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Competition

OUR GRAND DESPAIR

a film by SEYFI TEOMAN





BULUT FILM presents

OUR GRAND DESPAIR

BİZİM BÜYÜK ÇARESİZLİĞİMİZ

a film by SEYFİ TEOMAN

2011 • Turkey-Germany-Netherlands • 102 minutes • 35mm • color • 1:2:35 • Dolby Digital • in Turkish

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OUR GRAND DESPAIR

SYNOPSIS

The peaceful cohabitation of bachelors Ender and Çetin is disrupted when they allow a friend's sister to move in with them. The 30-something longtime friends are overwhelmed by the presence of the uncommunicative Nihal. What possessed them to accept the responsibility of a university student in their home? Especially a girl struggling with the trauma of recently losing her parents in a car accident. But simple daily rituals like sharing meals eventually bring the three roommates together for more pleasant moments. Nihal soon comes out of her depressed shell and the two men discover a vibrant beautiful young woman. Always caring and protective gentlemen, Ender and Çetin are intent on being conscientious guardians. Nihal enjoys discussing literature and poetry with scholarly Ender, and she finds comfort in boisterous Çetin's earthy humor. Nihal is touched by the men's loyal friendship: in a sort of bromance since high school, Ender and Çetin now seem like an old married couple... Before they see what's coming, both men fall in love with the enchanting Nihal. But Ender and Çetin don't want to disrespect their good friend nor confuse his still-fragile sister. Ender and Çetin seesaw between feeling like protective fathers to acting like nervous school boys, wondering if they should confess their true feelings to Nihal...



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR SEYFİ TEOMAN

DESPAIR

The word “despair” in the title transforms into different meanings throughout the film. In the beginning it is obviously the despair of Nihal who has lost her parents in a car accident. After Nihal moves into their apartment, it refers to the despair of Ender and Çetin who are disrupted by Nihal’s presence. Later when they fall in love with Nihal it becomes despair over the impossible love they feel for Nihal. Actually the title of the book, and the film, comes from a sentence from the book: “Our grand despair was not being in love with Nihal but that our voices were not among the voices of the kids playing in the street. That was the real despair.” So it also refers to a state of mind, to a wider comment about the nature of Ender and Çetin’s relationship. This despair comes from the pain of growing up and becoming adults, as opposed to continuing to behave like high school boys, free from the complications of the adult world.

NİHAL

At the start of *Our Grand Despair*, Nihal seems inexperienced and uneasy with men, somehow innocent. She is fragile, creating the impression that she needs protection. But she is, at the same time, strong and graceful. She is discreet – although she strongly feels the pain of having lost her parents, she never talks about it. This discreetness creates a kind of mystery around her. As she pulls out of her mourning, and gets to know Ender and Çetin better, she opens up like a blooming flower. She is also sensitive and clever. She gets more confident and playful throughout the film, and transforms into a self-assured young woman. Nihal is a complex and compelling character, and it is not difficult to understand why Ender and Çetin fall in love with her. ▶



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR SEYFİ TEOMAN

A PERCEPTION OF US

As amusing as is the love that Ender and Çetin feel for Nihal, my challenge in *Our Grand Despair* was portraying the loving relationship that the two men have developed. After years of friendship, Ender and Çetin have finally started to live together in the same apartment. Their relationship resembles a sort of marriage that doesn't involve sexuality. The core of their relationship is a safe closeness, an intimacy. Ender and Çetin live together more like family than bachelor roommates. They do almost everything together — cooking, sharing meals, going on holiday. They have a perception of “us” rather than “me and you,” just like married couples. For example, when they talk about Nihal's feelings, Ender says “She might think she is in love with us,” referring to themselves as one person.

DEFYING CLASSIFICATION

Our Grand Despair plays with clichés about the roles within a traditional family. Çetin acts more like a typical husband

who goes to work everyday, while Ender sees Çetin off in the mornings, as would be expected from a housewife. Nihal asks for Çetin's permission to invite friends over, not Ender's. Çetin is more extroverted and practical, while Ender is more introverted and emotional. This might be confusing for some, but for Ender and Çetin their relationship is very clear. For them, there is nothing unsettled or ambiguous about it. Ender and Çetin love each other, but they are not sexually attracted to each other, not openly nor suppressed. Because of the characters' closeness, some viewers may have the impression that they're a gay couple. I think this comes from our tendency to immediately categorize the relationships we see onscreen according to social preconceptions. Actually, *Our Grand Despair* is about how it is sometimes difficult to classify certain relationships according to standard categories. You can call Ender and Çetin's relationship love, or you can say that it is friendship, but no matter what you call it, a part of it will remain missing. Their relationship defies classification. ▶



