



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

ABOUT DRY GRASSES (Kuru Otlar Üstüne) (15)

Director: Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Starring: Deniz Celiloglu, Merve Dizdar, Musab Ekici

Turkey/France/Germany/Sweden, 2023, 3 hours 17 minutes, Turkish + Eng subtitles

Samet [Deniz Celiloglu] is a young Art teacher who is assigned to teach in the rural village of Incesu, eastern Anatolia. The assignment is mandatory and Samet has no choice. He longs for the day when he can return to a post in cosmopolitan Istanbul.

Samet goes out of his way to display very little empathy or interest in his pupils or villagers of Incesu. He does however form a connection, if not a friendship with Kenan [Musab Ekici], his more thoughtful fellow teacher and housemate.

Samet enters his final term and inches closer to leaving Incesu and returning to Istanbul. He can at last see light at the end of his dismal tunnel but hope may be extinguished as both he and Kenan face allegations of inappropriate behavior with female pupils. The allegations are ill defined but one of Samet's few consolations during his time in Incesu has been an affectionate relationship with teenage Sevim [Ece Bagci]. Samet may have crossed boundaries and the consequences may put paid to his ambition of a teaching post in Istanbul.

It is the characters not the plot which drives the film along, albeit at a very slow pace. As cracks develop in the school there is a developing underlying theme of cracks in Turkish society with references to Kurdish independence, exemplified by the character of Nuray [Merve Dizdar], who is also a teacher. Her relationship with both Samet and Kenan adds complexity to the plot.

Ceylan was originally a well know and award-winning photographer before turning to film. His previous films have included *Three Monkeys* [2008], *Once upon a Time in Anatolia* [2011] and *Winter Sleep* [2014]

Peter Bradshaw writing for **The Guardian** 20 May 2023 gave the film 4 out of 5 stars and was impressed; "The Turkish auteur Nuri Bilge Ceylan has delivered another of his expansive, ruminative and distinctly Chekhovian character-driven dramas. Again, it is spread out across the landscape of Anatolia, and again there is Ceylan's emphasis on still photography and portraiture. This film does however have one very atypical touch: a very startling and Brechtian meta-moment when we are reminded this is a film we're watching, and the tiny and flickeringly firelit interiors are created on a soundstage."

It is no doubt the combination of Ceylan's background in still photography and the influence of Chekhov and Brecht which results in a film lasting over 3 hours, but where there is a possibility of the ordinary becoming profound. There are many lingering scenes of characters staring into the Anatolian landscape, which viewers will find beautiful and stunning but might also leave them wanting more plot. If viewers are in the second camp, they might want to look for the plot, or at least the message hidden inside the more-simple narrative.

Speaking to **The Hollywood Reporter**, 27 May 2023 Ceylan said; "The films that bore me most at the beginning have become the most important films of my life...The biggest decisions of our lives generally come right after the biggest boredoms. Boredom has the potential to put the people in the right mental state to be able to sense the hardest truths."

Preview courtesy of Picturehouse Entertainment Notes compiled by Adrian Rhead