

THE WILD PEAR TREE

(Ahlat Ağacı)

A film by
Nuri Bilge Ceylan



188 mins / Turkey/France/Germany/Bulgaria/Bosnia/Macedonia 2018 / Turkish with English subtitles

Certificate 15

Cannes, Toronto, New York, London Film Festivals 2018

Release November 30th 2018

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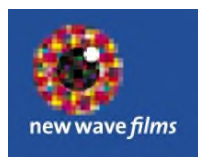
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SYNOPSIS

Sinan returns from his studies in the city of Çanakkale to his parents' home in the small rural town of Çan. He hopes to publish a book of essays and short stories (or what he describes as a “quirky auto-fiction meta-novel”). But his teacher father Idris is an addictive gambler, so much so that his mother and sister have become reluctantly accustomed to making do without food or electricity. So Sinan, with his writing dreams, worrying that we will be reduced, after army service, to teaching in the remote East, wanders around town, visiting his grandparents, encountering old friends, all the while looking for funding for his book.

Further information and downloads [here](#)

Photo set can be downloaded [here](#)



Cast

Aydın Doğu DEMİRKOL
Murat CEMCİR
Bennu YILDIRIMLAR
Hazar ERGÜÇLÜ
Serkan KESKİN
Tamer LEVENT
Akın AKSU
Öner ERKAN
Ahmet RIFAT ŞUNGAR
Kubilay TUNÇER
Kadir ÇERMİK
Özay FECHT
Ercüment BALAKOĞLU
Asena KESKİNCİ

Sinan
Idris
Asuman
Hatice
Süleyman
Grandfather Recep
Imam Veysel
Imam Nazmi
Riza
Ilhami
Mayor Adnan
Grandmother Hayriye
Grandfather Ramazan
Yasemin

Crew

Director
Screenplay
Director of photography
Sound
Editing
First assistant director
Production designer
Costume designer
Casting
Make-up
Hair
Line producer
Producer
Co-producers

Nuri BILGE CEYLAN
Akın AKSU, Ebru CEYLAN, Nuri BILGE CEYLAN
Gökhan TIRYAKI
Andreas MÜCKE NIESYTKA, Thomas ROBERT, Thomas GAUDER
Nuri BILGE CEYLAN
Yıldız ASANBOGA
Meral AKTAN
Selcen DEMET KADIZADE
Erkut EMRE SUNGUR
Mojca GOROGRANC PETRUSHEVSKA
Emre ÖLMEZ
Ahmet DEMIRCAN
Zeynep ÖZBATUR ATAKAN
Alexandre MALLET-GUY, Fabian GASMA, Stefan KITANOV
Labina MITEVSKA, Mirsad PURIVATRA, Mirsad PURIVATRA
Jon MANKELL, Anthony MUIR, Thomas ESKILSSON
Zeyno Film, Memento Films Production, Detail Film, RFF International
Sisters and Brother Mitevski, 2006 Produkcija Sarajevo, Film i Vast,
Chimney Pot
ARTE France Cinéma, Imaj, Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu (TRT)
Doha Film Institute, Nu-Look Yapım, Kale Grubu
Eurimages, Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism,
Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, National Film Centre of Bulgaria
Macedonian Film Agency, Sarajevo Film Fund,
MPA APSA Academy Film Fund
ARTE France

A production

In co-production with

With the support of

In association with

Nuri Bilge Ceylan



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 Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, 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.

Three full-length feature films followed - the 'provincial trilogy'; KASABA (1997), CLOUDS OF MAY (1999) and UZAK (2002).

In all 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.

New Wave Films have released all his films, either as New Wave from Three Monkeys onwards, or before that in a previous company.

FILMOGRAPHY

1995 KOZA (COCOON)

Cannes 1995 - 20 min.

1997 KASABA (THE SMALL TOWN)

Berlin 1998

1999 THE CLOUDS OF MAY (MAYIS SIKINTISI)

Berlin 2000 - Competition

2003 UZAK (DISTANT)

Cannes 2003 – Grand Prix and Two Best Actor Prizes

2006 CLIMATES (IKLIMLER)

Cannes 2006 – Competition

2008 THREE MONKEYS (ÜÇ MAYMUN)

Cannes 2008 – Best Director Prize

2011 ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA (BİR ZAMANLAR ANADOLU'DA)

Cannes 2011- Grand Prix

2014 WINTER SLEEP

Cannes 2014 - Palme d'Or

2018 THE WILD PEAR TREE

Cannes 2018

INTERVIEW WITH NURI BILGE CEYLAN

Michel Ciment, Yann Tobin

Michel Ciment and Yann Tobin: When did you start thinking about this project, and how did it come to be developed?

