People call them „documentary“ or „fiction“ but I never categorize them. I searched „documentary film“ and „fiction film“ on the web at least a hundred times to understand what the difference is between them.



Still, I don't understand. But what I see is seriously comic – they call cheap films documentary films and expensive films feature films...

It will be your first time in Venice – what do you expect from the festival screening?

First of all, we are very happy that we arrived in the big league! Though sometimes I become very shy and I don't want to be seen – it is a great feeling to find an audience. For me, it is the value of the festivals – to find your real family, the people like you, who lose themselves in this dark room, who find their roots in another world.

What kind of cinematic experience do you want to provoke in the audience?

The films that have touched me always take me to places I have never been to, but I always feel that I belong there. It is only this feeling that I need. They always make me see with my heart, which can only happen in the cinema. If anyone in the audience feels this, I may convince myself that I did something valuable.

What message do you hope audiences to take away from the film?

Honestly, I don't know. From the early beginning, I believed that cinema shouldn't give a message. It should deal with big questions about the dark side of human nature as Dostoevsky said. I never made a film to teach or preach. I always obey the master Bresson in that I prefer feeling rather than understanding. If we want to call it art, it has to be like that.

I also want to avoid casting judgements because I believe that all the characters and the things - no matter living or non-living - are one and the same in our films. We sometimes joke about there being no "bad" character in our films, why does nobody hate or seek revenge like in so many other films? But I think in the end all the characters, men and women, young and old, real and fictional, even the trees, roads, cars, birds, trains, mountains, windows, curtains are of the same origin, and they reveal the same light that comes from the source of all life.



CARLOS REYGADAS - CO-PRODUCER, SPLENDOR OMNIA STUDIOS

The writer, filmmaker and producer Carlos Reygadas Castillo was born in 1971 in Mexico City. His first feature film JAPÓN won the Caméra d'Or in Cannes and was well received by critics. In 2005 Reygadas was welcomed in Cannes again to premiere his radical Drama BATALLA EN EL CIELO in competition. BATALLA EN EL CIELO counts as one of Reygadas most provocative films and was awarded the FIPRESCI Prize at the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival. His 2007 film SILENT LIGHT, casting light on the Mennonite community in Mexico, also premiered in Cannes and was awarded the Jury Prize. His third award at Cannes followed in 2012 with the Best Director Award for the semiautobiographical Drama POST TENEBRAS LUX.

Reygadas also co-produced other directors such as Amat Escalante, Carlos Serrano Azcona, and Pedro Aquilera. His latest projects as producer include the Drama film BEGINNING by Dea Kulumbegashvili and In BETWEEN DYING by Hilal Baydarov.

FILMOGRAPHY (Selection):

- 2020 IN BETWEEN DYING (co-producer)
- 2020 BEGINNING (executive producer)
- 2018 OUR TIME (producer, director)
- 2017 OPUS ZERO (associate producer)
- 2012 POST TENEBRAS LUX (producer, director)
- 2009 EL ÁRBOL (producer)
- 2007 SILENT LIGHT (producer, director)
- 2005 BATALLA EN EL CIELO (producer, director)
- 2002 JAPÓN (producer, director)



CARLOS REYGADAS' STATEMENT

I met Hilal at Béla Tarr's film school in Sarajevo but we did not talk much, as he spent his time playing chess in Mostar. Then he sent me his films and I found them to be so rooted in a tradition of cinema that is today an endangered species – and at the same time so mystical. I felt grateful for the depth and the originality of this vision and thought I would be lucky if I could contribute in any way to Hilal's possibilities of making more films.

JOSLYN BARNES - CO-PRODUCER, LOUVERTURE FILMS

Joslyn Barnes is a writer and producer. Among the films she has been involved with producing since co-founding Louverture Films together with actor Danny Glover and partners Susan Rockefeller, Bertha Foundation and Sawsan Asfari are the documentaries TROUBLE THE WATER; BLACK POWER MIXTAPE; THE HOUSE I LIVE IN; STRONG ISLAND; HALE COUNTY THIS MORNING, THIS EVENING; AQUARELA; GUNDA, and the forthcoming CHOCOBAR. Among the narratives are BAMAKO; UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES; CEMETERY OF SPLENDOUR; WHITE SUN; ZAMA, and the forthcoming MEMORIA and NOCHE DE FUEGO. In 2017, Barnes was the recipient of both the Cinereach Producer Award and the Sundance Institute | Amazon Studios Producer Award. In 2010, 2018 and 2019 she was nominated for Emmy Awards, and in 2018 won the Emmy for Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking. In 2018 and 2019 Barnes earned Oscar nominations for best Documentary Feature.

