

ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA

(Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da)

Directed by

Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Winner Grand Prix, Cannes 2011

Selected for the forthcoming London Film Festival 2011



Turkey/Bosnia-Herzegovina 2011 / 157 minutes / Scope

Certificate: 15

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Once Upon A Time in Anatolia

Director	Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Producer	Zeynep Özbatur Atakan
Co-producers:	Mirsad Purivatra (Prod2006) Eda Arıkan (1000 volt) İbrahim Şahin (TRT) Müge Kolat (İmaj) Murat Akdilek (Fida Film) Nuri Bilge Ceylan (NBC Film)
Scriptwriters	Ercan Kesal Ebru Ceylan Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Director of Photography	Gökhan Tiryaki
Editors	Bora Gökşingöl Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Art Director	Dilek Yapkuöz Ayaztuna
Sound Engineers	Okan Selçuk (Melodika) Mehmet Kılıçel (Selekt)
Sound Editor	Thomas Robert
Sound Mixers	Ulaş Ağçe (İmaj) Erkan Altınok (1000 volt)
Foley Artist	Francois Lepouple
Casting	Don Kişot Kasting
Production Coordinator	Çağrı Erdoğan

Turkey/Bosnia Herzegovina 2011 157 mins Cinemascope



Once Upon A Time in Anatolia

CAST

Muhammet Uzuner
Yılmaz Erdoğan
Taner Birsal
Ahmet Mümtaz Taylan
Fırat Tanış
Ercan Kesal
Erol Eraslan
Uğur Arslanoğlu
Murat Kılıç
Şafak Karali
Emre Şen
Burhan Yıldız
Nihan Okutucu
Cansu Demirci
Kubilay Tunçer
Salih Ünal
Aziz İzzet Biçici
Celal Acaralp
Mehmet Eren Topçak
Ufuk Karali
Fevzi Müftüoğlu
Turgay Kürkçü
Fatih Ereli
Hüseyin Bekeç
Mehmet Öztürk

Doctor Cemal
Police Chief Naci
Prosecutor Nusret
Driver Arab Ali
Suspect Kenan
Mukhtar
Murder Victim Yaşar
Courthouse Driver Tevfik
Police Officer İzzet
Courthouse Clerk Abidin
Sergeant Önder
Suspect Ramazan
Yaşar's wife Gülnaz
Mukhtar's daughter Cemile
Autopsy Technician Şakir
Hospital Cook Hamit
Restaurant Owner Kazım
Pharmacist Saim
Hamam Scrubber
Hospital Attendant Sıtkı
1st Digger Hayrettin
2nd Digger Ethem
Gülnaz's son Adem
1st Soldier
2nd Soldier



Once Upon A Time in Anatolia

SYNOPSIS

An epic and rigorous tale of a night and day in a murder investigation, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* is a beautifully photographed crime drama about police and prosecutors locating a buried body through one long night in the Anatolian steppes.

In the short prologue three men are drinking and talking. Then a convoy of cars is travelling around the countryside at night as one of the men seen earlier is trying to remember where a body was buried. After several false leads and a rest in a remote village, the body is finally discovered early the next morning. In the course of the long investigation the characters and hidden thoughts of the main protagonists are gradually themselves exhumed.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan was born in Istanbul in 1959. After graduating from the Engineering Department of Bosphorus University, Istanbul, he continued studying electrical engineering at Bogazici University, where he got interested in photography and cinema. After travelling to London and Katmandu and 18 months of military service, he studied film-making for two years at Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul, and supported himself through commercial photography. In 1993 he started his first short KOZA, which was shown in Cannes in 1995.

His two first features, KASABA and THE CLOUDS OF MAY were shown in Berlin, but it was only with UZAK in 2003 that he came to international attention, winning the Cannes Grand Prix with the 2 actors sharing the Best Actor Prize. Each of his subsequent features premiered in the Cannes competition.

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

Once Upon A Time in Anatolia

Interview with Michel Ciment and Yann Tobin during the Cannes Film Festival, on 22 May 2011. Published in *Positif*, November 2011, issue 609.

Michel Ciment and Yann Tobin

Apparently, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* is based on a story that really happened to your co-writer Ercan Kesal, who is also a doctor. What exactly happened to him?

Nuri Bilge Ceylan

He remembered having searched for a body at dawn but he was unable to give me all the details. We only used the situation as a starting point. When Ercan started writing the script with us [co-writer: Ebru Ceylan], he had forgotten almost everything!

