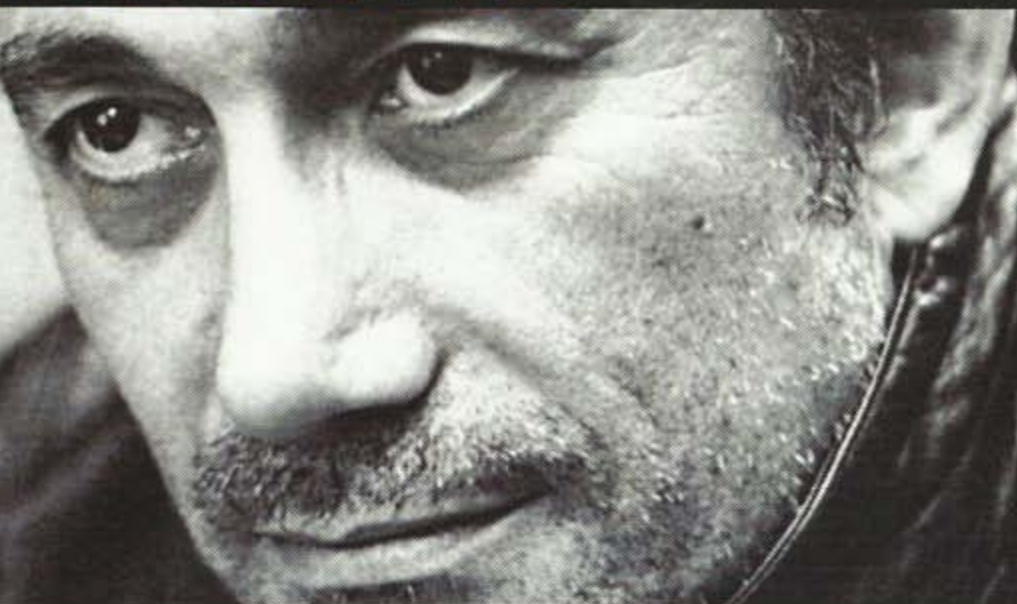


NURI BILGE CEYLAN

"I do not like marginal stories, I also do not like extraordinary stories which happen to ordinary people, I like ordinary stories of ordinary people" Nuri Bilge Ceylan.



The Turkish filmmaker Nuri Bilge Ceylan is perhaps not a household name in India. But in his modest repertoire of five films, he has established an audio visual discourse that is uniquely his own. In this section, **Mohan Kumar** a student of SRFTI, discusses the work of this Turkish master of contemporary cinema.

"In the time-image, which finds its archetype in the European modernist or art film, characters find themselves in situations where they are unable to act and react in a direct, immediate way, leading to what Deleuze calls a breakdown in the sensor-motor system. The image cut off from sensory-motor links becomes "a pure optical and aural image"- Gilles Deleuze. Nuri Bilge Ceylan's first feature film *Kasaba* (The Small Town, 1997) feature sequences that bear testimony to what Deleuze calls as "a pure optical and aural image". Ceylan's subsequent films also fulfill many characteristics of the new time image described by Deleuze like a dispersive situation, deliberately weak links, the condemnation of the plot etc (Cinema 1, 210).

Here comes one of the few directors who are interested in simple and ordinary things in life. He finds drama in the children in a classroom looking at a cat outside the window, the creaking of a door, a tortoise in a field, rustling of the wind, all the things that we have become used to in our lives and fail to notice any more.

Especially, his first two films '*Kasaba* (The Small Town)' and '*Clouds of May*' have many sequences of this kind. He softens your nerves which have been numbed by the heightened dramas, catharses, action sequences and exaggerated emotions, with these simple yet subtle things surrounding us. Those moments in his movies remind us of Japanese Haikus which cultivate their images in such a way that they mean nothing beyond themselves.

"The old pond was still. A frog jumped in the water. And a splash was heard."

His observation of life, like the above Haiku, is pure, subtle, one with its subject. He constructs the mood and the atmosphere that surrounds a scene along with the nuances in an unhurried pace and calmness. Nuri Ceylan is one of the best examples of the director as an Auteur; we can trace repetitive themes, form and stylistics in his movies. His stories are more anecdotal and straightforward than

allegorical and abstract (Tarkovsky and Kiarostami). He does not offer any solutions or obvious endings. According to Ceylan "In reality, we often reach stasis points in life".

