

BLISS

A film by Abdullah Oguz

Directed by Abdullah Oguz
Based on the novel by Zülfü Livaneli
Original Title: MUTLULUK

35mm, color, 105 minutes, 2007
In Turkish w/English subtitles



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SYNOPSIS

Adapted from internationally acclaimed author Zülfü Livaneli's novel, *Bliss* is an unconventional road movie in which the executioner of an honour killing and his victim go on a journey of self-discovery.

When 17-year-old Meryem (Özgü Namal) is found dishevelled and unconscious by the side of a lake, her family believes the worst – that her chastity has been lost and that she has been a willing accomplice in its disposal. They turn to the ancient principle of “tore,” a strict moral code governing the rules of sexual practice, which condemns Meryem to death. The duty of defending the family's honour is given to distant cousin Cemal (Murat Han), who must take Meryem to Istanbul and kill her along the way.

The two begin to fall for each other and their journey takes an unexpected turn when they meet Irfan (Talat Bulut), an academic escaping his big city angst, who is also looking for a second chance in life. Set against the impressive backdrop of Turkey's natural wonders, *Bliss* pits tradition against modernity, urban against rural and East against West, all the while refusing to settle for easy answers.

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY-- ABDULLAH OGUZ:

Abdullah “Apo” Oguz founded the production company ANS International Turkey in 1992, which has brought produced numerous original dramas, reality shows, game shows and commercials for Turkish television.

In addition to being a versatile producer, Abdullah Oguz has established himself as a unique director by almost single-handedly creating the music video industry in Turkey, and has won a number of international awards. He has also become one of the most sought-after TV commercial directors. In 2003, ANS entered the national film market, producing four feature-length films, two of them becoming the highest grossing films out of a total of 134 released features. Abdullah Oguz directed one of these films, *The Ivy Mansion-Life*, which became the highest grossing film of 2003 in Turkey. *Bliss* is Oguz's third feature film.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY-- ZÜLFÜ LIVANELI:

Omer Zulfu Livaneli was born in Ilgin, Turkey in 1946. After being held under military detention for three months during the coup of March 12 th, 1971, he had to leave Turkey and move to Sweden. After Stockholm, he lived in Paris and Athens, and he returned to Turkey in 1984.

His third novel "Bliss", published in 2002, also a number one best-seller, made 44 editions, became almost a cult work. “Bliss” has been published in Greece, Sweden, France, United State, Norway, Netherlands and Italy.

Livaneli achieved prominent success not only as a writer but also as a musician and film director. Alongside this brilliant artistic career, he has been a highly influential political figure for the past thirty years. Being one of the foremost defenders of Turkish-Greek friendship, in 1986, he founded the Greek-Turkish Friendship Committee together with the Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis. In 1995, he was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO in recognition of his contributions to world peace. He still continues to work on UNESCO's Culture of Peace

programs worldwide. In 2002, he was selected a Member of Parliament. He's still on duty as an independent member of parliament from Istanbul. He has been writing editorials for different Turkish dailies since 1989.

For more information on his books and achievements, visit his Website at www.livaneli.net.

ACTORS BIOGRAPHY

TALAT BULUT

Born in 1956 in Sarikamis, Talat Bulut began to his acting career in a play called "Dimitrov" in 1975. He played within the Ankara Sanat Tiyatrsu (Art Theatre) structure for many years and entered into cinema first with movie called "Hazar". He played in distinguished Turkish films such as "Yilani Oldursele", "Gol", "Cayda Cira", "Karanfilli Naciye" "Firar", "Fidan", "Kuyucakli Yusuf", "Kurbagalar", "Her seye Ragmen", and "Manisa Tarzani".

OZGU NAMAL

Ozgu Namal was born in 1978 in Istanbul. She began her acting career with children plays in Masal Gercek theatre. She made her television debut in 1998 with Affet Bizi Hocam (Forgive Us Teacher). Taking part in serial films such as Karete Can, Yeditepe Istanbul, she graduated from Istanbul State Conservatory in 2002 and in the same year took on a role in the film "Sir Cocuklari". With this movie, she was awarded with "promising female actress" prize the 14th Ankara Film Festival. She received awards for her supporting female role as "Kiralik Oyun" in the play Orta Oyuncular. She also was awarded with "Beyza Inci", best leading actress, for her role in the Kurtlar Vadisi serial films. Her movie credits include: Buyu, Anlat Istanbul, Organize Isler, Beynelmilel, Polis, and Mutluluk (Bliss)

MURAT HAN

Born in Ankara, Murat Han graduated from Bilkent University department of theatre and moved to Los Angeles in 1998 in order to receive education from Stella Adler acting academy that trained actors and actresses such as Marlon Brando and Robert De Niro. He has been living in America for 8 years and took leading roles in plays such as "elephant man" (fil adam), "Of Mice and Men" in the Stella Adler theatre.