Nuri Bilge Ceylan: Actually, my wife Ebru and I were working on another project, a somewhat autobiographical story about a family. One day, we were in our country house near Troy, where I was born. It was a seaside place, very crowded in the summer because of a religious holiday, and we decided to get closer to my hometown. In a nearby village I met someone I knew, a teacher. He was married to someone from my family and he was an interesting man; I liked talking with him because he was different from all the people who lived there. He would talk about the colours of a landscape or the smells of the earth. The locals didn't respect him, and they didn't listen to him when he talked. He came to our home and told us about his life in a very colourful way. My father was a bit like him: he was passionate, for instance, about Alexander the Great, who no one really cared about. He was an agricultural engineer, he read a lot, and he was a bit of a loner; he didn't share much with other people. Getting back to this neighbour of mine, I came to know his son who had finished school, was working for a local newspaper, and helped out his father sometimes. I started talking with him and this idea grew on me, to make a movie about him, that would also talk about his father's loneliness. I went to visit him and asked him if he could write about his memories, his feelings, his father, his childhood and his relationship with his family. For three months, I heard nothing. He had made a big impression on me, he was an avid reader and he knew all the books I talked to him about; I really liked him. He was a very reserved person who didn't talk much. I talked to his father about him and he had the same impression. And then out of the blue, I received an email with eighty pages of information and descriptions. I read it all and was very impressed. It was very candid and had the ring of truth to it. He didn't hold anything back, or try to present himself as a hero, not at all. It was much better than I expected. My wife agreed with me. And so, I decided to shelve the project I was working on, and to shoot this one first! I asked this young man, Akin Aksu, to contribute to the script, and he even played one of the two imams, the one who talks a lot.



Had you already shot in that part of Turkey before?

Yes, for *Clouds of May* (1999). In the Western part of the country, the Dardanelles, about a hundred kilometers West. We talked extensively for a month with Akin and my wife, exchanging ideas and impressions. He wrote a couple of outlines on his own, and I took what I needed from them. Meanwhile, I read the two autobiographical books that he wrote, and I liked them very much. I used some of his details, some of his thoughts, in the script. Then he went back to teaching and we continued working together via email. In Turkey there are much more applicants than teaching positions, so it's very hard to get recruited: this man had attempted the exam for four years running and this was the first time he passed. He didn't score very high, so they sent him out to the Eastern part of Turkey. And so, for nine months we traded our ideas about the script back and forth. First, we talked about the scenes, and then we worked on the dialogue. My wife was also in contact with him.

You mentioned another project with autobiographical undertones. Were there any aspects of *The Wild Pear Tree* that were related to your own childhood?

Yes, particularly when it comes to my relationship with my father. But the movie is mostly a reflection on Akin's personality. He was a teacher like his father, and also a writer. I wanted to know, for instance, what was said between them when Akin's father tried to borrow money from him. I wanted all the details about his father's gambling, specifically, like in the film. He was even forced to sell his house.

There's a lot of confrontation in this film, just like in *Winter Sleep*, a lot of dialogue. The son talks with his father, his mother, the local writer, the head of publishing subsidies, etc. Were those scenes entirely scripted, or was there a lot of ad-libbing?

It was scripted for the most part, about ninety-five percent. Which is harder for non-professional actors. They're not as good at memorizing lines, they're usually more comfortable ad-libbing. Casting the lead role was one of the most complicated problems I've ever had. I looked everywhere in Turkish cinema to no avail, and in the end, I picked someone who had never acted in a movie before. I found him on Facebook. He'd been in a few comedy sketches on television. So, I approached him to try him out. I was not impressed with his performance at first: he started off by doing some improv with Ebru, and he wasn't very good at all. Then I sent him a few script pages, so he could learn some lines. When he played them for me, I knew that he had understood what I wanted for that character, and he was getting better and better at every reading. Out of all the actors who auditioned, he was the best at remembering his lines, maybe because he was also the smartest actor I've met to this day. He also knew a lot about life, and about people, and situations. Some of the other actors, they might be good with the girl but not with the mother, or they were good with the father, but not with the mayor. But him, he was great in all the relationships. So, maybe he doesn't look like a writer, but the important thing is that he was able to memorize long sequences of dialogue in an over-three-hour film, and he could perform them just right.



