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THE STRANGER AND THE FOG

Legendary Iranian New Wave director Bahram Beyzaie's sophomore feature possesses both the epic dimensions of myth and the hallucinatory atmosphere of a dream. Set in northern Iran, along the coast of the Caspian Sea, *The Stranger and the Fog* begins with a boat drifting onto the shore of a small village. The beautiful Rana (Parvaneh Massoumi) hopes the stray vessel has brought back her husband, who disappeared a year ago out at sea. But the only passenger is Ayat (Khosrow Shojazadeh), a wounded stranger with no memory of how he ended up in this land. After gradually proving himself as a member of the community, Ayat marries Rana, upsetting her former in-laws, and then grows increasingly paranoid about intermittently glimpsed figures that vow to avenge his misdeeds from a forgotten past.

Restored by The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project and the Cineteca di Bologna, in collaboration with Bahram Beyzaie. Funding provided by the Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation.

Iran | 1974 | 146 minutes | Color | In Persian with English subtitles | 1.37:1 aspect ratio

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

By 1974, Bahram Beyzaie had established himself as not only one of Iran's premier playwrights and theater directors but also one of the most promising filmmakers of the Iranian New Wave. Two years earlier, his debut feature, *Downpour* (*Ragbar*), had been a hit with critics and audiences alike, proving his combination of forward-looking cinematic aesthetics and trenchant social criticism could appeal to the Iranian public. For his next film, however, Beyzaie wanted to challenge viewers. "During [the making and release of] *Downpour*, the equations of commercial and intellectual films were the same," Beyzaie remarked in 2023 after the World Cinema Project's restoration of that film. "The common morality of the action/drama films of the commercial cinema had a tone of political ideology and social activism. The intellectual films were praised for communicating with the mass culture. In that sense, I don't want to be popular . . . My audiences are those who strive to go one step further, not those who are the guardians of the old equations nor those who dread self-examination and self-reflexivity."

In an interview with critic and filmmaker Zaven Ghoukasian, Beyzaie said that his follow-up, *The Stranger and the Fog* (*Gharibeh va meh*, 1974), was inspired by his experiences during the production of *Downpour*. Beyzaie shot his debut in several Tehran neighborhoods whose residents viewed the production as a disturbance and regarded the crew with distrust. As critic and curator Amir Hossein Siadat explains in *Senses of Cinema*: "Beyzaie recognized that beneath the facade of a seemingly modern city, age-old tribal dynamics persisted. Every neighborhood operated . . . with its own set of customs or, in other words, its own totems and taboos." For *Stranger*, Beyzaie allegorized these insulated, narrow-minded segments of Iranian society by crafting a story about a man, Ayat (Khosrow Shojazadeh), who lands on a village bordering the Caspian Sea with no memory of how he ended up there, other than fleeing an attack by mysterious assailants. Fearing they are still on his trail, Ayat seeks refuge among the suspicious locals, who honor his request on one condition: that he marry one of their own. Ayat weds the beautiful Rana (Parvaneh Massoumi), but his choice of bride provokes ire, especially from her former in-laws, who expect Rana to forever mourn her lost husband.

To achieve the film's mythic tenor, the production team crafted a rural society that would resonate in its universal dimensions, a conceit for which the director drew upon his knowledge of Persian culture, cultivated extensively since his early twenties. *The Stranger and the Fog* possesses diverse, mixed, and even intentionally contradictory geographical and cultural particularities: for example, as Siadat points out, the film's unnamed village lies beside the Caspian Sea, yet its customs differ from those of real-life northern Iran. Some of the villagers dress in northern clothing, but others wear those of the Lurs and Turkmens, who reside in the west and the northeast, respectively. Further, the film's soundtrack incorporates musical elements from sundry Iranian regions and cultures, while its indeterminate time period is emphasized by the observation of rituals that were already archaic in 1974; and the villagers, unexpectedly, speak unaccented Persian rather than the dialects common to their

remote location. The tiny, several-person crew on *Stranger* was young but more than capable of helping Beyzaie fulfill his vision: cinematographer Mehrdad Fakhimi, who would go on to shoot most of Beyzaie's films until the nineties, was here making his feature debut; and this was the first production for Iraj Raminfar, a future legend of art direction and costume design. However, actors Shojazadeh, Manuchehr Farid, Sami Tahassoni, and Valiyollah Shirandami were all seasoned veterans of the stage.

