

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Three Monkeys 2008

Nuri Bilge Ceylan

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OVERVIEW

Nuri Bilge Ceylan has won the best director award from the Cannes Film Festival with *Three Monkeys* (Üç Maymun). Even though Ceylan has received awards from many national and international festivals, in Turkey he is mostly associated with Cannes.

Three Monkeys is a film about evil, money, crime, and deception from the perspective of a lower-middle class. The title of the film comes from the three monkeys which embody the principle “see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil”, one of them covering her eyes, one of them her mouth, and the last covering her ears. All the characters in the film are guilty of turning a blind eye to crime.

CINEMATIC NARRATION

One of the striking features of the film is the use of location as a character. In addition to being an element that emphasizes dramatic situations, relationships, and the emotional changes in the characters, location also becomes a tool of expression on its own, creating meaning, and communicating a feeling or an idea. The house, in other words the place that the family in the story inhabits, also represents the family and the three monkeys. The glass room door which allows anything that happens behind it to be better heard and seen; the connections of the rooms between each other; the terrace and the street door that are too weak to defend from outside threats; and in the final scene the external image of the building with train tracks in front it, its paint and coating coming off, and standing solitary, render the building as a character that contains the events inside it and comments on them.

The close-ups of characters in *Three Monkeys* allow the viewer to read on their face the changing ideas and emotions, the evil side of human beings, and their inner conflicts without needing to hear their words.

SYNOPSIS

A businessman and a candidate for the parliament, Servet hits and kills someone with his car. He offers money to his driver Eyüp to take the blame for him. While Eyüp is incarcerated, his son İsmail who fails the exam for university admission wants to buy a car and use it as a school transportation vehicle for students. Unable to find a job for his son, his mother Hacer asks money from Servet. Servet gives the money and he starts an affair with her. Hacer mistakes the affair for love and falls for Servet. İsmail learns about the affair when he catches them in the house but he does not say anything to his father. Eyüp finishes his sentence and gets released from jail after 9 months. He starts to get suspicious of Hacer's behavior and of the money that Servet gave for the car. Servet puts an end to his affair with Hacer. İsmail murders Servet. Hacer and Servet's affair is revealed. Eyüp offers money to the coffeehouse apprentice Bayram to take the blame of his son's crime.

THE PLOT

The accident. At night, Servet is driving on a deserted, narrow road. He is sleepy and he dozes off occasionally. Just then the sound of brakes is heard. Servet has hit and killed someone. The body is sprawled on the road and another car approaches, stops for a second and moves on. Until the other car drives away, Servet hides behind a tree by the road.

The call. Eyüp wakes up to the sound of his phone ringing during the night. The caller is Servet. Eyüp's son also wakes up to the sound, goes to the toilet.

The crime. Eyüp meets with Servet by the seaside. They sit on a bench and talk. Servet is a candidate member for the parliament. The elections are coming soon. He offers money to Servet to take the blame for the crime.

Visiting the father. Hacer wakes her son İsmail. İsmail takes the commuter train to the jail, to visit his father. Eyüp enjoins İsmail to work hard for the university admission exam.

Plans for the future. İsmail has failed the exam. He tells her mother that he will ask for the money Servet promised Eyüp before Eyüp is released, that he wants to spend the money to buy a car and use it as a private vehicle to carry students to school and back. Hacer opposes the idea, saying that Eyüp would not approve. Hacer makes some calls to find a job for İsmail. Nothing comes out of it.

The fight. Hacer falls asleep on the couch while watching the election results. İsmail comes home with a bloody bandage covering his hand. He silently goes to his room, careful not to wake his mother up. Hacer wakes up and turns the TV off. Then she sees drops of blood on the floor. She opens the door of İsmail's room. İsmail's face is covered in bruises, his shirt is torn, his hand is wounded.

Without Eyüp knowing. Hacer goes to Servet's office to ask for money. The election results have been announced and Servet has lost. Someone calls him under the pretense of asking how he is doing. On the phone, Servet speaks nonchalantly about his loss. After he hangs up, he swears at the caller and chews his secretary out for "connecting anyone who calls, letting anyone in who comes". Hacer gets uncomfortable. When Servet realizes that Eyüp is unaware that Hacer is asking for the money, he starts to observe her. At that point Hacer's phone rings and she rummages around her purse looking for it.

