WINNER
FIPRESCI INTERNATIONAL CRITICS PRIZE
FESTIVAL DE CANNES 2014

WINNER
FOXTEL MOVIES AUDIENCE AWARD
SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL 2014

WINTER SLEEP
A film by Nuri Bilge Ceylan

196 min - 1:2.40 - 5.1 - Turkey / Germany / France

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SYNOPSIS

Winner of the Palme d’Or at this year’s Cannes, the new film from Turkish auteur Nuri Bilge Ceylan (Once Upon a Time in Anatolia) is an immersive and provocative Chekhovian drama.

Set in the picturesque and striking landscape of Cappadocia in Central Anatolia, Winter Sleep focuses on a small village, half-empty, in the wintry off-season. The film follows a local celebrity, Aydin (Haluk Bilginer), an actor who runs a small hotel with his wife, writes a column for the local newspaper, and is toying with the idea of producing a book on Turkish theatre. Like all the villagers, Aydin has time on his hands, but as Ceylan's film progresses, the director carefully strips away the veneer that surrounds this self-satisfied and insular man. Through some magnificent set pieces, beautifully written and performed, we get a close look at Aydin's interactions with his wife, his recently divorced sister, and a family of locals who are tenants of one of his properties.

With a steady, penetrating gaze reminiscent of that which Ingmar Bergman brought to his chamber pieces, Ceylan cuts through the smug self-image of a man who considers himself of elevated stature, but is ultimately brought face-to-face with who and what he truly is. Awarded the International Critics Prize in Cannes in addition to the Palme d'Or, Winter Sleep is a compelling and hypnotic study of human frailty.
CAST LIST

Aydin
Nihal
Necla
Hidayet
Hamdi
İslam
Suavi
Levent
Timur
İlyas

Haluk Bilginer
Melisa Sözen
Demet Akbağ
Ayberk Pekcan
Serhat Kılıç
Nejat İşler
Tamer Levent
Nadir Sarıbacak
Mehmet Ali Nuroğlu
Emirhan Doruktutan

CREW LIST

Director
Script and Dialogues
Producer
Executive Producer
Co-Producer
National Co-Producer

Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Ebru Ceylan / Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Zeynep Özbatur Atakan
Sezgi Üstün
Alexandre Mallet-Guy / Mustafa Dok
Muzaffer Yıldırım / Müge Kolat
Olivier Père / Rémi Burah
Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Gökhan Tiryaki
Andreas Mücke
Özgür Sevimli
Thomas Robert
Benoit Gargonne
Lars Ginzel
Daniel Gries
Adam Inglis
Monika Münnich / Anke Thot

Director of Photography
Editors
Production Designer
Sound Engineer
First Assistant Director
Sound Editor
Dialogue Editor
Sound Recording Mixer
Foley Artist
Colorist
Make-up and Hair

Gökhan Tiryaki
Nuri Bilge Ceylan / Bora Gökşingöl
Gamze Kuş
Nuri Bilge Ceylan / Bora Gökşingöl
Andreas Mücke
Özgür Sevimli
Thomas Robert
Benoit Gargonne
Lars Ginzel
Daniel Gries
Adam Inglis
Monika Münnich / Anke Thot
NURI BILGE CEYLAN - BIOGRAPHY

Nuri Bilge Ceylan was born in Istanbul on January 26th, 1959. In 1976, he began studying chemical engineering at Istanbul Technical University, in a context of strong student unrest, boycotts and political polarization.

In 1978, he switched courses to Electrical Engineering at Boğaziçi University. There, he developed a strong interest in image, entering the photography club at the university. This is also where he fed his taste for visual arts and classical music, by means of the vast resources of the faculty librarians. He also began to take film classes and attend screenings at the Film Society, which reinforced his love of cinema, born years earlier in the dark rooms of the Istanbul Cinematheque.

After his 1985 Graduation, he traveled to London and Kathmandu, which allowed him to take the opportunity to reflect upon his future. He returned to Turkey for his 18 months military service and at that moment decided to dedicate his life to cinema.

Thereafter, he studied film at the University Mimar Sinan, and worked as a professional photographer to make a living. After 2 years, he decided to abandon his studies to practice. He started with acting, in a short film directed by his friend Mehmet Eryilmaz, while helping with the technical production process.

In late 1993, he began shooting his first short film, KOZA. The film was screened at Cannes in May 1995 and became the first Turkish short film to be selected for competition.


In all of these films, Ceylan took on just about every technical role himself: the cinematography, sound design, production, editing, writing and direction...

