

Once upon a time in Anatolia: In which what is revealed is not at all what we expect....

At just over two and a half hours, this fourth effort by the directorial minimalist master, Nuri Ceylan, will probably deter many viewers. From the fade-in, however, fans of Ceylan will be immediately drawn into - once again almost voyeuristically through a dirty glass window as the scene focuses - the ordinary lives of three men sharing a meal, drinks, conversation and jokes at a run-down garage somewhere in Anatolia. Voices are so muffled we can't hear what is being said. We don't know who these men are.

Heavy traffic crisscrosses the scene, occasionally obscuring the view; outside, a dog barks. One of the men picks up food and, as the scene widens to show the darkly brooding night sky crashing with thunder (almost a Ceylan trademark in movies), he takes the food to the dog, gives it a pat, looks around and up, and returns to his meal and the others. Fade to black.

Next fade-in (next day? next week? who knows?) at dusk, we see on the horizon, from a high vantage-point, three sets of headlights which eventually stop nearby to disgorge many police and others, perhaps a dozen men in all. In the dimming light, we can just see one of the men is handcuffed. None of the faces are clearly seen. And, as the story now gets under way, we discover that two of the men are somehow involved in the death of another person, and efforts are now in progress to find a buried body.

So ... we settle back comfortably to watch how director Ceylan unravels the mystery for us: the who, what, where, how and why of all good mysteries. All well and good, except for one thing: the real story here is not actually about finding a body somewhere in these Anatolian hills, nor who it is, how and why the death happened, or even when.

The real story is certainly about a death, though - an almost unbelievably poignant, pointless death which is revealed and discussed between two of the officials as the whole search party continues to travel through the night, from place to place, up hill and down dale, hour after hour, until eventually, the accused man - who looks familiar - correctly pinpoints where the corpse lies. From there, the body's taken to the local hospital for autopsy and official report. The two accused are taken to the local lockup.

By this time, and no longer comfortable, we don't really care much about that issue, that sordid little side affair, whatever it was about. What's more important is the outcome between those two officials who wrestled, quietly vehemently, emotionally and psychologically about guilt, forgiveness and justice through much of the night and into the day. And all of which shows again the creativity and skill of Nuri Ceylan, his actors and his production team in creeping into viewers' minds so effectively. Again.

The setting is bleakly appropriate, recalling landscape imagery we saw in *No Country for Old Men* (2007); but this one uses that type of vista for most of the time. Moreover, the two movies each have no music soundtrack which, for this viewer, is always a welcome omission. The script and acting are simply superb.

Nuri Ceylan (and don't forget his wife, Ebru, who helps write and produce) is, IMHO, one of the best directors on this planet; arguably the best I've seen at mood-setting static and long takes, and facial close-ups; and, along with Ebru, brings some of the most innovative stories I've seen in all my 70 viewing years. Together, (if you'll excuse the hyperbole) they're the Turkish Dream Team of Cinema. Long may they continue to develop and produce the highest quality cinematic experience.

Recommended for all to see.

Rating: 9

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