

# Nuri Bilge Ceylan : the road to perdition

Friday 23 January 2009, by [Emine Yildirim](#)

**After director Nuri Bilge Ceylan's third successful return from the Cannes Film Festival — this year having received the best director award — everyone has been anxiously expecting his “Üç Maymun” (Three Monkeys) to hit the national cinema screens.**

This week the wait is over and, even better, Ceylan and his producers have launched an alternative distribution strategy, the first of its kind in Turkey. Fifteen movie theaters in Turkey, all owned by the Cinebonus chain, will release the film in digital, showing the film in its original digital format as opposed to the normal 35 mm prints. This might not mean much for filmmakers and audiences used to making and watching films shot on reels, yet this is a revolutionary step in light of the cost reduction of digital filmmaking: No more hefty transfer costs associated with traditional 35 mm prints.

But let's get to the heart of the matter. Particular viewers nauseated by Ceylan's languorous story-telling style despite his virtuoso photographic eye in his previous “İklimler” (Climates) will be relieved to know that “Three Monkeys” is a work which takes the director's narrative maturity to a higher level without having to depart from his trademark visual style of capturing “emotionally desperate characters standing alone in beautiful and haunting landscapes.” This time we have a full-fledged story co-written by wife Ebru Ceylan and actor Ercan Kesal which is as powerful as the director's notorious cinematography.

It is summer 2007, İstanbul. A man is driving down a narrow forest road. With dark bags around his eyes, he is on the brink of falling asleep at the wheel. Off-screen we hear a loud crash. He has run over a pedestrian. He calls someone, asking them to assume responsibility. It turns out that the real perpetrator is a politician called Servet (Ercan Kesal) and the guy to assume responsibility for the accident is Eyüp (singer turned actor Yavuz Bingöl), his driver. Servet proposes to provide Eyüp's salary to his wife and their 18-year-old son while Eyüp does time. The deal is made, all is sworn to secrecy. While Eyüp is in jail, his wife, Hacer (Hatice Aslan), and their son, İsmail (Rifat Sungur), seem to merrily continue their lives with Eyüp's fixed salary. But there is something utterly wrong in the air. Hacer and İsmail have a major communication problem. They stop regularly visiting Eyüp in jail and Hacer begins an affair with Servet. Even worse, there's the image of a half-dead child floating about in İsmail's memories. When Eyüp finally gets out of jail, all seems to go out of control as the family begins to drown in a vortex of guilt, grief and anger.

Like always, Ceylan's style is subtle; an ethos and state of being that he has fully succeeded in passing on to his actors. Each character is aware of its major flaw but has mastered the art of disguise and repression. Emotions are never voiced but they are fully readable from the destitute expression and trivial interactions of these characters. And like most cases of repression, an explosion is on the way.

Aslan is especially magnificent as she portrays Hacer, possibly the most desperate yet powerful person in the story. She is a woman tired of being trapped in her poverty-stricken life surrounded by domineering males, whether it be her husband, son or lover. But her only outlet is the seductive power she tries in vain to exercise on them, which results in her own destruction. She is beautiful for her age, but her eyes show the psyche of a woman who suffers from obsessive compulsion and failure. It is almost the same case with the young İsmail, whom Sungur performs with a forceful frailty that can unpredictably transform into wrath in a split second. Even before the father goes to jail, this is a family whose members are already lost souls and their attempts to find any sort of meaning in their broken lives is what allows us to engage.

In this film Ceylan's visuals do not dominate the story, but complement it. For sure, the viewer will become astounded by the depth of field of the director's master shots, the rich color scheme of his digital palette, his talent in framing (Ceylan continues his works of still photography), his use of derelict

geographies — this time İstanbul's district of Yedikule. But all these devices find new meaning with the story arc which could have been adapted from a novel. In one sequence in particular we see Hacer and Servet in the middle of a tense confrontation set on the top of Yedikule's famous hilltops with the hovering sky and endless sea in the background. The boundless scenery is just an illusion, as is the case with the "sincere" relationships the four main protagonists believe they are experiencing. The infinity of the background makes it even sadder to watch the entrapment of the foursome within their own lies and shortcomings.

"Three Monkeys" is truly the most ambitious piece of work that Ceylan has brought forth. It is gut wrenching, wonderfully disturbing and awe inspiring. He has become a pioneer in Turkish cinema, not just technically but also as a storyteller.

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## Sources

Source : [Today's Zaman](#) ]  
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