Turkey / 105 minutes / 2007
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Directed by Abdullah Oguz
Based on the novel by Zülfü Livaneli

Starring

TALAT BULUT / IRFAN
ÖZGÜ NAMAL / MERYEM
MURAT HAN / CEMAL
MUSTAFA AVKIRAN / ALI RIZA
EMIN GÜR SOY / TAHSİN
SEBNEM KÖSTEM / DÖNE
MERAL ÇETİNKAYA / MÜNEVVER

{ Winner - Audience Award, Best Film
Montpellier Int Film Festival }

{ Winner - Audience Award, Best Film
Puerto Rico Int Film Festival }

{ Winner - Odyssee Award for Best Film
European Council }

{ Winner - Five Awards
Antalya Film Festival }

{ Winner - Best Film, Best Director & Best Actress
Funchal Int Film Festival }

{ Opening Night Film -
Mediterranean Film Festival, Rome }

{ Opening Night Film -
Mumbai Asia Film Festival }

{ Winner - Special Jury Prize
Kerala Int Film Festival, India }

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Turkish Film Festival 2008 International Filmfestival Mannheim-Heidelberg 2008 Istanbul
International Film Festival 2007 Montréal World Film Festival 2007

Los Angeles Times

Review: 'Bliss'

Tradition-mandated horrors rain down on two young Turkish citizens, but perhaps they will find something sweeter.



In Abdullah Oguz's "Bliss," characters played by Talat Bulut, left, Ozgu Namal and Murat Han stand on a threshold between old and new ways. (First Run Features)

By BETSY SHARKEY Film Critic

October 9, 2009

The lake is still. A stark wind-swept dune rises above it, the image mirrored, unbroken on its surface. A herd of sheep drinks beside it. The body of a young woman lies on its bank.

Her name is Meryem and though it turns out that she is alive, that life is of little use to her anymore, for the shepherd's daughter is the victim of an "honor crime"; her chastity lost brutally, her sentence in the small Turkish village of her birth -- dictated by tradition, demanded by the village's most powerful man -- is death.

And so begins the modern-day horror story of "Bliss," director Abdullah Oguz's powerful adaptation of Omer Zulfu Livaneli's politically trenchant novel. The sheep, which looked so serene against their harsh landscape, now become a chilling metaphor running through the extraordinary pain and beauty of this film, which puts the stain of "tore" and those who like sheep follow it blindly, or worse, who fear to question it, under the microscope.

The Turkish film is daring for its unsparing look at a subject that still tears at its people. It is one of the divides remaining between an advancing culture and a generations-old

tradition, between urban and rural ways. But being daring alone is not enough and in Oguz's good hands "Bliss" offers us a great deal more.

The story takes us on many journeys both literal and figurative.

The first is Meryem's, played with a riveting quietness by Ozgu Namal, whose inability to carry out her suicide leaves the village with a problem it must solve. Cemel (Murat Han), a young soldier just back from the front lines and a distant cousin, is handed the task of taking her to Istanbul and disposing of her.

When Cemel finds he doesn't have the stomach for this killing -- at least not yet -- a slow rebirth for Meryem begins, while a disquieting awakening descends upon Cemel. If he can't kill Meryem, he will have defied his father, yet another unforgivable sin.

As the two make their way into hiding, all of the rural traditions that shape relationships and roles between men and women are tested. Each time their ties to the past loosen, Meryem flowers ever so slightly while Cemel struggles as the battle rages on inside of him.

There is solace for a while at a remote fish farm, then Irfan (Talat Bulut), a freethinking professor-author who is running from his own demons, turns up in their lives offering escape on his luxury yacht, and it takes a while for them to figure out whether he is a mentor or a menace.

There are reasons that trust doesn't come easily.

While the story is a dark and difficult one, the players in this morality tale are bathed in light and lost within breathtaking landscapes thanks to director of photography Mirsad Herovic. And despite the Turkish desert forever in the distance, survival, and if not survival, growth, always comes by way of water. If not for the lake in the beginning, Meryem might not have been discovered; if not for the fishery, there might not have been a safe haven; and if not for Irfan's yacht, well, much would not have happened.

Though Oguz has given the film almost a fairy tale quality, there are hard truths embedded throughout. He has ultimately told a story of a man and a woman, alone and at odds, giving a voice to both their dilemmas. And though only one answer is humane, by treating the issue in such an exacting manner, Oguz allows the sense of outrage to grow ever stronger.

Self-discovery always comes with a cost, and in "Bliss" the price is a great one. It is mesmerizing to watch it unfold in the lives of these two young people, and you can't help but think that the way the story ends is a window into the future and the fate of the Meryems and Cemels caught in a backwater of tradition.

See for yourself whether there is reason for hope.