The bus-stop. Hacer has left the office and she is headed towards the bus-stop. Servet watches her from his window. While Hacer waits for the bus, Servet approaches with his car and offers her to drive her home. Hacer hesitates, says that she would like to wait for the bus and she refuses politely but Servet insists. A car behind Servet honks at him to clear the way. Servet gets out of the car to pick a fight with the other driver but changes his mind when he sees there are three strong men inside. Servet persuades Hacer to get in. He only talks about himself during the drive. Near her house, Hacer thanks Servet and is about to get out of the car when Servet tries to make an impression on her, saying: "I would do anything for you."

Being deceived. Hacer is home. She has been charmed by Servet's interest. İsmail notices Hacer's elated mood. The money would arrive a week later. They watch a Turkish film on TV.

Hacer's secret affair. İsmail and Hacer is invited to a wedding. While getting ready for the evening, Hacer's phone rings. She closes her door so that she is not heard. At the wedding, Hacer talks with someone on the phone again. İsmail watches her from afar, he has realized that his mother is hiding something.

Deceiving. İsmail goes to the train station on his way to visit Eyüp and deliver him some stuff that he needs. He is pensive while he waits for the train. He pukes then he goes back home to clean up and change his clothes. He hears sounds coming from his mother's room. He watches from the keyhole. At that point his eyes fall on a bread knife in the kitchen. He thinks for a moment then he takes his things and silently leaves the house. Hiding behind a car on the street, he waits. After a while Servet leaves the house. İsmail goes back in. He asks Hacer why she is home, asks her who visited. Hacer lies. İsmail slaps his mother a couple of times. She bursts in to tears. In a rage İsmail grabs his bag and leaves again for the train station and there he stays until late evening.

Behind bars. Another day, İsmail goes to visit his father in jail. Eyüp notices that something is going on with his son. The visiting hour is over. Just as İsmail is about to leave, he calls after Eyüp as if he is about to tell him about the affair between his mother and Servet but changes his mind at the last moment.

The subconscious of the family. İsmail returns home and sees an envelope full of money on the nightstand. He lies down on his bed. The street door opens by itself. A soaking wet boy dripping water on the floor enters. İsmail tightly closes his eyes but when he opens them back the boy is still there.

The car. Eyüp's sentence is over. With the car he bought, İsmail takes his father from the jail. On the road, Eyüp asks how much they paid for the car. He gets angry for not being asked or told about it and he starts to shout at him. Then he asks who asked for the money from Servet, and who received it. İsmail tries to lie but he fails. They visit the cemetery and go to İsmail's brother's grave. Eyüp pulls the weeds, washes the headstone.

Spying on. Hacer calls Servet all throughout the day. Servet does not answer his phone. She goes to Servet's home. He is about to get on his car with his wife and kid. Hacer watches them from afar for a while. Servet sees Hacer but he gets on the car and drives away. Hacer has gotten carried away by her feelings. She feels bad about Servet ignoring her.

Suspicion. At home, Hacer is in the shower and her phone is ringing in her purse. Eyüp reaches inside Hacer's purse but he stops when the ringing stops too. After a while the phone rings again. Eyüp finds the phone inside the purse, the caller ID is hidden, he answers. Servet starts talking without waiting for an answer, and in a bad temper he asks why she came to his house. Eyüp does not recognize the voice and asks him who he is calling. Servet hangs up. Eyüp is on the terrace while Hacer gets out of the shower, she lies on the bed waiting for him. Eyüp enters the room. He starts to interrogate Hacer about the money. He climbs on top of her, and trapping her with his body he threatens her with physical violence. Then he changes his mind and goes to the kitchen. At that point the phone rings again. Eyüp reenters the bedroom and he throws Hacer back on the bed and starts to caress her. He notices that Hacer's heart is not in it. While he tries find out why, they start shouting at each other. Hacer bursts into laughter. While Eyüp goes on manhandling her, asking questions, Hacer's laughter turns into weeping. Eyüp leaves the house in a rage. In the evening he goes to the coffeehouse and sits there until late in the evening. Bayram, the apprentice to the coffeehouse is living and sleeping there while working just for food. After everyone leaves, Bayram treats Eyüp to a tea and they talk.

