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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

THREE MONKEYS

CREDITS

Director	NURI BILGE CEYLAN
Screenplay	EBRU CEYLAN ERCAN KESAL NURI BILGE CEYLAN
Producer	ZEYNEP ÖZBATUR
Dir. of Photography	GÖKHAN TIRYAKI
Editing	AYHAN ERGÜRSEL BORA GÖKSİNGÖL NURI BILGE CEYLAN
Co-producers	FABIENNE VONIER VALERIO DE PAOLIS CEMAL NOYAN NURI BILGE CEYLAN
Art Director	EBRU CEYLAN
Sound	MURAT SENÜRKMEZ UMUT SENYOL OLIVIER GOINARD
1st Asst. Dir.	AYLA KARLI TEZGÖREN
1st Asst. Camera	SERKAN GÜLGÜLER
Color Grading	BORA GÖKSİNGÖL
Make-up	GÜLCAN BAYAR ÖGE
Prod. Manager	ARDA TOPALOĞLU

A ZEYNOFILM, NBC FILM, PYRAMIDE PRODUCTIONS, BIM DISTRIBUZIONE production
in association with IMAJ and with the participation of the
MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE DU TOURISME TURC, EURIMAGES and CNC

CAST

Eyüp	YAVUZ BİNGÖL
Hacer	HATICE ASLAN
Ismail	AHMET RIFAT SUNGAR
Servet	ERCAN KESAL
Bayram	CAFER KÖSE
The Child	GÜRKAN AYDIN

www.zeitgeistfilms.com

Press photos are available for download through

<http://www.zeitgeistfilms.com/film.php?directoryname=threemonkeys&mode=downloads>

Turkey, 2008

109 min., Color

In Turkish with English subtitles

HD-Scope, Dolby SRD

SYNOPSIS

After his critically acclaimed mood pieces *Distant* and *Climates*, Turkey's leading filmmaker moves in a more plot-driven direction while retaining his mastery of ambience and nuance. Winner of the Best Director prize at Cannes, *Three Monkeys* tells a twisty, noirish tale that opens with an ambitious politician fleeing a hit-and-run accident. Afraid of hurting his election chances, he pays off his chauffeur, Eyüp, to take the rap.

The film concerns the effects of this devil's bargain on Eyüp's shiftless son Ismail (who sees an expensive new car as his ticket to salvation), and on his restless wife, Hacer (who develops an ill-deserved passion for the oily politico). Ismail's discovery of his mother's infidelity and Eyüp's suspicions after he gets out of jail crank up the simmering tensions in a household already haunted by hidden ghosts.

In the spirit of Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* and Haneke's *Caché*, *Three Monkeys* mounts a caustic critique of the bourgeois family, riddled with hypocrisy yet stubbornly resilient in its seemingly boundless capacity to sidestep guilt and accountability. As in his previous films, Ceylan is unsurpassed at evoking both emotional and haunting cityscapes. The wintry vistas of *Distant* are supplanted here by sweltering seaside summerscapes rife with thundering trains and lowering clouds that portend a day of reckoning repeatedly—but perhaps not endlessly—deferred.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Since the beginning of my early youth, what has most intrigued, perplexed and at the same time scared me, has been the realization of that unprecedented wide scope of what goes on in the human psyche. It has always astonished me to see in the human soul the coexistence of the power to rule and the potential to forgive, the interest in the most holy and that of the lowest banality, and love and hate. For this reason, dealing with the qualities of our inner world - which cannot be formulated rationally - and trying to comprehend it, has always been the foremost reason for me in making films. This film aims to present that kind of emotional and psychological situation together with a plot loaded with the violence of complicated events evolving between four main characters. We have tried to dramatize the abstract thoughts, beliefs and conceptual conflicts that deeply engage our minds by personifying them in these characters.

What intrigues us the most here is the deviation that messes up the whole, the ancillary road that separates from the main road. For example, that moment when a very brave person suddenly gets weak in the knees with fear or that moment when a coward suddenly turns brave... It is the endeavor to try to understand human nature and ourselves and depict that through these types of deviations.

—Nuri Bilge Ceylan

INTERVIEW WITH NURI BILGE CEYLAN

How did you get the initial idea for the *Three Monkeys* screenplay?