UZAK won the Grand Prix and Best Actor (for the two main actors) in Cannes in 2003, making Ceylan an internationally recognized director. Continuing his tour of festivals after Cannes, UZAK won no less than 47 awards, including 23 international prizes, and thus became the most awarded film in the history of Turkish cinema.

His subsequent films were all awarded at Cannes : CLIMATES won the FIPRESCI Prize in 2006, THREE MONKEYS won Best Director in 2008 and ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA won the Grand Prix in 2011.

In 2014, his seventh feature film WINTER SLEEP won the Palme d’Or as well as the FIPRESCI prize.
INTERVIEW WITH NURI BILGE CEYLAN

by Michel Ciment and Philippe Rouyer

Michel Ciment and Philippe Rouyer:
How did the idea of making a film in the troglodyte cliffs of Cappadocia come about?

Nuri Bilge Ceylan: I was inspired by three short stories by Chekhov. I’ve had this project in mind for 15 years. I won’t say which narratives I chose, to avoid steering the reading of the film, but for anyone who knows the writer’s work well, it wouldn’t be hard to find the source material. We changed the story a lot, adding some things. To begin with, we didn’t want to film in Cappadocia, because I thought the location was too beautiful for this film. But we couldn’t find a hotel anywhere else that was cut off from the world, where I could place my characters away from mainstream life. What’s more, I wanted there to be a few tourists in this establishment, which is credible in Cappadocia, where people come even in winter. When we finally found the place where we wanted to locate our story, in consequence it was changed. In a way, the setting had an influence on this change.

People have also mentioned The Cherry Orchard as a source of inspiration.

I never thought about it. There’s no direct connection, but since all of Chekhov’s work deals with the same themes, one could of course also evoke The Cherry Orchard.

The name of the hotel, Othello, the posters of Caligula by Camus, and of Antony and Cleopatra by Shakespeare in Aydin’s office might also give some clues?

Not really, but since the main character is a former actor, it’s not surprising that there are some theater posters in his place of work. What’s more, they are posters which belong to him and plays in which he appeared. Haluk Bilginer is a well-known actor in Turkey, so it’s logical for the character he plays who runs a hotel to have given it the name of Shakespeare’s hero.

You worked on the screenplay with your wife, Ebru. How do you work together?

We have been writing together ever since Climates. First, we concentrate on the construction of the narrative, then we write the dialog. In fact, we each work alone, then we talk about it. When it comes to making a decision about this or that line of dialog, there are lots of arguments, sometimes quite violent, but this helps us decide between several options. The time spent writing is quite short, but the time spent arguing is ... longer! Since I’m the director, I want to have the final word, but Ebru always finds a way to convince me that it’s not the right dialog. These discussions continue even after the film has been released. If a journalist criticizes an aspect of the film which she didn’t agree with, she tells me she was right after all. So I then have to find another article which espouses my point of view!
What qualities does Ebru bring to your joint writing?

She’s particularly good at crafting the plotline. When we worked on Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, it was she who came up with most of the solutions to the problems. I think she’s also even more merciless than me when it comes to judging our work. She’s a very realistic person. Sometimes I feel like Aydin, my protagonist, when he’s faced with his sister Necla, who’s a very intransigent person. Faced with her onslaughts, I sometimes want to tell her to let me land on my feet. I think Ebru’s realism helps the film: she is anchored in the present and in reality.

Did the fact that your film has more dialog than usual change anything in the writing?

In fact, we had some doubts whilst writing the screenplay and we wondered whether the audience would accept this very literary dialog, which does not pose a problem in the theater.

Winter Sleep bears some similarities with Climates, which painted the portrait of a couple, and which came after two films that might be called noir thrillers, Three Monkeys and Once Upon a Time in Anatolia. But compared to Climates, it’s a much broader work, like a great novel. From the start, did you plan to direct a 196-minute film, a sort of epic?

When we’d finished writing the script, we already realized what was going to happen, because it had 163 pages, compared to 96 for Once Upon a Time in Anatolia! But that wasn’t very important to me. I think I need the same freedom as a novelist who, when writing, doesn’t wonder how many pages his or her novel should have. These are merely commercial concerns which constrain directors to making films with a runtime of 90 or 100 minutes. I never gave a thought to this kind of consideration, and we embarked on the adventure.

Did all the characters exist in the synopsis, or did some of them emerge along the way?

