

Furniture" (2010), you return to your mother's apartment, in Tribeca, explaining that you suffer from "a postgraduation malaise." And, if you are the hero of "The Wild Pear Tree," you find yourself once more in Çan, a small town in the far west of Turkey, where you lie on your bed and read. It's as though you never went away.

"The Wild Pear Tree" is directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, whose movies are, in the most demanding sense, talkies. Conversation is to Ceylan as the clash of metal monsters is to Michael Bay, and there are times in the latest film when the chatterers seem unable to stop. The graduate, Sinan (Aydin Doğu Demirkol), finds a couple of young imams picking apples from a tree, like truant schoolboys; one is *in* the tree, and he has the nerve, having clambered down, to advise Sinan to be "prudent and deliberate." A theological debate ensues, both airy and ominous ("Who says free will is free?"), and continues during a stroll down a hill and then at a café table. Sinan glances at a newspaper. "Janet Jackson's started wearing the veil," he says. The imam is unimpressed. "Give me a break," he replies.

That exchange is one of many, none of which arrive at any conclusion. Out in the countryside, Sinan meets an old friend, Hatice (Hazar Ergüçlü), who can see her fate coming fast. "You know that place they call the house of matrimony? That's where I'm going," she says, leaning against a tree. (The arboreal theme, in line with the movie's title, is fairly constant.) Hatice removes her head scarf and lets the wind play havoc with her hair before kissing Sinan and biting him on the lip: a final gesture of

freedom and frustration. His own future is less locked down, not just because he's a man in an unequal culture but also because of his roving—and, it must be said, annoying—disposition. He's a surly sort, morose and easily nettled; if Adam Sandler made a desperate mid-career move into crime dramas, and shaved once a week, he'd look exactly like Sinan.

Nobody could accuse this film of blossoming with plot. Things keep on not happening. Even when we spy what appears to be a corpse, covered in ants and lying beneath yet another tree, it turns out to be someone having a nap. Sinan takes an exam, in a bid to become a primary-school teacher, but he hasn't bothered to study, and you can understand why; his father, Idris (Murat Cemcir), who *is* a teacher, has shrunk into a weary wastrel with a mound of debt. Sinan, meanwhile, has written a book, which he describes as "a quirky autofiction meta-novel." (Translation: it's all about him.) Lacking the money to self-publish, he goes first to the mayor and then to a guy who runs a sand quarry, requesting financial support. No joy. When he consults a famous local author, the two of them practically come to blows. His mother, addressing both her husband and her son, inquires, "Where did books get you?" She has a point.

The person who interests me most in "The Wild Pear Tree" is someone we never see. "I have a friend who graduated in literature. He joined the riot police," Sinan says. When they speak on the phone, the friend jokes about controlling crowds of protesters ("Anywhere out of sight, we beat them up"), and the

tone is neither horrified nor menacing but simply high-spirited, as if two old pals were recalling student japes. Such moments provide glimpses of a wider and more riven society. Accurate figures for the number of Turkish public-sector employees dismissed or imprisoned since the failed coup of 2016 are hard to come by, but tens of thousands have certainly lost their jobs, including teachers and cops. The wisest plan, for people like Sinan, must be to keep their heads down. As somebody says, "Education is great, but this is Turkey."

If you saw Ceylan's earlier works, such as "Distant" (2002) and "Winter Sleep" (2014), you'll know how rarely they rage or surge. Instead, you find yourself gradually engulfed, as if by rising waters, and it seems only fair to report that "The Wild Pear Tree" lasts for more than three hours. True, "Once Upon a Time in Anatolia" (2011) was not much shorter, but that meticulous tale, centered on a murder investigation, was tightly paced, whereas the new film has a looser and more loping tread. Only fitfully does it accelerate, as when Sinan, seeking refuge, runs and hides in the belly of an enormous wooden horse. It stands on the seafront in Çanakkale, not far from what is thought to be the site of Troy, and for a wondrous instant you feel—or fancy that you feel—the ancient and modern worlds collide. Nice idea. In fact, the horse was donated to the city after the filming of "Troy" (2004), and our cunning hero is not following in the footsteps of Odysseus. He's sitting inside a prop. ♦

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