The New York Times
MOVIE REVIEW
Bliss (2007)

NYT Critics' Pick



First Run Features

Murat Han, left, plays a soldier and Ozgu Namal a rape victim in Abdullah Oguz's "Bliss."
Cultures and Sexes Clash in the Aftermath of a Rape in Turkey

By STEPHEN HOLDEN
Published: August 7, 2009

In an early scene of ["Bliss,"](#) the glowering stepmother of Meryem, a teenage rape victim in eastern Anatolia, gives the girl a rope with which to hang herself for bringing dishonor to her family, and you prepare to endure a Turkish variation of ["The Stoning of Soraya M."](#) That recent harrowing film, based on a true incident, depicted the public execution of a young Iranian woman falsely accused of adultery, with the graphic ferocity of B-movie torture porn.

"Bliss," fortunately, is not a one-note exposé created to shock, although its vision of a misogynistic patriarchy is almost as repellent. Adapted from Zulfu Livaneli's 2002 novel, it observes the collision of two cultures, one ancient, the other modern, in contemporary Turkey. Directed and produced by Abdullah Oguz, "Bliss" has ravishing cinematography by Mirsad Herovic and a mystical score by Mr. Livaneli that match the novel's feverish, poetic language. The natural beauty of the waters around Istanbul is breathtaking. And once the story moves from the Anatolian village where Meryem's unconscious, brutalized body is discovered by a shepherd, the movie's initially monochromatic palette bursts into brilliant color.

More than the novel, the film focuses on Meryem's steady awakening to her own autonomy. After fitting a noose around her neck, Meryem (Ozgu Namal) removes it and refuses to kill herself as tradition dictates. Her stern uncle Ali Riza (Mustafa Avkiran), the dignitary in the rural village who decreed her suicide, decides to wait for his son Cemal (Murat Han) to kill her when he returns from the army. Cemal's instructions are to take Meryem, his cousin, to Istanbul on the pretext of an arranged marriage and dispose of her en route.

The young soldier's sympathy for the disgraced girl, whom he routinely reviles as a whore and smacks in the face at any suggestion of what he deems improper female behavior, conflicts with his fundamentalist beliefs. In one scene he calls her a demon after having an erotic dream about her. But he can also be tenderly protective.

He delays the killing until they reach the city, where they visit his brother Yakup (Erol Babaoglu), who disparages the village's benighted customs. Still feeling obliged to follow orders, Cemal takes Meryem to a bridge and instructs her to jump. But when the do-or-die moment arrives, he plucks her from the edge, and the cousins become fellow fugitives from their repressive background.

They find lodging and work on a remote fish farm and later on the yacht of Irfan (Talat Bulut), a suave, white-haired Turkish professor, educated in the United States, who has just left his unhappy marriage to a wealthy woman.

In one of the most pointed scenes of culture clash, Irfan instructs Cemal to set the table and serve dinner. When Cemal refuses to do "women's work," Irfan exerts his authority as the ship's captain and declares, "There are no women's jobs and men's jobs on my boat."

Cemal also assumes that the fatherly interest Irfan takes in Meryem is really lust waiting to pounce. And when she disappears with Irfan on his motorboat to observe marine life, a potentially lethal tussle between the soldier and professor breaks out upon their return. Irfan has his own demons: his dream is to find a way of living in which he doesn't have to think about tomorrow.

As Cemal and Meryem discover the cosmopolitan world, with its bikinied young women who drop by from other boats, Meryem chafes at Cemal's dominance. But traditional ways don't die easily. Cemal's indoctrination in hyper-masculine authoritarianism runs to his very core, and he often reacts violently without thinking. The movie goes out of its way to ridicule his attachment to his macho military title, "commando."

There are moments aboard the boat in which the competitive male rituals between him and Irfan recall [Roman Polanski's "Knife in the Water."](#) But the game-playing psychodrama in "Bliss" is only a minor element in a panoramic allegory of Turkish national identity, beautifully acted by Mr. Han, Mr. Bulut and especially by Ms. Namal.

The screenplay, written by Mr. Oguz with Kubilay Tuncer and Elif Ayan, turns the novel, in which the rapist's identity is disclosed early on, into a thriller in which the truth is revealed in an explosive Hollywood ending that rather too neatly ties up loose ends left dangling in the book. However streamlined, this consistently gripping, visually intoxicating film stands as a landmark of contemporary Turkish cinema.

BLISS

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

Produced and directed by Abdullah Oguz; written by Kubilay Tuncer, Elif Ayan and Mr. Oguz, based on the novel by Zulfu Livaneli; cinematography, Mirsad Herovic; edited by Levent Celebi-LewQ and Mr. Oguz; music by Mr. Livaneli; art director, Tolunay Turkoz; released by First Run Features. At the Cinema Village, 22 East 12th Street, Greenwich Village. In Turkish, with English subtitles. Running time: 1 hour 45 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Talat Bulut (Irfan), Ozgu Namal (Meryem), Murat Han (Cemal), Mustafa Avkiran (Ali Riza), Emin Gursoy (Tahsin), Sebnem Kostem (Done), Meral Cetinkaya (Munevver) and Erol Babaoglu (Yakup).