One thinks of the accident in *Three Monkeys*. Here the murder is not shown and the investigation starts. In the beginning, the audience feels a bit lost.

If you want to find something, you have to get lost first. I wanted viewers to lose their usual points of reference, before they slowly become accustomed to the light. It did not seem important, in the prologue, to know whether it was a murder, a fight or an accident. I was not looking for this truth. It did not seem essential to show what had happened. I did not want the audience to know more than the protagonists.

Why did you want to show all three characters in the prologue?

I wanted the audience to see the man alive in order to feel his death better. We see them drinking alcohol, and when we see the other man in the car, we understand that the first man has been killed. The dog that we see much later in the film is another important element.

Which region of Turkey did you film in?

In the heart of Anatolia, two hours away from Ankara. It is a land of steppes and the place where the actual incident took place. In reality, we could have shot in another part of the country, but this landscape suited us best. I realised it after having travelled through other regions. I did not know this particular place, but I had travelled in the vicinity. I really like travelling around Turkey and photographing the landscape.

It takes time for the viewer to know who the main character will be. The doctor, for example, is a passive observer for a long time.

If you look closely though, you'll notice that the camera is with the doctor from beginning to end. I never film him outside his field of vision. I show other characters only in so far as they are in contact with him.

From a passive observer, he slowly becomes a participant. The heart of the film is his relationship with the prosecutor, because he is made to question himself and thus evolve during the trip. The viewer is led, like he is, to see things from a different perspective. At the end of the film, he can't stand seeing himself in the mirror.

He may have built, through his profession which puts him in contact with suffering, illness and death, a protective armour. He has adopted a certain coolness in his behaviour that will start melting.

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He starts feeling compassion for others, for the murderer, for the woman with the child. He is for the first time capable of sacrificing something within him, of being less selfish. It's at least what we can guess, because I don't want to say more than what the film shows. He definitely realises that something in him has changed, but we don't know how. My supposition is that he has, for the first time, taken risks in relation to his career, to his profession. The reasons for this change can be varied, and we are sure of nothing. Perhaps the killer thanked him, perhaps it has to do with the child. Some people may have an opportunity to change but they decide to do nothing. It is a critical moment in Dr Kemal's life, and, despite his reluctance, he decides to evolve.

In his correspondence, Flaubert pretty much wrote that he would like to write a book held together only by style. We get the impression that in your new film, the mise-en-scène is what holds everything together, that you push your contemplative gaze to the extreme.

I am conscious that it is a difficult film for the viewer, but at the same time I'm responsible for the content. There is nothing on the screen that I cannot justify. I can answer questions on any detail. I can explain the behaviour and words of each character.

At every stage of the work, from writing the script to editing the film, I was questioning every single detail. If you only worry about style, you don't bother with questions about narrative logic or characters' psychology. I put a lot of energy into going to the bottom of things. On the other hand, directing does not require so much energy from me, it comes naturally

The short sequence with the girl is lived like a dream.

It lasts a few seconds, it looks like a dream, but it is real. I have not used any dreamlike element and I have filmed it as if it were reality. I have also scattered the film with a few borrowings from Chekhov stories. There are references to Chekhov in all my films. You know that he was also a doctor, and since his works refers to all aspects of life, it can nourish one's inspiration at any given moment in time.

One could also say that the girl with the lamp is inspired by paintings of Rembrandt and Vermeer, but in fact she comes from reality, from the context. I have myself lived this kind of situation. When I was in the army for example, three months could go by without us seeing a single woman. We lived among men. When a young woman would appear in our life, it was like a miracle. When we walked for days and then came across an attractive woman in a remote place, it would produce an emotion charged with melancholia. It was not particularly sexual, it brought up the memory of a spouse or a fiancée. It has a different meaning for the murderer. I spoke to people in the Police force and to officials in Anatolia while writing the script. They told me that some suspects would not say a word or confess their crime for three days and suddenly, after having seen a woman or heard a baby scream, they would start crying and confess everything. For those I was speaking to, it was a common experience in the practice of their profession.

There is a similar episode in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The police arrests Dimitri, holds him in a room where he falls asleep. When he wakes up, he discovers a pillow under his head. He starts crying and asks who placed the pillow there. He does not stop asking this question, until he confesses a crime that he has not committed.

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It is interesting that you should mention Russian writers such as Chekhov or Dostoyevsky, because it is a literature that mixes tragic and grotesque.