One generally forgets the very first motivations for a project... I think that the first scene that came to mind was the image of a son hitting his mother. What reason would provoke such an improbable situation? Writing a screenplay is a very chaotic process. For this film it was more complicated than for my previous ones and made it necessary to bring in a co-screenwriter.

This would be the actor who plays the part of the politician?

Yes, but I started with my wife Ebru. For *Climates*, she had given me key ideas, like the motorcycle accident, but she didn't want to appear as screenwriter in the credits. I decided to work with her again on this new film. She knows me very well, which cuts down on explanations! We rented a house in the mountains, where we worked for a few months. But the story became more and more complex, and we decided to invite our friend Ercan Kesal to join our team. He is a doctor and runs a hospital. He had done his military service in far-off regions and excelled at recounting colorful memories of it. For three months, we saw each other every day for sessions of about four hours, during which we talked about the screenplay and the characters. Every day I gave them 'homework' on specific scenes for the following day. But I have to say that the architecture of the screenplay is really the work of Ebru, who, once again, gave me the screenplay's key ideas. As for Ercan, it was his first writing experience. He's also been involved in politics, which is why the character he plays is a politician.

The political aspect is never really fleshed out in the film... We just know he's a candidate in the elections, a man of power.

The important thing is that he was able to have this affair with the wife of the man who is in prison because of him. When he loses the elections, he has to hold in the violence he feels inclined to due to his humiliation. During the shoot, there were elections in Turkey, which allowed us to get footage – left out in the editing process – and record interesting atmospheric sound. We made up an imaginary political party for him.

Certain critics, who had categorised you as an 'autobiographical' filmmaker, were surprised by this film's very elaborate storyline.

All my previous films are works of fiction, even if I act in them! It's easy to make mistakes when interpreting a work: if I had used an existing party, people would immediately have taken that to entail a political message, while my concerns here are more existential than political.

There are almost melodramatic elements in this screenplay.

I really like the melodramatic elements as one finds them in popular Turkish cinema. Turkish filmgoers, myself included, are crazy about them. I wanted to borrow those themes and reappropriate them in a realistic way. Most melodramas involve unrealistic situations, which become acceptable if you treat them realistically. For me, the essence of life is melodramatic, especially in Turkey!

Do you only broach this question of realism during the shoot, or is it already a concern in the writing stage?

In the writing. But sometimes one doesn't realize until the moment of shooting that something doesn't work and what was written should be tweaked. You have to be very wary. For example, when the mother comes back home and shows her son the money the politician has given her, the son rejoices in the screenplay. During the shoot that didn't work, and he ended up being more contrarian...

... Because he suspects his mother's infidelity?

Not necessarily. As Nietzsche said, there are two tragedies in life: to not attain one's goal and – worse – to attain one's goal. They're doing something dangerous without the father's approval. During the shoot, the credibility of the scene was not dictated by logic, but by intuition.

This wish to treat melodramatic codes realistically brings Fassbinder to mind...

Certainly. And also Bergman, I think.

What seems to interest you most is what goes on inside the characters' heads, which is maybe the hardest thing to translate cinematically.

Yes, I like to explore the soul of the characters. The cinema is maybe not as powerful as literature for that. It's still a young art, but I don't have the impression that on this track, the cinema has produced a body of work equal to that of Dostoevski. Maybe one day filmmakers will manage that. What interests me is to try and understand what is generated in the deepest realm

of human nature. It's only by getting to know your own dark side better that you can hope to improve oneself.

How did you find the title?

Very late! It comes from Confucius' philosophy, where, in fact, the three monkeys have a positive meaning that represents goodness: to not hear evil, not see it and not talk about it. In the film, the son pretends that he hasn't seen his mother commit adultery, the father pretends that he hasn't heard his boss's voice on the phone, and the mother lies to the other two. In our days, though, the metaphor of the three monkeys is used in a negative way, to denounce the hypocrisy of appearances.

You seem to be more interested in consequences than in 'pure' action. An accident and a murder occur in the film, but you don't show them on screen.

I shot the accident, but I didn't keep it in editing. If I show too much action, that risks eclipsing the other moments of the film.

Why didn't you take charge of the film's photography yourself, as you did for *Uzak*?

