



# Memorable movies of 2014

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

It is never easy to get down to listing one's favourite films of the year. Especially if one were to have some kind of number in mind – like 10 or 20.

So, I let myself go without being barricaded by a numerical figure. And here are the movies that have stayed with me till the end of this year, and I am sure they will do so for a long, long time.

One of 2014's finest works was from Turkey, by the master called Nuri Bilge Ceylan, whose Cannes Palm d'Or winner, *Winter Sleep*, was, I think, his best so far. Despite being three hours and 15 minutes long, it just sucked me in. It has a great script, narrated with exciting ease, and helping to push the narration are the riveting performances.

Shot in a small Cappadocia village in the middle of scenic natural beauty, *Winter Sleep* centres on a theatre-actor-turned-writer/journalist and his relationship with his pretty young wife and sister, who is going through a divorce.

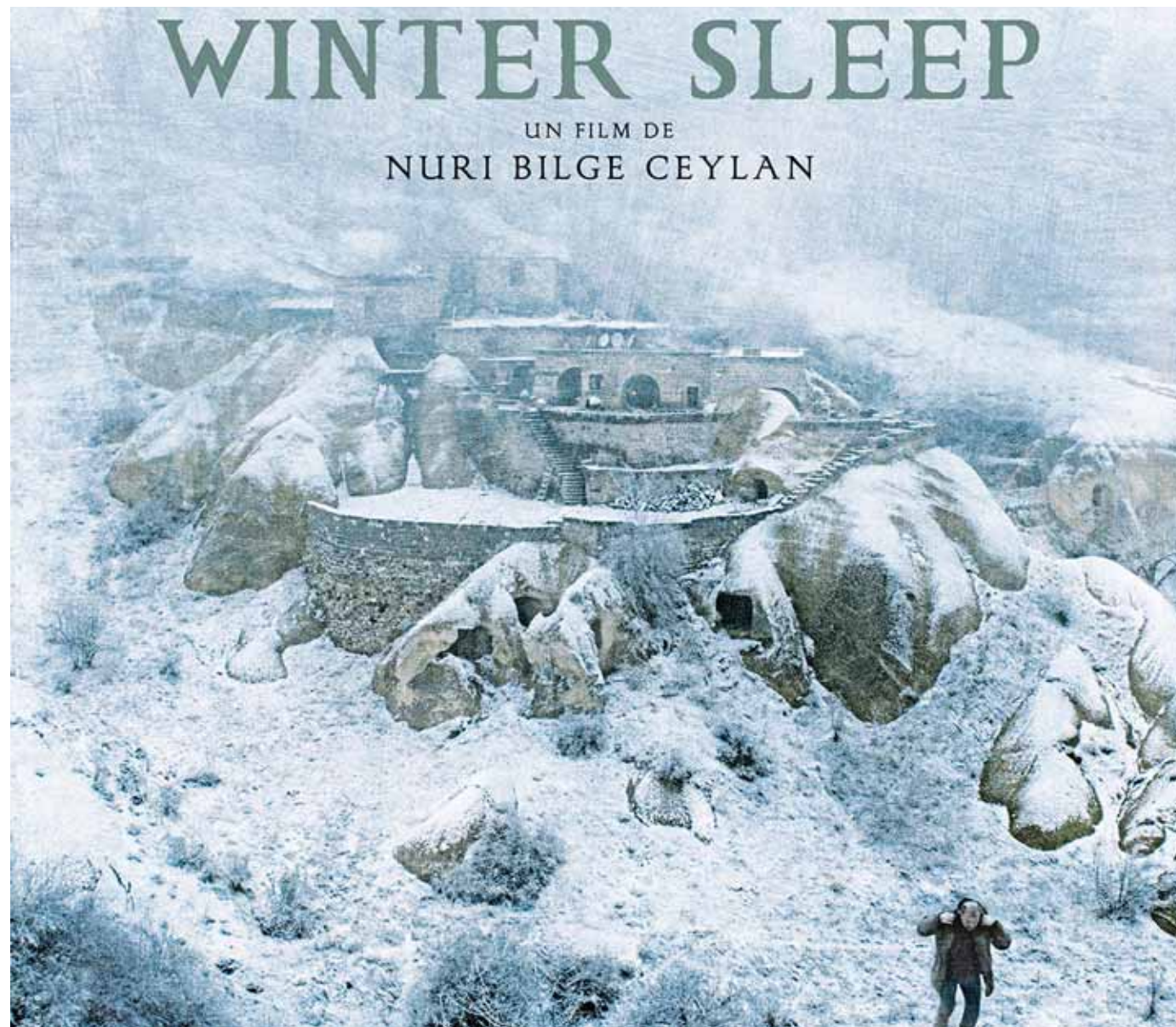
These characters live in a kind of pressure-cooker existence which is accentuated with the coming of winter, a season that keeps them indoors and at nodding distances from one another. The film evokes plenty of tension, and literally grips you with Bergmansque close-ups.