Did you rehearse before shooting?

Very little, because we did not have much time. We did, however, rehearse during the three-and-a-half-month shooting, even though it cost us money. Sometimes I like to do a lot of takes, but none of the actors were better when they started ad-libbing. The man playing the father was a professional actor who was more used to playing comedies.

His sarcastic laugh, was that your idea?

Sure! My father was like that. No one listened to him in the village, so he laughed at his own words. I wanted the character to have something that would cause the villagers to not respect him and I came up with this little detail. It's hard to understand this lack of respect in others, because teachers are usually held in high esteem. Maybe it was his gambling addiction, or the laughing. In the Turkish countryside, they don't like people who laugh all the time! The other characters are also all professionals. For the local writer, I tried in vain to get a real one. One of the imams however, was also an amateur, although he wasn't an imam himself.



For that scene, as well as the one with the local writer, you shot some very long takes with a mobile camera. When you follow the two imams walking with Sinan, you're shooting from a distance and we don't always know who's speaking.

It's easier for a Turkish audience! I was able to develop this shooting style using a new camera, the Osmo; it's very small and extremely mobile. It also depends on the actors and whether they can read lines for a long period of time. In the past, I've had to make some cuts during shooting because of that. If I used a lot of long takes, it's also because there were many exterior scenes with people moving. They would walk and talk at the same time, so there was no need to cut. I still have my loyal cinematographer, Gökhan Tiryaki, and I make most of the decisions. But of course, when you're writing a script you have an idea of what you want to do, and then reality forces you to make some changes during shooting. We make the final decisions on set. I also gave a lot of thought to seasons, and I wanted the story to end in winter. I tried to dodge the sun, but when we started shooting in October, it was sunny every day! And then for the final scene, we had almost finished shooting, when the sun disappeared. So, we shot it again without the sun, and then it started to snow. So, we had to shoot it a third time! I kept that last take for the final cut.

We see the snow fall from the bedroom window, when the protagonist is speaking with his mother...

Yes, I put that in the script because I wanted his military service to take place in the snow, in a different atmosphere than the rest of the film; I wanted to express that a certain amount of time had gone by (a year, in this case). I felt like I needed to show it visually.

The military service is one shot...

Yes, a single shot. It's just meant to be symbolic, I didn't want to weigh heavily on it.

The young man is always contradicting others as a show of opposition, whether it's his parents, the writer, the mayor or the imams...

He's like this in real life, too. It's because he's a writer, and always alone. The isolation triggers anxiety and this leads him to constantly criticize other people. He fights against what he perceives as unfair. He doesn't like this local writer, or his works, and he resents his success. That's why he lashes out! But in doing so he belittles himself as well. His constant state of inner struggle is what causes these uncontrolled outbursts.

In the end, his father is the only one who reads his novel... this is the most important line in the film.

Yes, because he's the person that he respects the least!



This reminds us of the relationship between James Dean and his father in *East of Eden*...

When he finds his news clip in his father's wallet, that's also inspired by a real event. But he was feeling guilty before leaving for his military service, because his father's attitude had started to change. Maybe he resented him for selling the dog, which would explain his suspicion at the school, when he tries to hide what he's writing from his son. The son hadn't known how much his father loved the dog when he sold it to get his book printed. The village was different from a big city: dogs were not very valuable there.

You've often cited Chekhov as an influence for *Winter Sleep*. This new film is also very reminiscent of that author, particularly because it never judges the characters... everyone gets a fair chance.

Not just Chekhov, I think, all the great writers refuse to judge their characters. Tennessee Williams, for instance... We are not to judge, we are only to understand, even if they are murderers. My favorite authors are Russian, like Dostoevsky. And some Turkish ones like Sait Faik, who wrote beautiful short stories. A very solitary man, he never married. He spent some time in France.

There's an important line of dialogue, when the mother says that the dog was the only creature which never judged its master.