The debt is paid. Eyüp goes to Servet's office. He receives the money for taking the blame of Servet's crime. He asks Servet whether he took out the money he gave to Hacer beforehand. Servet answers that that money does not matter.

Being mistaken. Somewhere deserted by the seaside Hacer meets with Servet. Servet blows up at her, says that they are done, and he hurls insults at Hacer. Hacer begs him not to leave her, she hangs onto his legs.

İsmail's choice. During the night, late in the morning İsmail comes home. Eyüp is asleep on the couch while Hacer is in her bed. Moments later there is a knock on the door. The police are here.

The police station. Servet has been murdered. The police take statements from Hacer first and then Eyüp. They ask Eyüp if he knows about the affair between Hacer and Servet.

The confession. They return home. Eyüp goes to bed. Behind his back the arm of a kid reaches out and hugs him. Eyüp cries. Hacer is on the terrace. İsmail comes and sits by her, he says that he killed Servet. The kid gets up from Eyüp's side and leaves the room. Eyüp goes to the terrace. While Hacer is preparing to throw herself off the roof, Eyüp hides in an alcove. He waits there covered in sweat. Just then a train passes by. As the noise of the train recedes into the distance, Hacer's cries become audible. Eyüp moves out of his hiding place to have a look. Hacer is holding the hand of İsmail and she is crying.

The smaller fish. Three of them are sitting in the living room and İsmail is crying. Eyüp sends him off to bed and leaves the house. Hacer calls after him and asks where he is going. Eyüp gets angry, swears, he shouts "Throw yourself off from there", and he dashes down the stairs. After a while he comes back. Hacer has actually climbed on the wall of the terrace. She sees Eyüp coming. It's as if she is waiting for a sign from him asking her not to jump. First Eyüp says nothing. But in the end, he says "Don't be ridiculous" and leaves. He starts a slow walk down empty streets. The call for morning prayer is being recited from minarets. He goes to the mosque and sits there. He walks to the police station and stops in front of it. He goes to the coffeehouse. It is not open yet. Bayram is asleep inside. He knocks at the door and wakes him up. He offers him money to take the blame for his son's crime. Just like Servet did in the past, he tries to convince Bayram by talking about money, how comfortable he would be in jail, how hard

it must be to sleep in the coffeehouse during these cold winter months. He returns home. Hacer and İsmail are asleep.

THEMES

Crime . *Three Monkeys* is based on crimes born out of murder, lies and deception. However, the biggest crime in the film may still be the crime of trading in crime. First, Servet causes someone to die and he pays Eyüp to suffer the punishment in his place. At the end of the film this time İsmail becomes a murderer by killing Servet. Eyüp pays the coffeehouse apprentice Bayram to take the blame and suffer the punishment in İsmail's place. This is an economy where values are completely eradicated. Both Servet and Eyüp buy someone else's freedom. All characters know what the deal is but they play the three monkeys: "see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil".

Hacer's affair with Servet while Eyüp is in jail is another crime, another deception in the film. Like the crime of trading in crime, with deception comes a chain of other crimes: lies, murder, hypocrisy, taking advantage of others. The starting point of this chain of crimes in the story is Servet, who is a businessman and a politician. This is no different for him than an exchange of goods.

Evil . In interviews, Nuri Bilge Ceylan says that in *Three Monkeys* he tried to study evil. Sure enough, there is evil in the nature of crimes committed in the film. Yet maybe the greatest evil in the film is that of playing the three monkeys. Until other people become aware, those who commit the crime get away with it and live with it as an unseen, unheard, unknown evil. The striking part of *Three Monkeys* is that even when the crime is revealed it results in even more crimes and thus the evil lives on. Against the grain of mainstream film morality, *Three Monkeys* does not end with the punishment of evil and evil doers.

CHARACTERS

Eyüp	In his forties. Servet's driver.
Hacer	In his forties. Eyüp's wife. A worker.
İsmail	A high-school student. Eyüp and Hacer's son.
Servet	In his forties. A businessman and politician.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Eyüp . In his forties. The driver of Servet. He has a lower-middle class family with limited means. He is married to Hacer and has a son named İsmail. He has lost another son in the past. It is not revealed when and why his child died but the child's image in the film creates the impression that the cause of death was drowning. Eyüp is going through a moral bankruptcy.