His movies frequently feature characters who are self absorbed (*Clouds of May*, *Uzak* and *Climates*) and lonely, who do not want to or cannot come out of their personalities. He is often interested in how evil and violence come out of the ordinary human beings (Isa in '*Climates*' and the son in '*Three Monkeys*').

All his movies except '*Three Monkeys*' are autobiographical, in varying degrees. And he frequently casts non-actors, and brings out brilliant performances out of them. He allows the actors to negotiate a remarkable range of emotions and responses, every subtle nuance of expression conveying meanings. He uses sparse dialogues to communicate with his audience.

He uses static compositions like Ozu, often shoots people from behind and uses natural light and real locations. He shot '*Uzak*' in his own home. He frequently uses long takes allowing the actors to perform at length.

Sound in his films plays a major role and contributes to the setting of the scene and communicates beyond his image. He uses sparse or no music at all in his films.

Other recurring motifs in his body of work are nature's elements and dreams. He often cites Anton Chekhov as his major influence and Ozu, Tarkovsky and Bresson as his favorite directors. The way Nuri Ceylan makes his movies is one of best instances of independent films. Starting from this short film in which his mother and father played the roles, in most of his films till '*Three Monkeys*' he has cast his family members, relatives in his films as actors. This short film and his first feature film '*Kasaba*' were shot with just two persons. Nuri himself did the camera along with a focus puller - an unbelievable fact in an age where even a low budget film needs at least 20 to 30 technicians. His debut film cost only \$15,000. The story is based on his sister Emine's own experiences. Nuri co-wrote the screenplay along with his sister. Ceylan, with non-sync, noisy 35mm Arri 2C camera and a tripod, envelops people and records whatever he can from the immediacy of their amateurism. The result, in the context of the Spartan minimalism of his resources, shows a director with absolute clarity of vision, cinematic precision and inspiration, knowledge of the natural world, of light, of facial shadows, the recording of detail and steady, powerful,

expressive framing. The achievement of this film is that, in spite of the nonexistent resources with which it was made, it constitutes, in the context of contemporary cinema, a solace for the eyes and the soul. It is a return to pure cinema. A camera, a few people, landscapes and sounds are all Ceylan needs to set up his universe.

Born in Bakırköy, Istanbul on 26 January 1959, Nuri Bilge Ceylan spent his childhood in Yenice, his father's hometown in the North Aegean province of Çanakkale. For Nuri Bilge and his older sister Emine the move meant a childhood of freedom roaming the Yenice countryside. It was only to last, however, until his sister finished middle school. Since there was no high school in Yenice in those years, the family was forced to return to Istanbul in 1969. In 1976, having graduated from high school, he began studying chemical engineering at Istanbul Technical University. In 1978, he re-sat the university entrance exams and switched courses to electrical engineering at Boğaziçi University.

His interest in the art of photography, kindled during his time at high school, blossomed at the Boğaziçi University photography club, where he also took passport-style photos to earn some pocket money. Meanwhile, the elective film studies course he took with Üstün Barışta and the film club's special screenings did much to reinforce his love of cinema, which had taken root earlier during screenings at the Cinémathèque in Istanbul's Taksim.

Having graduated in 1985, Nuri Bilge started contemplating the question of what he should do in life first in London, then in Kathmandu. His travels in the east and west lasted months and on return to Turkey he put the agony of indecision to rest by resolving to do his military service. And during those 18 months in the army in Mamak, Ankara, he found out how to give shape to the rest of his life through cinema...

After completing the military service, he set about putting the decision into practice. While studying cinematography at Mimar Sinan University, he took commercial photographs as a means of livelihood. But at 30-

something, he was the university's oldest student and in a hurry to make a career for himself. After two years he abandoned the course.

Towards the end of 1993, he began shooting the short film KOZA (Cocoon), using a combination of negatives he brought back in a suitcase from Russia and some stock long past its expiry date that was given to him by the state broadcaster TRT. The film was screened at Cannes in May 1995 and became the first Turkish short to be selected for competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

Ceylan has made five feature films till date...