I always like to see the humour in life, including in dramatic situations. I don't know if it belongs to the cultural traditions of my country, but at least it is the way I look at human existence. There is in all of us an objective and a subjective way of seeing. Other people will see different aspects of life or will put forward details that don't interest me.

You are conscious that the first part of the story is testing for the viewer.

Of course. I wanted the spectator to go through the same impressions as the characters. Beside, the system encourages filmmakers to direct films of a standard duration, let's say ninety minutes. Writers have much more freedom, they can write a novel of five or six-hundred pages. I envy this freedom, and I wanted to escape the norm imposed by the industry. It can put off some viewers, it can also seduce others.

Did you mix professional and non-professional actors?

Most are professional actors. They come from theatre and cinema. Muhammet Azner who plays the doctor is not very famous in Turkey. He had played small parts but nobody had ever given him a chance. I am happy to have entrusted him with this role after an audition, and I am surprised he had not been discovered earlier. Taner Birsnel, the prosecutor who's been compared to Clark Gable, is more famous, especially in arthouse cinema. Yılmaz Erdoğan (Police Chief Naci) is a real star. He plays in films, writes plays, teaches and even directs films. Many people were surprised to see us working together. Ahmet Mümtaz Taylan, who plays the Arab driver, also plays both on stage and on screen. I have given the mukhtar's role, the mayor, to my co-scriptwriter Ercan Kesal. He on the other hand is not a professional actor but he has played in several of my films.

It was a challenge to shoot half of the film at night time and often inside cars. It always raises technical problems.

I was conscious, while writing the script, of the difficulties we would encounter and this did not please the decision makers. After all these years however, I still like challenges. The worry with this film was the budget: it corresponds to that of my five previous films put together! It created problems within the context of the type of films I make. The over-cost came essentially from shooting at night. In addition, we were in the middle of the steppe, it was freezing. We had to be able to eat, get some heating and put toilets in as we were far from everything. The technical team was composed of about sixty to seventy people. The lighting was complicated. I was not expecting to take so much of a financial risk. For the type of cinema I make, I am better off working with a modest budget in order to break even. This film required high production costs as well as a three-month shoot.

How did you work with your usual director of photography –Gökhan Tiryaki – for this very unusual shoot?

As usual, we chatted a lot before starting, particularly about the issue of moon light, which is very expensive. We used cranes and it was important to light only the faces. Having about fifteen actors in the frame for certain scenes raises particular problems. If one of them makes a mistake, the scene has to be shot again.

Were the scenes choreographed?

new wave films

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I don't like organizing this in advance. Everything is sorted out on the set and I love doing the camera movements according to the actors' movements. When I started making films, I was very anxious and I would prepare the story board more. I am more confident today and I can make radical changes in the process of shooting. I am not a slave to the script, even if most of the dialogue was filmed as it was written. On the other hand, I can improvise, try various solutions and bring about modifications if it does not work. The most difficult thing was without a doubt to film inside cars, because on the screen it can quickly become boring.

How long was the first cut?

Three and a half hours! The last part in the village was longer because at first I wanted to show the population's reaction to the murder. I filmed several scenes that dealt with the ethics of a small town, the conversations of the locals... The murder was almost like a ritual sacrifice. In the end I cut these scenes to focus on the central story.

Don't you think that the film's title lend itself to misunderstanding? It can be seen as a reference to Sergio Leone's cinema!

I like to create to mislead people!

You don't show the autopsy, only the sound of it.

How else could I have done it?

Cronenberg would have shown it!

Some filmmakers like to show violence. Personally, I don't like showing it in that way. I want to make it palpable, not describe it. I am interested in inner violence, or in the violence as it is felt by the characters. Men who conduct an autopsy do it as a routine, as if they were cooking a meal. The banality of their movements only reinforces the dread felt by spectators.

You also suggest smells, that of yogurt or grilled lamb. It is a very olfactory film!

With the yogurt scene, I wanted them to speak of a topic that bore no connection with the incident. They still have no suspicion or worries. They think that they'll come back in an hour, they do not expect such a long search. Thus the tension increases progressively. In addition, life and death in the countryside are not so separated, they coexist. People in the cities tend to forget this coexistence. For example, peasants kill an animal one day and eat it the next.

The prologue of *Three Monkeys* as well as the whole of *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* are closer to your photographic work, in particular in the vision of landscapes. Your film is in colour, but it draws closer to black and white.

In this film I wanted to be more realistic. I did not use so many digital effects during postproduction. What I was looking for was to recreate the blackness of the night. And it was not easy!

Translation by Diane Gabrysiak