JOSLYN BARNES' STATEMENT

I first encountered Hilal Baydarov's work at the 2019 Visions du réel festival, where I had the privilege of serving on the International Feature Jury. I saw Hilal's extraordinary documentary WHEN THE PERSIMMONS GREW in the course of the main competition, and we awarded that film for its „uncompromising restlessness and poetic subjectivity, for its grammar of pure cinema and its exploration of time“. These are bedrock elements in all the work I have subsequently seen Hilal undertake, and after viewing some of his earlier films and the documentary MOTHER AND SON which premiered the same year at IDFA, it became clear to me that here was a filmmaker erupting with a volcanic and obsessive need to create.

I really can relate to that volcanic feeling, and after some time now producing, I just ,know' when I am in a chemistry that will result in a kind of courage that is just essential in responding to the era we live in. We must have courage.

Hilal does not work with a script, he does work with a small band of dedicated cast and crew in Baku, Azerbaijan, and he himself directs, improvises, problem-solves, shoots and edits. The family he has cultivated – in addition to his brilliant, loving mother, Maryam Naghiyeva, who has appeared in many of his films – has I know inspired and sustained him. But he also works in conditions that are chronically underfunded or completely un-funded. This is challenging, limiting and can be demoralizing. But the overall effect of this situation, thanks to not ,will' I think, but willingness to encounter themselves and their thoughts as mysteries, has been the liberation of his and his band's collective imagination, and the unleashing of a restive, penetrating vision.

When Hilal invited me and our company Louverture Films to participate in his second feature IN BETWEEN DYING I jumped at the opportunity. We had been corresponding for some months, and also then started a discussion with Carlos Reygadas (himself one of the most gifted and generous filmmakers working today) and together we created a co-production path through Azerbaijan, New York and Mexico, to assist Hilal – who had completed photography – from his edit through to the delivery of the film and its upcoming world premiere.

I love the premise of IN BETWEEN DYING, the failure of recognition at the heart of narcissism, the subsequent realization that narrative itself – even seeing the world in words – can get in the way of entering life fully, missing the inter-being experience of Love. What abides is almost always missed by those ironically inclined, and to his credit Hilal Baydarov courageously, provocatively, resists that and keeps wonder alive.

STATEMENT OF CRISTIAN MUNGIU - SUPPORTER

A few years ago, I was speaking in front of a group of young filmmakers about cinema, in Sarajevo. Among them, there was Hilal Baydarov. I gave talks for a week and during all that time, Hilal did not say anything. He was watching me from the back of the class. At the end, he wished to speak. He told us his story: How he grew up in a family where his mother was watching Bollywood films, how he discovered cinema when he moved to Turkey, how shocked he was when he saw LA DOUBLE VIE DE VÉRONIQUE – his first-ever cinema film, how he abandoned his studies and became interested in cinema and how he ended up watching some two thousand films in just a few years. His story was impressive and his opinion about cinema – very firm. Actually, he didn't agree with what I was saying during that week. That was not cinema for him – cinema was something else. He couldn't explain precisely what – but that was because his English didn't help him. Deep down, he seemed to have clear ideas – and his passion for cinema was his fuel. He showed us a few poetic shots he had recorded – steam coming out of fields in Anatolia, streets passing by behind the windows of a Sarajevo bus. But it was hard to tell where all this would lead. I encouraged Hilal to focus on documentaries, for a while, which he did – successfully.

Now, watching IN BETWEEN DYING – I learn more about his idea of cinema. It's like a veil was pulled from his eyes – and mine. Landscape, atmosphere, light, essentialization, a meditation on the state of the world coming not from reason, narration, words, but from empathy, intuition, senses. You feel while watching IN BETWEEN DYING how time flows, how relevant the irrelevant moments of life are – each of them bringing us closer to the end, through this unbearable paradise called life.

SPLENDOR OMNIA
POSTPRODUCTION STUDIOS



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