According to Siadat, *Stranger's* reception among Iranian critics and audiences marked a reversal of fortune for Beyzaie. His previous films (including two shorts) were heralded as important works by a theatrical director now proving himself a master of the cinematic medium, but *Stranger* was considered overly ambitious and stylistically bizarre. Siadat imputes this initial misunderstanding of *Stranger* to the political environment of 1970s Iran. During the prerevolutionary period, leftist intellectual thinking was dominated by "a commitment to social realism and a deep reverence for the concept of the mass of people," writes Siadat—an approach that *Stranger*, with its mythic overtones and its critical allegory of provincial groupthink, openly renounces. After the film's release in Iran, *The Stranger and the Fog* was screened in the West only once, at the 1976 Toronto International Film Festival, before being banned by the Iranian government following the 1979 revolution.

CAST

Rana Parvaneh Massoumi
Ayat Khosrow Shojazadeh
Zackaria Manuchehr Farid
Jeyran Esmat Safavi

CREDITS

Written, directed, and edited by.... Bahram Beyzaie
Producer Mohammad Taghi Shokrayi
Cinematography Mehrdad Fakhimi
Firooz Malekzadeh
Art direction and costume design ... Iraj Raminfar
Assistant director Varuzh Karim-Masihi
Sound design Mohsen Kalhor
Special effects Mehdi Bahmanpoor





BAHRAM BEYZAIE BIOGRAPHY

Bahram Beyzaie was born in Tehran, Iran, on December 26, 1938. He grew up in an artistic family: both his father, Ne'matallah Beyzaie (a lawyer by day, who wrote under the nom de plume Zoka'i), and an uncle, Adib Beyzaie, were poets. Beyzaie's paternal grandfather and great-grandfather were also well-known poets in their own right.

Beyzaie's love affair with cinema began in his teenage years, when he would skip classes to watch as many films as he could. Instead of taking up poetry like many others in his family, Beyzaie started to write historical plays while still in high school. During his early twenties, he became interested in traditional Persian theater, independently researching its origins and history, and by the age of twenty-three, he had moved on to study other aspects of ancient Persian and pre-Islamic arts and culture. He also wrote several essays for various arts journals and shot his first short on 8 mm film.

During the 1960s, Beyzaie authored seminal texts on Iranian, Japanese, and Chinese theater, works that—alongside plays such as *The Marionettes* (1963), *The Eighth Voyage of Sinbad* (1964), and *Four Boxes* (1967)—led the theater department of the College of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran to hire him in 1969. (From 1972 to 1979, he served as department chair.) During that same decade, Beyzaie and a number of other writers founded the Iranian Writers' Association.

Beyzaie's filmmaking career began in earnest in 1969, with the short *Uncle Mustache*

(*Amoo Sibiloo*). Not long after, he directed his first feature, *Downpour*, which won a special jury prize at the first Tehran International Film Festival and is now widely considered one of the greatest Iranian films of all time. The success of this movie, and others by contemporaries like Sohrab Shahid Sales and Mohammad Reza Aslani, sparked the Iranian New Wave. Next, Beyzaie directed *The Stranger and the Fog* (1974) and *The Raven* (*Kalaq*, 1977).

In the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Beyzaie debuted his most famous play, *Death of Yazdgerd*, which he

adapted and directed for the screen in 1982. But the shifting political environment led to Beyzaie's expulsion from the University of Tehran in 1981; though he wrote and directed several plays and films in his home country over the next three decades, he also faced increasing censorship and marginalization by the government. In 2010, he left Iran for the United States when he accepted a teaching position at Stanford University. Since that time, he has taught there as the Bitá Daryabari Lecturer in Iranian Studies. His most recent film to date was *When We Are All Asleep* (*Vaghti hamah khabim*, 2009). ●

BAHRAM BEYZAIE FILMOGRAPHY

1969	<i>Uncle Mustache</i> (<i>Amoo Sibiloo</i>) (short)
1972	<i>Journey</i> (<i>Safar</i>) (short)
	<i>Downpour</i> (<i>Ragbar</i>)
1974	<i>The Stranger and the Fog</i> (<i>Gharibeh va meh</i>)
1977	<i>The Raven</i> (<i>Kalaq</i>)
1979	<i>Ballad of Tara</i> (<i>Charike-ye Tara</i>)
1982	<i>Death of Yazdgerd</i> (<i>Marg-e Yazdgerd</i>)
1986	<i>Bashu, the Little Stranger</i> (<i>Bashu, gharibeye koochak</i>)
1988	<i>Maybe Some Other Time</i> (<i>Shayad vaghti digar</i>)
1992	<i>Travelers</i> (<i>Mosaferan</i>)
1998	<i>Talking with the Wind</i> (<i>Goft-o-gu ba baad</i>) (short)
2001	<i>Killing Mad Dogs</i> (<i>Sagkoshi</i>)
2006	<i>The Talking Carpet</i> (<i>Qali-ye sokhangu</i>) (short; part of the omnibus <i>Persian Carpet</i>)
2009	<i>When We Are All Asleep</i> (<i>Vaghti hamah khabim</i>)