



NEW RELEASES

About Dry Grasses (Kuru Otlar Üstüne)

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Director: Nuri Bilge Ceylan

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an NBC Film, Memento Production, Komplizen Film production

Executive Producer: Mediha Didem Türemen

Assistant Director: Yıldız Asanboga

Castling: Pinar Gök

Script Writers: Akin Aksu, Ebru Ceylan, Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Directors of Photography: Cevahir Şahin, Kürşat Üresin

Visual Effects by: Mojo FX

Editors: Oğuz Atabaş, Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Production Designer: Meral Aktan

Costume Designer: Gülşah Yüksel

Make-up (Winter): Nur Morkoç

Make-up (Summer): Nuriye Gündoğdu

Hair (Summer): Fazlı Balci

Hair (Winter): Fatih Yücel

Sound Engineer: Fatih Aydoğdu

Re-recording Mixer: Jean-Pierre Laforce

Sound Editor: Clément Laforce

Cast:

Deniz Celiloğlu (*Samet*)

Merve Dizdar (*Nuray*)

Musab Ekici (*Kenan*)

Ece Bağcı (*Sevim*)

Erdem Şenocak (*Tolga*)

Yüksel Aksu (*veterinary Vahit*)

Münir Can Cindoruk (*Feyyaz*)

Onur Berk Arslanoğlu (*Principal Bekir*)

Yıldırım Gücük (*director of education*)

Cengiz Bozkurt (*Nail*)

S.Emrah Özdemir (*sergeant*)

Elif Ürse (*Assistant Principal Saime*)

Turkey-France-Germany-Sweden-Qatar 2023©

197 mins

Digital

A Picturehouse Entertainment release

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**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

The latest work from the Turkish auteur behind *Once upon a Time in Anatolia* and *Winter Sleep* is an arresting, character-driven study of loneliness and self-interest. Samet, an art teacher assigned to a small school in Eastern Anatolia, is weary of his remote surroundings and tedious village life, and longs to be reposted to his native Istanbul. He finds distraction in his favourite student and protégée Sevim, who receives special attention from him. However, this leads to an accusation of inappropriate behaviour. As the arrogant and nihilistic Samet unravels when faced with the charges, Ceylan delves into the man's self-absorption and bitterness. A philosophical and novelistic drama, set against the striking and beautifully framed landscapes of Anatolia, *About Dry Grasses* once again features Ceylan's signature verbal sparring between characters. A magnificent Merve Dizdar, who plays a fellow teacher tackling existential questions with Samet, took home the Best Actress prize from Cannes for her captivating performance.

Kimberley Sheehan, Film and Events Programmer

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *About Dry Grasses* premiered at Cannes in 2023, a few days after a closely run, ideologically charged Turkish election which threw up questions about the country's future course. Ceylan's wordy, quietly unpredictable ninth feature is all about taking the pulse of the nation, albeit in oblique fashion, as the travails of a teacher in the vast snowy landscape of eastern Anatolia eventually open out into a portrait of Turkey being pulled in many different directions – one that easily modulates between the intimate and the expansive. While this topicality certainly adds thrust to the film's cerebral, ever further spiralling ponderings, the mood it taps into resonates beyond its specific setting. Here and elsewhere, hope and weariness long since lie side by side.

Samet is an art teacher in the last year of a compulsory placement at a village school, already dreaming of moving somewhere more urban. This perhaps explains his only half-hearted interest in Nuray – a fellow teacher at a nearby school who returned to the region after losing her leg in a suicide bombing, and who strikes up a bond with Samet's colleague and housemate Kenan.

Samet seems well-liked by the local community, colleagues and pupils, though he's not above favouritism, as expressed by the small mirror he gives to the giggly Sevim, a girl from one of his classes who hangs on his every word. In a routine bag inspection, the mirror is discovered along with a love letter; Samet's mishandling of this delicate situation reveals more unpleasant sides of his character as well as the precariousness of someone in his position. When he and Kenan are accused of inappropriate behaviour, it seems a matter of time before the situation explodes.

As usual in Ceylan's recent films, the plot advances less through action than across dialogue scenes that would feel classical if not for their length. The focus is on telling over showing, aside from the scenes of the snow-covered landscape that break up all the talk, like the blank pages separating chapters of a novel.

NEW RELEASES

About Dry Grasses Kuru Otlar Üstüne

From Fri 26 Jul

I Saw the TV Glow

From Fri 26 Jul

Sky Peals

From 9 August

Kneecap

From 23 August

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Alma's Rainbow

From 2 August

Werckmeister Harmonies

Werckmeister Harmoniak

From 2 August

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Collecting texture and nuance is the order of the day, through secondary characters and references to the many diverse folds of Turkish society. In the aftermath of the accusation, the tetchy, hugely detailed, ethically minded conversations between different permutations of Samet, Kenan, the headteacher and the board of education start to feel as exhausting for the viewer as they must be for the characters; and it seems that this restrained rural take on cancel culture and its procedures is going to be the film's primary concern.

But this plotline unexpectedly recedes into the background once Samet sees Nuray beginning to respond to Kenan's interest and reconsiders his feelings for her. Samet and Nuray's subsequent all-night conversation may be just as protracted, but varies greatly in tone, tenor and presentation from the previous ones, as if to underline the various functions dialogue can perform.

As Nuray's left-leaning, action-oriented ethos rubs up against Samet's solipsistic desire to merely complain from the sidelines, two contrasting approaches as to how one should navigate life in this 'land of unending setbacks' come into focus, as does an ambivalent, yet still deeply felt romantic connection between two wary individuals – macro and micro, individual and collective perfectly intertwined. This in turn forges a link back to the opening plotline, as Samet at once embodies a specific teacher in a specific place and a general attitude towards how the youth of today are seen and treated by those responsible for guiding them into the world; a thin line divides affection from control.

The presentation of Samet and Nuray's talks progressively deviates from the traditional shot-countershot set-up of the previous scenes – just one example of how Ceylan creates a veneer of formal conventionality in order to splinter it on occasion to exhilarating, thematically cogent effect.

The photos Samet has taken of villagers appear sporadically across the film as hyperreal portraits of social archetypes which jut out obliquely from the narrative, just as the vision of the world Nuray seeks to capture in her paintings, seen hanging on the wall in her house, is suddenly conjured up on the soundtrack. The moment when one character doesn't so much break the fourth wall as actually step out of the plot and onto the film set is further evidence of Ceylan's formal audacity, as well as a fitting reminder that the world on screen and the one we inhabit are always touching. When Nuray asks Samet what he's doing for the world, she's also asking us.

James Lattimer, *Sight and Sound*, July 2024