KASABA (The Small Town- 1997, Caligari Prize, Berlin)

MAYIS SIKINTISI (Clouds of May- 1999, 18 international awards)

UZAK (Distant, 2002), the final film of the trilogy, won the Grand Prix at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival. Ceylan suddenly became an internationally recognized name. Continuing on the festival circuit after Cannes, UZAK scooped a total of 47 awards, 23 of them are international.

IKLİMLER (Climates, 2006), which again premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, this time scooping the FIPRESCI Prize.

ÜÇ MAYMUN (Three Monkeys, 2008) - Nuri Bilge Ceylan won the Best Director award at Cannes followed by many other international

KOZA

Koza (Cocoon) shot in black and white in 1994 by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, reveals the adroit craftsmanship the director has over the medium. You can find the form, style and content that would appear again in the director's later work.

Due to some painful experiences of their past, an old couple in their seventies live separately. One day they come together again. But the meeting which they hope will heal the lingering pain doesn't give the expected results. Like the rest of the Ceylan's film things don't get resolved in the end.

Instead of a straight forward narrative Ceylan uses visuals and sound to create the unsettling psyche of the characters. He skilfully uses nature's elements like fire, water, wind, rain, snow throughout the film as substitute for conventional use of dialogues. Most of this troubling mood that permeates the entire film is contributed by brilliant use of sound. The door creaking, the bee buzzing, a chicken chuckling, sounds of breathing, a dog barking at a distance, these are the sounds along with music that make you immerse in disconcerting feelings. Unlike his later films this short was surrealistic and expressionistic in its treatment and has extensive usage of music which he reduced gradually in his subsequent films.



"People are lonely in life. This is the most tragic aspect of life, this melancholy: nothing else seems to be worth making a film about" **Nuri Bilge Ceylan.**

KASABA (THE SMALL TOWN)

With his first feature film Nuri Ceylan takes you into the life of 70's Turkish village. Ten minutes into the film and you realize that this film is so different from other films. The passage of time is beautifully captured with simple yet subtle nuances of daily life, Children read a text from their books in a classroom; sister and brother spend a leisurely afternoon in a graveyard, a family with its members spanning three generations have an outing in a corn field while sharing elder's experiences.

Nurie shows the details of nature, weather, animals, humans the whole existence surrounding the village. The microscopic view of the world in Kasaba, the way of looking at the animals, at every tree, at every single blade of grass - these small things are the very essence of what lies within the living macrocosm. But we have never made the effort to focus our attention on them, to observe them at close range in a thorough, complete manner. The director uses the camera to focus on the things we overlook, natural occurrences that we have always ignored.

The boy in the graveyard looks at the Donkey, as it cuts to the close up of the donkey's face, the flies around the donkey's eye, the way it blinks; somehow it makes you empathize with the animal.

In reality, he just shows us the parts of ourselves that we've

neglected to pay any attention to, our subjective feelings. We notice that we have become completely jaded. And we realize that this is because we have never properly listened before, focused our gaze, shown sensitivity and empathy, and actively tried to feel the cosmos we belong to.

Along with these details, he doesn't miss to strike delicate emotional cords. The girl is sad because the teacher found spoiled food in her lunch box; you see her smiling in the next minute as a feather falls on her with which the children were playing before the teacher came in. You will never forget how the mad man's laughing face turns into a gloomy one when falls down on the ice while children are making fun out of him. You wonder at the child's cruelty when he turns a tortoise upside down, knowing fully well that this act will kill the tortoise.

Another captivating thing that leaves you feeling intoxicated, is the world of sound. Many of the sounds in the film are amplified to an exaggerated degree. He takes sounds from the real world, gleaned from a complex range of different states, and then puts them together and modifies them so as to awaken that feeling of strangeness that we all know so well. It is a feeling of strangeness that generates a sense of the poetic, an enticing strangeness. The sound of drops of water dropping into the flames of the stove and hissing, the noises of the animals in the natural environment, human voices calling for help from afar - these sound almost unreal. The twittering of birds, the chirping of crickets, the rustling of the wind, the crash of thunder are all noises that we have become used to ignoring. Now we encounter them again in the cinema in a highly accentuated way.