I adore working with my chief cameraman, Gokhan Tiryaki. I had hired him for *Climates*, because I couldn't frame the shots while playing the leading role. And I kept him on this film. He has very stimulating ideas and gives me a lot, even though I decide the camera and light placement. Then I control everything on the monitor, which is easier than working the frame. This gives me an overall vision and allows me to better focus on the actors.

Exactly which ideas did you have regarding the image of this film?

I wanted everything to be focused on the three members of that family. Therefore I insisted on visually isolating them from the surrounding world. Initially I had even planned never to show faces other than theirs! I also wanted to create around them a particular chromatic atmosphere, consisting of desaturated colors, which I accomplished in post-production. I wanted a less naturalistic and more stylized image than that of my previous films. I had decided to create my own visual universe, which I probably would have done on earlier projects had I had more skill.

It's particularly suited to this somber, tragic story...

I don't know if one should exaggerate its significance. Those are the images of my soul. They correspond to my worldview of the past twenty years. And now, I manage to technically achieve what I want better than before. My character is pretty somber! And I fight for life to be more bearable.

As far as isolating the characters is concerned, there are certain scenes shot in close-up, but the fight with the lover toward the end of the film was shot from afar.

There were cries, violent action... The kind of thing I don't like to show too much. It seemed enough to shoot it from a distance.

But there is also very violent action when the husband and wife have a fight in the room, where you keep the close-up...

The setting was too small for me to put the camera further away! But in that scene the violence is mostly dormant: you wait for it to explode, but it's deferred, so the close-up is allowed for. The other scene, by contrast, is violent from the start.

We could assume someone is watching them from afar, no doubt the son.

Yes, I wanted to give that impression, especially since I'm shooting them from behind the bushes. But I wanted to let ambiguity linger. They could also be observed by the father.

How did you find the setting of that house? Did you have it built?

We didn't have the means for that! One day, while passing by the railroad, I noticed that house. At first I hesitated to choose it: it was almost too good a fit, as if it had been constructed for the film. I was looking for a more banal-looking, more realistic house. The connection between the terrace and the interior wasn't at all what I had imagined. I didn't want to show the sea, I found that too beautiful. What sold me on it was the proximity to the railroad: one of the titles envisaged for the film was "The Sound of the Trains". The spaces of the house were too small to film: they enforced on us an interesting scenography, since the camera and the crew often had to position themselves in another room than the characters. Generally speaking I'm not very demanding in terms of locations, and I adapt very easily to natural settings. If I had shot in another house, I would have created a specific atmosphere for it. When you decide to shoot in a certain setting, you force yourself to make the best possible use of it. As the screenplay had been written before the house was chosen, I had to change the writing considerably in function of the setting. I had written it with a balcony in mind, and not the big terrace that ended up playing an important role. To be able to adapt is part of the work of *mise-en-scène*. I'm someone very practical on the set. I don't change the meaning of the film, but I adapt very easily. That's what I mean when I compare myself to a chameleon.

How did you find the other actors?

We had to speed up preparations for the shoot because of the elections I wanted to film...

... And which you left out in the editing...

Yes, it's always like that with me! But we had to get the cast together in fifteen days. The casting director had only been able to find the young man. I had sent my assistant out to film people in the street! For the father and the mother, we placed ads in the papers, and we did many screentests. I didn't manage to find a convincing actor for the role of the father. Then I remembered this man I had met during a Turkish film festival in Strasbourg. He is a well-known singer in Turkey, who has acted on television. When I saw the tests I had no doubt: he was the father. The mother is a theatre actress, who also acted in television series.

How did you work with them?

Every actor is different. You have to create a method for everyone. The mother acted way too theatrically, which I had to incessantly fight against. I cheated a lot by having the camera roll without telling her, while she was rehearsing. For certain delicate scenes, I left the camera rolling in the kitchen while she was rehearsing there all alone! Nobody was watching her, and she appeared much more natural. During that time I watched the take on the monitor in another room! Then I went back and said "We're going to shoot!" and often she wouldn't do as well... For the father I started by filming exactly what was written, to 'make sure'; then I shot variations,

asking him to improvise. I would ask him “If you were in the character’s place, how would you react?” And sometimes, he would come up with better things than I could have imagined.