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR SEYFİ TEOMAN

BUILDING A FAMILY

At the basis of their relationship, which began years ago in high school, is a desire to build a family together. Even though the apparent reason may be Çetin's loss of his family in a traffic accident as a child, in reality this wish stems from something more general, sort of a desire to find one's closest, the other half of the apple. The desire to build a family can be better understood if we define a family as a warm embrace, an affectionate home that you can go back to no matter what, the ability to forgive everything, and not the sociological definition of the nuclear family. This desire may take on various forms depending on age and social standing, and may present in different ways that evoke the social definitions inherent within the very relationship.

DISRUPTING THE FAMILY

Years later when Nihal loses her parents in an accident, in a manner similar to Çetin's, and moves in with them, Ender and Çetin first see her as a threat, but with time accept her into the family. Since the basic dynamic of this family is an unfettered intimacy, it becomes inevitable for them to develop feelings of love towards Nihal, the new member of the family, both individually, and as a couple. But what is important is that they never see their love for Nihal as an alternative to their own relationship. They do not let their individual relationships with Nihal develop at the expense of disrupting the 'family'.



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR SEYFİ TEOMAN

FOOD

Ender and Çetin love food. They love cooking as much as eating. It's a characteristic of their relationship, something that defines it, making their relationship different than others. It also involves a certain nostalgia to their youth, as they've been inventing recipes together since high school. Cooking and eating is also a kind of emotional language for them. For instance, they don't talk when they feel sad about something; they eat together. When people live together, one room always becomes more important than the others. It becomes the center of cohabitation. For Ender and Çetin, this center is definitely the kitchen. For them cooking involves a kind of intimacy. The first thing they do with Nihal after she comes out of her shell is cook with her. It is their way to make her a part of the 'family'.

THE SOUL OF A LOCATION

I believe time and space are the most essential elements of cinema. At times this can be even more important than the characters and the story. Whenever I materialize a scene, I aspire to present that space and time in all their uniqueness. When time is in question, as much as the inner rhythm of the scene, this also means the season and the time of the day it corresponds to. This is just as true for the interiors, if not more important. Of course art direction is very decisive, but I also care about the use of light and sound for this purpose as well. That is, if you spend all your time at home, you take notice of and even follow the changes of light at home. In a similar fashion, if a significant portion of the film takes place in the same apartment, we need to notice the changes in light. These are what end up giving a location its soul.

OUR GRAND DESPAIR

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR SEYFİ TEOMAN

THE APARTMENT

I wanted to explore all the potential inherent in the relationship between the three main characters in *Our Grand Despair*. So I chose to focus on scenes related to their life in common, and portray them through this interaction rather than describing them separately with all aspects of their lives. Since they are roommates, the apartment is the main location for the interaction between the three... The home of Ender and Çetin is their nest, their shelter, the embodiment of their relationship, their safe haven. Rather than being claustrophobic itself, the apartment acts as a space that saves them from the claustrophobia they feel in the outside world. In the beginning of the film, the feeling of being trapped is strong when Nihal's pain

is still fresh. It gradually disperses as Nihal accepts her new roommates. As the relationships between the trio develop, the space opens up in layers. I believe the most important part of the use of space is choosing the right space and executing the right art direction and design. Especially in such a situation in which the character of the apartment is so important, and is the symbol of the main relationship in the film, designing every aspect of the location thoroughly, using wide shots and long sequences in order to show the characters' movement within the apartment, and to choose camera angles that would convey a sense of the entire depth of the apartment in the background were the principal determining factors regarding the use of space. ▶



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR SEYFİ TEOMAN

ANKARA

Ankara embodies the Turkish modernism both in architectural and social aspects with all its contradictions. In *Our Grand Despair*, the phenomenon of being from Ankara can be observed through the characters and behavior patterns of Ender and Çetin. Roughly, it can be said that while Ender represents the more intellectual, leftist, romantic aspects, and thus the side that romanticizes Ankara and embodies being from Ankara, Çetin represents the more technocratic, realistic, pragmatist side of the city that looks up to Istanbul. For this reason Ender has never left Ankara, while Çetin has returned to the city after first living in Istanbul, then abroad for a long time. As far as my observations go, a care-free spirit, understanding, and sympathy define the people

from Ankara in general. Istanbul, on the other hand, is the center of the business world, thus of the money and the media, and consequently bears a certain competitiveness and arrogance. The most important thematic and aesthetic contributions of setting the story in Ankara have been the strengthening of the emphasis on the characters' internal, bound-by-home lives, for which Ankara has acted as a natural background. For Turkish viewers the impressions Ankara brings to mind are completely consistent with the characters and the relationships in the film. As for those who are not from Turkey, the film oozes and shapes a portrait of Ankara that is consistent with it, and at the very least, it is functional as a generic, modern city that could have existed anywhere in the world. ▶