MAYIS SIKINTISI (Clouds of May)

“You look differently at the people and real life after reading Çekhov stories. Even simple human relations started looking very colorful to me. The Çekhov filter is something like that”. - Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

'Clouds of May' is dedicated to Ceylan's favorite writer Anton Chekhov. The world in 'Clouds of May' is seen through what Nuri calls as 'Chekhov filter'. In this semi-autobiographical film, the line between the movie and the reality is blurred. Nuri reflects upon how he made his first film 'Kasaba' with his own family members in his native village.

The movie starts with Muzzafer (Muzzafer Ozdemir) coming to his village to make a film. He eventually convinces his parents (Fatma Ceylan and Emin Ceylan) and relatives to act in the film. The film envelops the lives and fixations of these characters who act in his film. The father is concerned with the trees that are going to be cut down by the authorities in his farm. The child Ali is enamored by a musical watch; he has to carry an egg in his pocket over a month so that his grandmother recommends to the child's father to buy one for him. The cousin Saffet wants to get out of his village and settle down in Istanbul with the help of his filmmaker cousin. So he quits his job in the local factory and participates in the making of the film.

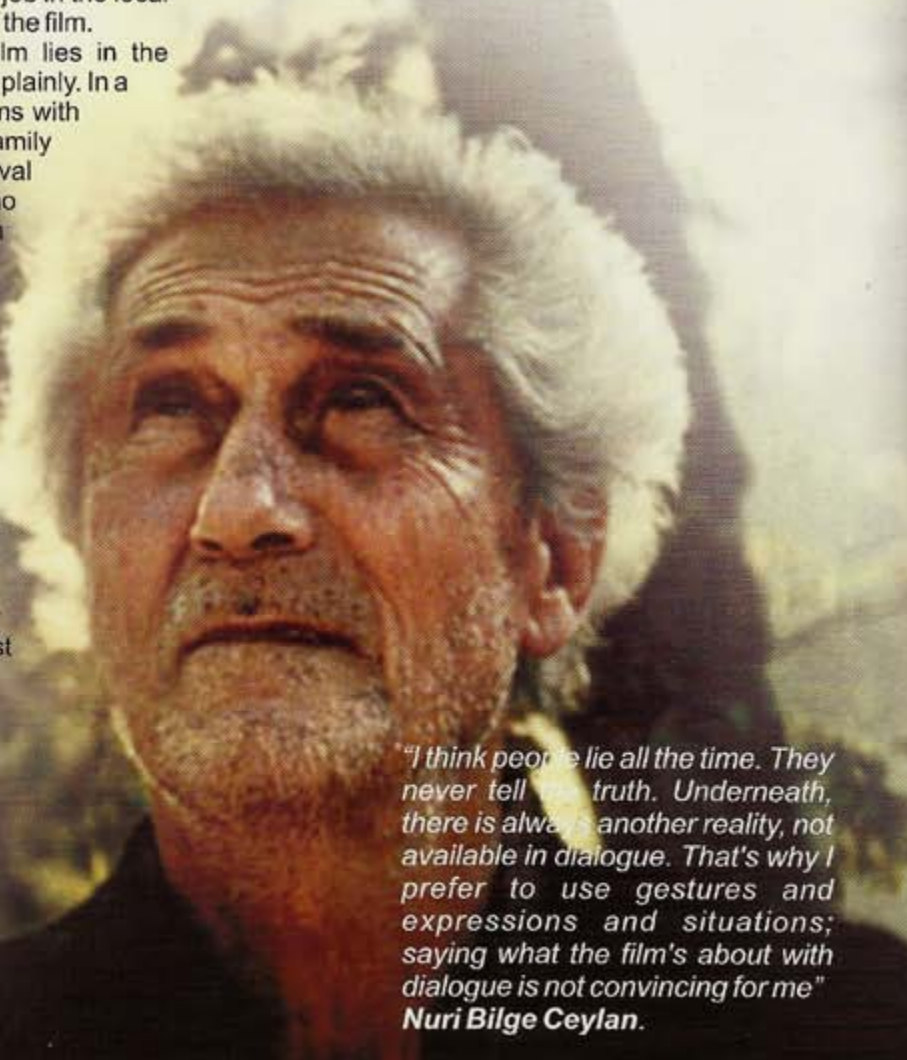
The uniqueness and magic of the film lies in the mysteries of these daily lives presented plainly. In a way this movie is about coming to terms with guilt, how the happiness of the his family members is a little disturbed by the arrival of Nuri Ceylan (Muzaffer in the film) who has made up his mind to shoot a film in the town.