The character of the son is maybe the most difficult to embody; he speaks little, he’s enigmatic...

The first week I didn’t think he was good. He was very stressed. He’s a young actor who had just come out of a dramatic arts school, and it was his first role. But as of the second week, he was amazing.

It must be even more difficult to direct actors when there is very little dialogue.

Yes, especially theatre actors: they feel obliged to fill silences with useless mimicry; those are the most difficult moments to play. That’s when I have to cheat and let the camera roll without telling them. With the chief cameraman, we always had to be on alert to capture the unexpected. We perfected a code with words that we changed on a daily basis to have the camera roll without the actors knowing! Therefore I never use a clapboard. Given all this I shot twice as much footage on this film than on *Climates*. I have to add that when I was playing the leading role myself, it was difficult to have the camera roll in secret!

What did the digital high definition shoot do for you on this film compared to your other films?

Climates was shot with the same camera. But the whole difference consists of the digital process in post-production. It’s not the camera that makes the difference; everybody uses the same one! It’s been known for a long time in photography: photographers can use the same camera, but what matters is the work done after the shoot, on the print. The definition of the image is not the most important thing. What’s essential is the density of the image, to be able to decide which part of the image will have which density. That’s what imparts depth and meaning: you decide that the corners will be darker, that the blacks will be more dense in a particular section of the frame, etc. Thus you can retouch every shot as if you were painting a picture. For example, when the boy follows his father toward the railroad, he is shot from the house in a high angle, as if the mother were watching him. In the film there is a big shadow on the terrace, which darkens the image. That shadow wasn’t there in the original take, yet it’s what gives the shot its force.

Is it true that *Three Monkeys* was inspired by an Yılmaz Güney film?

The film’s point of origin resembles a film by Güney I like a lot, namely *The Father*, but that’s where the influence ends. It’s the story of a rich man whose son commits a murder, and who pays the caretaker of his property to turn himself in in the son’s place. Güney plays the part of the caretaker, who spends years in prison...

Your soundtrack is very carefully crafted; it calls to mind the cinema of Bresson.

Robert Bresson is one of my great examples. To convey certain things, the image is useless; sound suffices. But I never think of this during the shoot. Everything comes together in sound editing and mixing. It is extremely difficult to take decisions regarding sound. Possibilities are infinite, every sound can create a different event. This is the first time I don’t use any music in a film, which pleases me. The only exception is the song that makes up the ring tone of the cell phone.

Where does that song come from?

When we were shooting *Climates*, in the far East of Turkey, we were removed from everything. One night, we were obliged to sleep in the crew bus. The cold woke us up in the dead of night, and the motor refused to start. If we stayed there, we were going to die of cold. So we started to walk. We noticed a light in the distance, and when we knocked on the door of this place, there were three young people around a fire. One of them told us he was in love with a girl. In Turkey, to get married, you have to give money to the family of the bride. He had been scraping for two years to get the required sum together, and said that he'd have to work five more years to manage that. In the background, this love song was playing! I've never forgotten either the encounter or the song.

BIOGRAPHIES / FILMOGRAPHIES

Director NURI BILGE CEYLAN

Nuri Bilge Ceylan was born in Istanbul, Turkey, 1959. After graduating from Engineering Department of Bosphorus University, Istanbul, he studied filmmaking for two years at Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul.

- 2008 THREE MONKEYS
Cannes 2008 – Winner Best Director
- 2006 CLIMATES (IKLIMLER)
- 2003 DISTANT (UZAK)
Cannes 2003 – Winner Grand Prix and Best Actor
- 1999 CLOUDS OF MAY (NUAGES DE MAI)
- 1997 THE SMALL TOWN (KASABA)
Berlin 1998 – Prix Caligari
- 1995 COCOON (KOZA)

AWARDS

- 2008 Cannes Film Festival
WINNER Best Director
- 2008 Asia-Pacific Screen Awards
WINNER Best Director
- 2008 Osian's Cinefan Film Festival
WINNER Best Director
- 2008 "Manaki Brothers" Film Camera Festival
WINNER Mosfilm Award for Cinematography
- 2008 Haifa Film Festival
WINNER Best Film (Golden Anchor)