Moral bankruptcy. Eyüp accepts Servet's offer to take the blame for his crime. This is of course mainly due to his low income, his need for money. Yet he compromises his honesty and he lies; he hides the real criminal. Later he gets suspicious of Hacer's relationship with Servet. When their affair is revealed, contrary to what may be assumed from a traditional man, he chooses to stay silent and not act. Instead he wants Hacer to kill herself. In the end, in order to save İsmail he buys Bayram's freedom, a poverty-stricken apprentice who has no one in his life. This change in Eyüp's character is an example of the identity corrosion prominent in contemporary society which is a result of power relations and economic ideologies.

Hacer . In her forties. Eyüp's wife. A worker. A helpless character.

Helpless. While Eyüp is in jail, Hacer falls for Servet's financial power and his words to draw her in. She does not have the capacity to evaluate what is true and the real intentions of Servet. She also does not assume responsibility for her attachment to Servet, her disappointment over Servet's break-up, her betrayal which is later revealed and the part she played in making his son a murderer. Instead she acts as if she is about to commit suicide, or at least she gives off that impression in order to plead for Eyüp's mercy and this also reveals how helpless a character she is.

İsmail . A high-school student. Eyüp and Hacer's son. Erratic.

Erratic. Generally, İsmail appears to be a quiet and easy-going person. However, he hangs out and fights with neighborhood good-for-nothings, he slaps her mom when he catches her with Servet in their house, and finally he murders Servet. All these indicate that his values have decayed just like his father Eyüp and that he is an erratic personality. Surely his youth also plays a role in the senseless choices he makes.

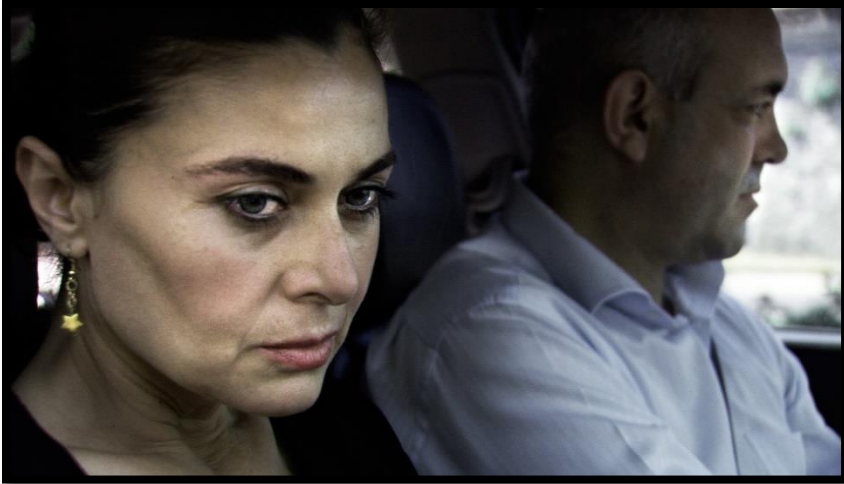
Servet In his forties. A businessman, a politician. Servet is exactly a product of his time and the system he works for, a character who embodies the moral corruption which is a result of neo-liberal ideologies. He has no moral values whatsoever. He is a hypocrite who only looks out for himself.

Self-interested. Servet hits someone as he drives his car while feeling sleepy. He runs from the scene of the crime, abandoning the person to his death on the road. Later, he asks Eyüp to take the blame of his crime. He uses his considerable financial power, Eyüp's limited means, and his class vulnerability in order to convince him.

Hypocrite. He has a relationship with Hacer based solely on sex. When he sees Hacer's passion, the meaning she ascribes to their relationship and to Servet, he pushes her away with threats and insults. By having the affair, he exploits Hacer's helplessness while he insults the honor of the man - as Eyüp would consider this act to be according to the traditional values he holds - who goes through punishment in jail in his place. A couple of scenes that tell us what kind of a person Servet is: the scene where Hacer comes to ask for money and he swears at a politician after hanging up on him, his degrading words to his secretary, his apologetic attitude in the bus stop when he gets out of his car to pick a fight with the driver behind him who honked and he sees that there are three men in the car with threatening looks.



İsmail visits his father in jail. There are things he cannot say to him.



Hacer and Servet.



Hacer: "I can't leave you"



Hacer's downfall.



Eyüp knows what he is doing.



Place as a character.