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR SEYFİ TEOMAN

ADAPTATION

I wrote the original screenplay for my first film *Summer Book* on my own. *Our Grand Despair*, on the other hand, is an adaptation whose script I have written together with Barış Bıçakçı, the novel's author. When there is such a powerful source text, it is hard to talk about any autobiographical traces from my perspective in the story. But of course, the novel's world is very familiar to me in a sense, and I too have pondered and taken up its subject matters. What especially attracted me to this novel was its main theme of the question: "How correct is it to explain relationships by certain patterns? Where do the boundaries of relationships start?" We tried to preserve this as the principal theme of the film as well. The novel's characters and situations are perfectly suited for cinema, but it was beneficial to add scenes that do not exist in the novel itself, yet are in line with its world. To have Barış involved as a screenwriter was

essential in this regard. The process of adaptation and cinematization went on from the first draft of the script to the very end of film editing. Throughout this process, we tried to make a film that is faithful to the novel in its climate and mood, which also evokes the feeling of an original story for the viewer who hasn't read the novel.

A STATE OF MIND

Even though relationships appear in the foreground in *Our Grand Despair*, what I am really interested in, more than the plot and character development, is a state of being, a state of mind. Without a doubt, the meaning that oozes through the small, ordinary details shown throughout the film in order to flesh this out, certain repeated routines, unuttered things, silent gazes, and all the allusions to the past in the dialog, evoke a sense of the state and the goings of things. This is sort of inevitable in a film in which the plot takes a back seat to the emotions. ►



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

COMMENTS FROM DIRECTOR SEYFİ TEOMAN

THE CAST

In choosing the lead actors we primarily considered their physical compatibility with the role and with each other, but the real determining factor was their acting ability. For instance, Fatih Al was too young for the role of Çetin, and when we first met he was not heavy enough. However, with his skills and acting ability he transformed into the ideal Çetin. Regarding the actors, I can talk more about an attitude, a stylistic difference rather than a generational gap. On the one hand, there were those actors who are more controlled, more bound by the text, more technical in the positive sense, yet adding vigor and depth to the characters through the little nuances they place in this technique, such as Fatih Al (as Çetin), Güneş Sayın (as Nihal), Mehmet Ali Nuroğlu (as Bora), and the master of this style, Taner Bırsel (as Murat). On the other hand, there were those actors such as İlker Aksum (as Ender) and Baki Davrak (as Nihal's brother Fikret), who are more open to surprises, chasing a different kind of realism,

possessing strong instincts, taking you by surprise with their contributions to the roles, but also whose control were relatively more difficult.

FILM ACTING

There were no instances in which the story infiltrated the filming atmosphere; film sets are places where people focus on the jobs at hand, and do not have room for such romanticism. Yet a couple of times the film crew was so affected by the power of the actors that they spontaneously started applauding them as soon as the shot was cut. Unfortunately, during editing, when I saw these shots that affected me as well on the set, I did not like them and ended up not using them. And in the editing process, I was astonished to discover the power of acting at certain points that did not call any attention during filming. Thus, I realized once again how film acting requires a specific technique of its own, and does not tolerate any excess or exaggeration.



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

SEYFİ TEOMAN Writer & Director

Our Grand Despair is Seyfi Teoman's second feature film. His first feature 2008's *Summer Book* premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and was later nominated as Discovery of the Year at the European Film Awards. The film won Best Film and the FIPRESCI Prize at the İstanbul Film Festival, as well as receiving awards in Taormina (Italy), at Artfilm (Slovak Republic) and Montreal.

Teoman was born in Kayseri, Turkey in 1977. After studying economics at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, he lived in Lodz, Poland for two years, studying film directing at the National Film School. Teoman is currently preparing his new film *Saints*.