The profundity of the director over characters is revealed in this film evidently. In life we are very much immersed in our interests and have little regard for others. Apart from the main protagonists in the film, you can see how even a little character of a tailor talks about how he is bothered by a customer while the old man talks about forest authorities who have come to the town to cut down his trees. They boy cheats her grandmother by replacing the egg with new one after first

one is broken accidentally. Earlier the same boy refuses to do so when the film maker advises him to replace the egg (Perhaps the child is becoming an adult when he loses his morality and innocence in the process). To the filmmaker's dismay, the father of the film maker leaves the shooting midway when he sees his tree is marked by the government officials. The filmmaker is distanced to his family members' interests when it clashes with his film making. He disappoints his cousin Saffet by not keeping his promise to find a job for him in the city when his film is about to get completed. Earlier the filmmaker had asked Saffet to help in the making of the film.

Ceylan approaches this narrative with an oblique and leisurely approach in terms of treatment. Using static compositions with little pan and tilt and sparse music, Ceylan lingers on to instances of everyday occurrences in the characters' lives, the filmmaker sits idly at his farm and watches his father working in the field, the boy observes his grandfather by closing one eye at a time while shaking his legs, the film maker and the boy amuse themselves with a Tortoise while lying down beside a road.

After indulging in his home town with the first two films, Nuri Ceylan moves on to the city landscape in his subsequent films.



"I think people lie all the time. They never tell the truth. Underneath, there is always another reality, not available in dialogue. That's why I prefer to use gestures and expressions and situations; saying what the film's about with dialogue is not convincing for me"
Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

"I don't like music in cinema, it seems to me like a crutch; I'm not against it, but if possible I try not to use it. And also, the sound of the atmosphere is the nicest sound for me in the cinema."
Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

UZAK (Distant)

"Feeling melancholy was a problem for me for some years; I found many things quite meaningless around me. I could do anything - I had money, I had knowledge - but I didn't feel the urge to do it. My intention was to make a film about the meaninglessness of my life" **Nuri Bilge Ceylan.**

Calling 'Uzak' as one of his most autobiographical films, Ceylan emerges with a masterpiece of our times. As the title suggests this movie is about Mahmut (Muzaffer Ozdemir), a distant intellectual photographer (Nuri Ceylan was a professional photographer before he became a filmmaker) living in Istanbul. He has divorced his wife, visits the same restaurant every day, clicks photographs for a tile company, he rarely meets his friends, and prostitutes pay secret visits to his apartment. He doesn't want to give or take from anybody, pretty much self-absorbed. Once, symbolically, he gets stuck on the sticky mousetrap in his apartment as if he is stuck in his own personality. To reveal his character, Ceylan brilliantly places a completely opposite character as an unwelcome guest in Mahmut's apartment. Yusuf (Mehmet Demin Toprak) is Mahmut's young innocent country relative who comes to find job in the city. This annoying guest's stay in the apartment prolongs as Yusuf tries very little to find a job for himself. Now the secluded intellectual's life is bothered as he doesn't want to come out of his shell.

Ceylan touches a wide range of themes with his simple yet subtle screenplay. Yusuf does not switch off the lights in rooms; he drops the ash on the carpet after smoking, he doesn't put shoes properly in the rack and plays with noisy toy soldier like a child. All these things irritate the reluctant host. Although the film is about Mahmut, Nuri sufficiently dwells on Yusuf also. Although Yusuf is interested in a girl in the neighbouring apartment, instead of talking to her, he silently follows her till she meets her boyfriend. In this

poignant sequence Yusuf wanders around the city alone, travels in metro, roams around the stores, and briefly follows a girl in book-shop, when his host is away from his home.