Yes, everyone blames the father, they think he's irresponsible, a gambler... When the young man leaves for his military service, he feels guilty. The first thing he does when he returns is to ask about his father, and

he learns that he became a shepherd. Actually, he's wondering if his father resents him, and he's relieved to find out that he doesn't.

In the bookstore, there are pictures of Garcia Marques, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Albert Camus...

The place was like that when I found it! Even though I do love these authors.

There are several dream sequences: the baby and the ants, the chase in the Trojan horse, the well at the end; it's quite unusual for contemporary cinema.

It just comes to me. For the Trojan horse, we don't know exactly when it becomes a dream. You know, most of the time I see my life as a dream. And my dreams are very real to me.

How did you come up with the scene where he talks with the two imams for a long time while walking towards the village?

The premise of the film is that I wanted to talk about a young man's values. Religion is one of the most important ones. Sooner or later you have to get to it, especially in a Muslim country. It's not something you can talk about as freely as other subjects. It's practically impossible in the countryside to say something like, "I don't believe in God." My father was like that, but he never said it publicly, or even to the family. This young man wants to talk about it, but he can't do it directly, so he goads the others about it. It's almost my favorite scene. I identify with the situation. I understand that it may seem long or confusing to a non-Turkish audience, but for us it brings up essential issues. We had to connect it to the rest of the story, so the imam borrowed gold from the grandmother, and the young man is trying to get it back to publish his book; that's the pretext. And then I make them talk about religion.

You also have a younger imam talking, one who's more reformist...

Yes, this is a very common sort of discussion nowadays in religious circles, where they bring up the issue of modernization in the interpretation of holy texts. In real life, the writer's grandfather was also a retired imam.

How much was shot on location, and how much on set?

The family's apartment was a set. It was actually an abandoned gym that we used as a set. It was an important fallback plan for days when the weather didn't cooperate. In the village, everything was shot on location.

There's a beautiful scene at the start with a young woman, but we never see her again...

It's because she got married to the other boy: she doesn't go out anymore!

She represents the hero's past: before the film starts...

In high school, the kids are all close, but they fall out as they get older. Some get married, others go to college...

The well that they dig, is that also a real situation?

No, we made that up to give the father a tangible goal. It solidifies his struggle against the villagers, who all think that he'll never strike water.

The wild pear tree from the title, is that a personal memory?

It's from a short story by the real-life writer: *The Loneliness of the Wild Pear Tree*. Those wild pear trees are quite ugly, and they bear very bitter fruit. They don't need much water to grow in the wild. They're isolated, and they grow on arid land. When they find one near a village, the locals will graft it to make it into a normal pear tree. There was a prologue in the script that I ended up not keeping: a scene about the father when he was younger and teaching in the village. He told the story of the pear tree to his students

as a metaphor for his own loneliness, which would later become his son's... and which he already got from his grandfather, who we see at one point sitting alone at a table in a local coffee shop, a very unusual thing for a countryside village.

This is your second longest film, after *Winter Sleep*, even though it doesn't feel like it...

I could tell the script was very long, much longer than the actual film. But I decided to shoot everything, and then to make cuts in the editing room. The first version was almost five hours long. The grandmother was much more fleshed out, and I completely cut some of the other villagers. Among others, there were group talks about the new mosque under construction.

What music did you use?

A transposition of a Bach piece for the organ, with a new orchestration.

How did you direct your actors?

I don't like to talk about their characters with the actors, I prefer to give technical directions. Most of them – not all of them, but most – have an intuitive approach to their character, rather than intellectual. If you explain things too much, it hinders them. I like to let them come up with something, and if I need to I'll correct them. Little things. I try to be very descriptive, not notional. I'll find something to praise before making suggestions: you can't push an actor around, or they'll close up. They need to be loved! But there's really no one way of doing things. What works with one actor might not work with another. I have to adapt my style to theirs.

What if you have a scene where every actor has a different style?

Sometimes I have to be tricky. If there's something wrong with one actor, I'll talk with another one and see how the first one reacts... directing actors is a very mysterious process. And it's the most important thing for a director.

How do you keep your head clear during editing? Do you screen-test the film?

Yes, first with my wife, who is very harsh. And then with one or two other people to get a set of fresh eyes on it. But most importantly, I give myself time. It took me almost a year to edit the film, and I did it alone this time, for the first time. No editor. It's hard for me to get along with another person for so long!

* Interview from Cannes, May, the 15th, 2018.

