

## Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry [15]

2023 Switzerland/Georgia 110 mins

UK released **3 May 2024**

Director **Elene Naveriani**

Screenplay **Nikoloz Mdivani; Tamta Melashvili** (based on novel by);  
**Elene Naveriani**

Cinematography **Agnesh Pakozdi**

Music

Cast **Eka Chavleishvili** (Etero); **Temiko Chichinadze**  
(Murman); **Lia Abuladze** (Natela); **Teo Babukhadia**  
(Sonographer's Assistant)

After *I Am Truly a Drop of Sun on Earth* (2017) and *Wet Sand* (2021), it's no surprise that the title of Elene Naveriani's third feature makes poetry of natural imagery. If Ingmar Bergman hadn't got there first, it could just as easily have been called 'Autumn Sonata', focusing as it does on a solitary woman seemingly in the autumn of her life who, one year, as the leaves begin to fall and the post-summer downpours set in, undergoes an existential awakening.

Out walking one morning picking blackberries in a Georgian village, local woman Etero (Eka Chavleishvili) loses her footing and plunges down the side of a ravine, narrowly saving herself from falling into the churning waters below. It's an uncharacteristic misstep for this stolid, taciturn shop proprietor, and as she stares down at the spot where she almost ended up, and locks eyes with a vision of her dead self washed up on the shore, something clicks inside her.

Mere hours later, she all but pounces on the delivery guy who's arrived at her store with a consignment of shelf stock, making passionate love to him on the storeroom floor. It's her first-ever sexual encounter, and one she is careful to conceal from the inhabitants of the small, gossipy village in which she lives: the man who has taken her virginity, Murman (Temiko Chichinadze), is a married father of two.

The stage seems set for a story of doomed liaisons and small-town melodrama, but what follows is as organic and unpredictable as the film's opening sequence. For Etero, everything's changed, yet nothing has: she's still a marginal figure among her so-called friends; she still conducts herself with proud, laconic confidence; she still loves to pick and eat wild blackberries. But when she sits alone by the dining table one evening, exulting in the feel of her own body, the warmth of the long-suppressed fire inside her suffuses the frame for the very first time.

Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry is a gentle but unmistakable social critique of gender conventions. All Etero's friends have settled down and procreated with their husbands; Etero's apartness is conveyed as much by Naveriani's careful blocking as by Chavleishvili's subtly modulated performance. In one early scene, Etero is visited by domineering visions of her father and brother, who ensured, as long as they were alive, that she duly fulfilled her role as matriarch, her mother having died of ovarian cancer shortly after giving birth to Etero.

The death has cast a long shadow over Etero's life, leaving her riddled with misplaced guilt. When she notices some dark discharge – the colour of blackberries – in her underwear, she immediately fears the worst. But it's characteristic of the film that this ominous turn of events sets up a delightful climactic twist. As a twittering blackbird appears on the soundtrack before the final cut to black, a line from McCartney-Lennon's 'Blackbird' seems to fit Etero perfectly: "All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to arise."

**Arjun Sajip**, *Sight and Sound*, 1 November 2023 (abridged)

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✉ [admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk](mailto:admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk)   [🐦 @buxtonfilm](https://twitter.com/buxtonfilm)