The purpose of a hospital is such that no person visits without reason and stays no longer than necessary. So it happens at the country hospital 200 kilometers from Alma-Ata operated by Dmitrii Vasilievich Morozov (Oleg Dolin) in Mikhail Kalatozishvili’s *Wild Field*. Farmers rush to the young doctor’s modest compound out of urgent physical or psychological need, but are also not slow to remove themselves once the crisis has passed. The brevity of their visits does not arise from rudeness—Dmitrii enjoys the respect of the residents of the steppe, as well as the material gifts that they offer—but from the space that he occupies. Even healthy visitors are forced into this pattern by the hospital space: the regional police officer Riabov (Roman Madianov) drops by briefly to ask about suspicious activity in the area; the young town coquette Galina (Irina Butanaeva) stops in to gauge the potential for Dmitrii’s attention; his fiancée Katia (Daniela Stoianovich) arrives in order to leave forever.

Dmitrii himself does not venture outside without specific goals—as a way station, the hospital is almost the inversion of the chronotope of the road. Otherwise, a glancing allusion to Don Quixote fully captures the degree to which Dmitrii defines and persuades himself of his place in narrative space.

Dmitrii steadfastly does his part to maintain the integrity of the hospital space, which serves for him alone as a domestic space. He keeps the gate to the low stone wall around the hospital closed and orders his pet dog to remain within the boundaries. He marks out the road to the mailbox with small stone cairns, extending the tamed space of his home to this point and no further. With some irony, he imagines the man who patrols the foothills that block one’s view of the wider steppe to be his “guardian angel.”

Dmitrii not only defines the spatial borders of his home against the wildness of
the steppe and the disintegration of social order, but from his limited vantage he also tries to define his temporal situation, as one in which people do not die. Dmitrii’s delusion of timelessness is finally lifted late in the film, in an event accompanied by the radio announcement that “30 years ago, in August 1977” Voyager II was launched into space. The hard and fast date, however, is tempered by the universality and timelessness of the music supposed to represent the whole of Earth, such as the first prelude in C minor from Bach’s *Well Tempered Clavier*, which plays as the casting credits roll.

Ironically, the sense of stasis conveyed by the period—“sometime after Communism”—may well be produced by three deaths that define the circumstances from which the script came to Kalatozishvili. The writers Aleksei Samorjadov and Petr Lutsik died in 1994 and 2002, respectively; they had been prominent representatives of *okraina* (“outskirts”) filmmaking. The script itself was written in 1993 and conveys freshly a sense of the loss of order, material support, and historical purpose immediately following the “death” of the Soviet project.

As Dmitrii stoically attempts to hold in stasis the world that is changing around him, others comment at length on the descent of the region into entropy. Dmitrii’s senior colleague, Fedor Abramovich (Iurii Stepanov), recounts to his captive audience a time when the hospital thrived and the walls were white. Riabov expresses foreboding and can barely control the situation when the messy fallout of an armed stand-off threatens to devolve into barbarism and the total abandonment of order. The steppe itself whips up winds and storms that erase the markers of human events, even the columns of dust that rise when individuals leave, in a hurry, from the hospital.

Indeed, one of the questions that *Wild Field* as a whole asks is: how one can maintain personal integrity in a time and place where the very environment takes every measure to wipe away every trace of humanity. And while Dmitrii’s grappling match with the inhuman steppe summons sympathy and admiration from the viewers and the steppe inhabitants, a true solution seems only to arise when this individual struggle finally, and inevitably, fails.

At the 2008 Kinotavr film festival, *Wild Field* won awards for “Best Musical Score” and “Best Screenplay,” as well as the special jury award. It went on to take the “Best Film” for 2008 awards at both the Golden Eagle and White Elephant ceremonies.

**Mikhail Kalatozishvili**

Mikhail Kalatozishvili was born in 1959 in Tbilisi and has been a resident of Moscow since 1973. Kalatozishvili graduated from the State Institute for Filmmaking in 1981, and worked as an art-director at the studio Gruziia-Fil'm between 1985 and 1991 and at the Lenfil'm studios between 1994 and 2000. Since 2000 he has been the president of a non-profit organization for the support of national cinema, the “Mikhail Kalatozov Fund,” named after his grandfather, the notable Soviet director (*The Cranes Are Flying* [1957], *I Am Cuba* [1964]). Kalatozishvili is a member of the Russian Union of Filmmakers.

**Filmography:**

- 2008 *Wild Field*
- 2001 *Two Atoms* (doc.)
- 2001 *I Dream of Hunchbacked Tiflis* (doc)
- 2000 *Mysteries*
- 1992 *The Beloved*
- 1981 *Mechanic*