2011 **OUR GRAND DESPAIR** Bizim Büyük Çaresizliğimiz

2008 **SUMMER BOOK** Tatil Kitabı



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

İLKER AKSUM as Ender

İlker Aksum was a leading actor in the Taylan Brothers' 2006 feature *The Little Apocalypse* (Küçük Kıyamet). He has acted in several theater productions and television series. Aksum was born in 1971 in İstanbul, and he studied acting at Ankara University.

FATİH AL as Çetin

Fatih Al was a leading actor in Mehmet Eryılmaz's 2008 feature *A Fairground Attraction* (Hazan Mevsimi: Bir Panayır Hikâyesi). He has also acted in theater and in television series. Al was born in 1976 in Ankara, and he studied acting at Ankara University.

GÜNEŞ SAYIN as Nihal

Our Grand Despair is Güneş Sayın's first feature film. Born in 1987 in İstanbul, she recently completed her studies in the acting department of İstanbul University. She appeared in the 2008 TV series "A Man Without a Hearth".



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CAST

İLKER AKSUM	<i>Ender</i>
FATİH AL	<i>Çetin</i>
GÜNEŞ SAYIN	<i>Nihal</i>
BAKİ DAVRAK	<i>Fikret (Nihal's Brother)</i>
TANER BİRSEL	<i>Murat (Çetin's Brother)</i>
MEHMET ALİ NUROĞLU	<i>Bora (The Poet Boyfriend)</i>
BERİL BOZ	<i>Aslı</i>
DAMLA KABAKÇI	<i>Nihal's Friend</i>
DURAK BÜLBÜL	<i>Doorman</i>
TAMER YURTBAŞI	<i>Young Man at Bar</i>
MELİHA ÇÖREK	<i>Receptionist</i>
İLKER BURMA	<i>Hikmet</i>
SELİM GÜRATA	<i>Ender's Father</i>

PRODUCERS
CO-PRODUCERS

Yamaç Okur, Nadir Öperli (Bulut Film, Turkey)
Titus Kreyenberg (Unafilm, Germany), Stienette Bosklopper (Circe Films, Netherlands)

CREW

DIRECTOR	Seyfi Teoman
SCREENPLAY	Barış Bıçakçı, Seyfi Teoman
ADAPTATION OF THE NOVEL	"Our Grand Despair" by Barış Bıçakçı
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Birgit Gudjonsdottir
EDITOR	Çiçek Kahraman
ART DIRECTOR	Nadide Argun
SOUND ENGINEER	İsmail Karadaş
SOUND DESIGNER & PRE MIX	Çenker Kökten
SOUND MIX	Peter Warnier
LINE PRODUCER	Tolga Afşin Kaya
CASTING BY	Ezgi Baltaş
COSTUME DESIGNER	Tuba Ataç
MAKE-UP & HAIR STYLIST	Ebru Süren

OUR GRAND DESPAIR

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

BULUT FILM

www.bulutfilm.com

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Founded in 2007 Bulut Film is an Istanbul based production company that produces films loyal to the director's artistic vision. Bulut Film develops its own projects, involves in co-productions, and also provides line production services. Bulut Film productions include *Summer Book* (Nomination for European Film Awards Discovery Section, 2008), *On the Way to School* (in co-production with Perisan Film) and *Dark Cloud* (in City to City Toronto 2010). Bulut Film's latest production, Seyfi Teoman's second feature *Our Grand Despair* has its world premiere at Berlinale Competition in 2011.

UNAFILM

www.unafilm.de

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After working as executive producers in film and television for many years, Titus Kreyenberg founded his own production company, unafilm in 2004. unafilm produces feature films. Straight forward and artistically challenging. National and international. Fiction and documentary. unafilm is based both in Cologne and Berlin. Films produced by unafilm have been released nationally and internationally and have been in competition at Berlinale, IDFA, Thessaloniki, San Sebastian, DOKLeipzig, Diagonale and many more.

CIRCE FILMS

www.circe.nl

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Circe Films BV is an Amsterdam-based company producing feature films for the national and international market. Since 1996, the managing director, Stienette Bosklopper, has been establishing enduring relationships with unique and innovative filmmakers, both at home and abroad. Circe's personal approach has led to the creation of a partner network that helps secure the broadest possible audience for Circe's directors. Outstanding festivals like Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Toronto, Rotterdam and Pusan have chosen Circe's projects, productions and co-productions.



OUR GRAND DESPAIR

a film by **SEYFİ TEOMAN** • a production of **BULUT FILM (Turkey)** • in co-production with **UNAFILM (Germany)** **CIRCE FILMS (Netherlands)**
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