Artist's estrangement from his ideals is brilliantly portrayed through Mahmut. In a scene which is equally funny and tragic, Mahmut watches Tarkovsky's 'Stalker'. But soon he loses the interest. After his bored village visitor leaves the room, he switches on to porn.

Mehmut stops while travelling by countryside at a beautiful sight to capture it. But he immediately says to Yusuf 'fuck it' and leaves without taking the picture.

Mehmut meets his ex-wife while she is going to leave the city forever with her present husband. She says that she cannot have children because of the abortion she had when they both were together. He immediately says 'But we both agreed to not have children'. He always tries to stay away from anything that binds him. In another poignant moment he silently watches from a distance when his wife is at the airport leaving the country. He hides behind a pillar when she looks at him.

Unable to tolerate his visitor, Mahmut admonishes Yusuf about his indecent ways of living and indirectly accuses Yusuf of stealing his watch. Upset by his city relative's unfriendliness he says to Mahmut 'You have changed' and leaves the apartment silently.

In the remarkable ending, after he finds that Yusuf has left, Mahmut sits by the sea-side silently. This ending perhaps elucidates the world view of the director that 'Many times we reach stasis points in our lives' and any other Hollywood film would have ended with Mahmut contacting Yusuf.

Muzaffer Ozdemir as Mahmut and Mehmet Demin Toprak as Yusuf played their roles perfectly in a film which has sparse dialogue; they both convey volumes with their expressions. Both ended up winning Best actor award at Cannes, 2003 jointly and the film won Grand Prix giving the director international recognition.

IKLIMLER (Climates)

“Yes. Film is dead for me. It is unnecessarily bulky and less capable to capture the reality I want. I don't need it. I don't mind much that the “pelicule” is dying” Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

'Climates' marks the director's transition from film medium to digital. After shooting his next film 'Three Monkeys' also in digital, the Turkish auteur is one of few the directors who completely discarded the 'film' medium and embraced 'digital' unequivocally. Apparently he shot 'Climates' in HD on Sony F900 HDCAM. Another shift about the 'Climates' is that, Nuri Ceylan worked with a cinematographer for the first time. Ceylan had done the camera himself for his previous three films.

Coen brothers made a short film for the Cannes film festival-2007 on world cinema section. In the short Josh Brolin (No Country for the old men) goes to watch a movie. He finds Jean Renoir's 'Rules of the game' and 'Climate s' playing in the movie hall. He enquires about the movies to the guy at

the ticket counter. The guy gives a brief introduction of both movies to him. Eventually, Josh Brolin chooses to watch 'Climates'. After watching the film, he tells the girl in ticket counter to let the guy he spoke previously at the ticket counter, know that he liked the film a lot. And he says 'There is a hell lot of truth in it, hell lot of truth". In this seemingly another autobiographical movie about the intricacies of man-woman relationship of a couple in Istanbul, Nuri Ceylan and his wife Ebru Ceylan have played leading roles as the couple in the movie. This exceptional casting is one of the rare instances in the history cinema. This leaves many viewers speculate whether it is actually their own story in real which unfolds on the screen. Ceylan plays as Isa, a university professor and Ebru Ceylan as Bahar, his vulnerable younger girlfriend.

This movie is about ever changing inner climates of characters especially Isa's, paralleling the nature's climates change from summer to winter. Isa breaks up from his girlfriend to her dismay, when he thinks she is an obstacle for him to move on with his life. Adrift for sometime in the city with disinterested visits to his another ex-girlfriend, his life doesn't

get any better. When he comes to know that Bahar went far away for work and has moved on with her life, he starts missing her. He again goes back and tries to revive their relationship. Although Bahar rejects him at first, she eventually goes back to him. In the end Isa again becomes his own self and leaves her again. After dissecting the character of a distant human being in "Uzak", Ceylan comes up with a near perfect portrayal of another self-indulgent individual in Isa.

Instead of telling the story with all causes and effects and spoon-feeding audiences, Ceylan tries to remain a passive observer throughout the movie. He uses sparse dialogue, extensive silences and long takes in this character driven tale. In one scene Isa has violent sex with his ex-girlfriend, the entire scene played out in one single long take and you marvel at how the depth of the characters unfold on the screen without any interference of the medium. In another long take, when Isa meets Bahar to win her back, you empathize with Bahar totally, when she goes through varied emotions one after another and Isa coldly lies to her that he did not meet his ex-girlfriend during their separation.