We started with the man and the woman, then came the sister, then those around them, and lastly the imam, his brother, and the child. That’s why the first scene we wrote wasn’t that of the child breaking the windshield with a stone. Our first sequence had the husband confronting his wife Nihal. Then we thought we had to establish a link between this couple and the small town they’ve moved to, and so we created the family. In fact, I remembered something which happened to me in childhood. We were with my father in a small town and he had brought back a car from the United States which was, I think, the only one there, and a kid threw a stone at the window. My uncle got out of the car, went to fetch the kid, and brought him back like in the film.

There is one sequence which is out of step with the overall tone of the film, in which Nihal comes to offer some money to Ismail, the child’s alcoholic father, who then burns the bundle of banknotes like in a famous chapter of Dostoyevsky’s The Idiot. The scene is inserted in the middle of a long drinking sequence.

To me, the character of Ismail is not very realistic. I see him as more utopian. We wanted him to be like that, living in another world, and we thought that this sequence was necessary to teach Nihal a lesson. I really like that scene steeped in utopianism, to better bring out the realism of the whole. In Dostoyevsky, you also find this kind of counterpoint.
How do you see the female characters in relation to Aydin? They seem more solid to us, entertaining fewer illusions than him, living less on false appearances.

When I wrote those strong female roles, I drew inspiration from my childhood, because I lived with my aunt and her two daughters who were in that mold. The men were not often at home. They would come and go, and these women would give them a piece of their mind. That inspired me a lot.

*Fitzgerald said that all life is a process of breaking down. In the drinking scene, one has the feeling that Aydin is falling apart after a long process which sees his mask falling.*

That’s true, but I’d add that Aydin really had to be destroyed so that he could start over and do something. I think in life, this is often how it happens: one has to go all the way with a process of destruction to be able to continue one’s existence in a different way. That’s why we came up with this scene in which they drown themselves in booze. Aydin must then find a little pride to have the strength to return home and finally write his *History of Turkish Theater*. At the end, there’s the possibility of making things up with Nihal, but we can’t be certain he really utters those words. Yet at the same time, with those words he puts the burden on his wife’s shoulders.

*At what point did you decide on the music, in particular the sonata N° 20 by Schubert that can also be heard in Robert Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar>*?

We tried several pieces of music and I wanted to use this piece because Schubert uses the same theme but with slight changes, infinitesimal variations. It’s a very well-known piece, and in doing some research I discovered that Bresson had already used it, but I didn’t think that mattered.

*From the donkey in Balthazar to the horse in Winter Sleep?*

In Turkish, Cappadocia means “the land of the fine horses”. There are many magnificent wild horses in that region, so I would have found it impossible to not include them in my story. They have no contact with man, and as soon as they are caught, they start to fight for their freedom. I thought this suited the film.

*In the two big central scenes, between Aydin and his sister, then between Aydin and his wife, filmed in shot/counter-shot, one finds the same intensity as in Bergman’s films. He seems to be more of an influence here than Chekhov.*

It’s true, in the history of cinema, he is the master when it comes to conflicts between couples and the settling of scores, and he is one of my favorite directors. I didn’t want to seek a different form for those two sequences: I went for the simplest style possible to bring out this confrontation between the two characters. Any other approach would have undermined the emotion of these duels. I filmed with a single camera, but I did a lot of takes.

*How did you work with your actors?*

I can’t say that I left them a great deal of liberty. I wanted them to deliver the dialog as we had written it. But once the take was done, I let them improvise to see if they could give anything else. I noticed that although they added some details to make their performance more natural, they
didn’t drift far away from the text. We spent a lot of time filming rehearsals on set so that I could get what I was after. Then I looked to see if we could do any better.

This was the first time you have worked with the main actors.

Haluk Bilginer (Aydin) lived for a long time in England, where he was director of a theater, then he returned to Turkey where he created a company. He’s very well known. When I began writing the script, I thought of him right away, because I needed a stage actor, since his lines were very literary. Melisa Sözen (Nihal) has a face and a voice that I really love, and she mainly appears in TV series. Demet Akbag (Necla) is the one who is most famous in Turkey. She’s a star and she mainly acts in comedies. I thought of her because I wanted an actress who talks quickly, one who has quick responses. Serhat Kilic, who plays the imam Hamdi, stood out for me because he was very good in some series in which the actors, in general, are not of a very good standard. I have for a long time wanted to cast Nejat Isler, who plays his brother Ismail, because he has a magnetic charisma. For the child, we carried out a casting in the region, going to the local schools, and very early on, I noticed this boy, Emirhan Doruktutan, who had a very insolent look and who asked us some quite tough questions. He was perfect for the role.

* Interviewed in Cannes, 20 May 2014.
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