Ebru Ceylan's performance as Bahar is noteworthy. Ceylan holds on to her expressions at length and she fills up the frame with her acting prowess and sheer screen presence while Ceylan aptly portrays the character Isa with a restrained performance.

After gaining international prominence with 'Uzak', with 'Climates' Nuri Bilge Ceylan turns out to be one of the significant directors of our era.



ÜÇ MAYMUN (Three Monkeys)

“You can't make autobiographical films all your life, you know. After *Climates*, I felt deep inside that I needed a change” Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

The quiet observer emerges as a adept story-teller, objectivity changes to subjective experience, the dispersive situations move away to an obvious plot, impressionism co-exists with expressionism, the realistic color palette gives way to de-saturated look. Yet, he stays as Nuri Bilge Ceylan and gives a chilling cinematic experience with 'Three Monkeys'.

Nuri Ceylan entirely exercises his directorial command over the medium in this movie. The result is an age-old adultery cum murder story unfolding as a minimalistic thriller. For the first time the director casts professional actors.

Servet, a politician, is responsible for a hit-and-run accident. Concerned about his election chances, he pays his driver Eyüp to take the blame. While Eyüp is in prison, troubled by his teenage son Ismail's unemployment, his mother Hacer asks Servet for money to buy Ismail a car so that he can start a school transport business. Ismail later discovers that his mother and Servet have begun an affair. Released from prison, a suspicious Eyüp angrily confronts Hacer. She has fallen in love with the married Servet, who is no longer interested in her and warns her to stay away. Ismail confesses to Hacer that he was the killer. Eyüp visits a homeless young man called Bayram, and offers him money to confess to Servet's murder.

Although the story seems to derail towards its end with its unconvincing finish, Ceylan makes up with a tight screenplay. Ceylan together with his wife Ebru Ceylan and Ercan Kesal (The politician in the film) came up with brilliant screenplay for this obvious story by revealing the plot details exactly at the right time when they give the maximum amount of effect. The use of ellipsis in this narrative has mesmerizing effect which elucidates Ceylan's master craftsmanship.

It is very interesting how Ceylan enacts the scene when the mother visits the politician to ask for the money for her son. It starts with the frustrated politician speaking to somebody over the phone as he lost the recent election. After completing the conversation he tears up the election poster on the wall and the sound overlaps with the mother sitting on the chair in front of him. Then you realize that she is in the room already. During the whole scene he never shows both of them in the same shot. He creates a hilarious moment in the scene by stretching the time when she is unable to find mobile in her handbag while a romantic ring tone is playing. And the scene cuts to another scene in the same room with a fan making a disturbing noise, and you realize that she has already left. The director refuses to treat the scene in an obvious way, you don't see characters entering or exiting in the scene. There are many other examples of this kind in the movie. Even the simple vomiting scene gives thrilling experience or the way the son finds out about his mother sleeping with the politician. Ceylan handles with much needed maturity when the husband molests the wife when he suspects about the affair with the politician. In another scene he makes the audience restless by distancing from the happening event and only giving the dialogues to hear, when the wife begs the politician to continue the relationship. He completely isolates the characters from the rest of the world; you hardly see any faces other than the characters in the film.

The way Ceylan uses sound instead of music to build up a scene is outstanding in its own right. The creaking doors, recurring train sound, and the way the wind blows suddenly,

all these sounds create an eerie feeling in the movie. 'Three Monkeys' earned him another Cannes award for the third time as the Best Director.

After changing his course with 'Three Monkeys' which stands out from his rest of the films, Nuri Bilge Ceylan remains one of the most sought after Auteurs in recent times. When asked why he chose Cinema, Nuri Bilge Ceylan says...

"I try to give a meaning to my life, first of all. That's why I make cinema. My intention is to reach a certain reality; I mean, away from the clichés, a deeper, more true reality. With my films, I would like to reach a certain reality that even I myself wouldn't reach without making the film. Maybe I cannot succeed, but that is my intention. In this way I can maybe cure myself and try to connect to life. Or maybe it becomes even worse"