There is another kind of tension in Ken Loach's *Jimmy's Hall*, which is set in the church dominated 1920s Ireland, where freedom of speech and modern music as well as dance are frowned upon by religious heads. They feel that these are "unholy, un-Irish". The church and the State vehemently oppose socialist leanings and even non-religious social gatherings in the aftermath of the Irish civil war.

A hauntingly simple story, whose detailing of the period is absolutely fascinating, *Jimmy's Hall* is elegantly shot, and dwells on the life of James Galton (played superbly by Barry Ward). He comes back to his mother in a small Irish village after a stint in New York. Once a supporter of the Irish Republican causes, it is not so much his political beliefs as the song and dance he brings back from America that gets him into trouble. The climax will leave many of us teary-eyed, and Ward is charming and intense as the man whose passion for a bit of clean fun and social discussions is seen as examples of Communist leanings. And the church and the State play perfect kill-joys.

Belgian Brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne have always been one of my favourites. They have given us extraordinarily moving pieces of cinema (*Rosetta*, *The Child*, *Lorna's Silence*, *The Kid with a Bike*). Their latest, *Two Days, One Night*, is a powerful document of how a society can come together to face odds posed by the monstrosities of consumerism.

Sandra (essayed by Marion Cotillard, who portrayed a whale trainer in the 2012 Cannes entry, *Rust & Bone*) is about to lose her position in a solar energy factory, which is struggling against fierce Asian competition. Her boss tells his 16 employees that if Sandra were to keep her job, they would have to forego their bonuses. Sandra and her colleague convince the boss to hold a referendum through a secret ballot on a Monday in which the employees will decide whether they are willing to let go their



bonuses. Sandra, desperate for the income and afraid that she would lose it, has two days and a night to try and plead her case with her co-workers.

The social relevance of the movie fascinated me. And while the outcome of the referendum is never very clear, what is most touching is the way *Two Days, One Night* ends. It is not just a great twist, but a poignant way of telling us how caring human beings can be.

Fatih Akin, born to Turkish parents, lives in Germany. His latest work, *The Cut*, is the final part of a trilogy, called *Love, Death and the Devil*. It tackles the 1915 Armenian genocide that took place in the Ottoman Empire and in which 1.5 million men, women and children died.

Akin's hero in *The Cut* is Nazaret, played by that brilliant French-Algerian actor, Tahar Rahim (*A Prophet*), who is separated from his wife and twin daughters and forced into backbreaking labour. Years later, when World War I ends, Nazaret, travels from country to country, continent to continent trying to find his lost family. His journey takes him to Germany, Cuba, Malta and the US.

*The Cut* is not just about the killings, but also about migration and rootlessness. Mostly in English, *The Cut* is old fashioned in the leisurely way it narrates the pain and pathos of Nazaret as he desperately seeks to find his wife and daughters, even going as far

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as robbing a rich man to pay the passage on one occasion.

Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu* is an engrossing indictment of religious fundamentalism. It is about extremism that the auteur recounts and comments on through very ordinary characters, through everyday situations and through sparse frames.

There is nothing dramatic about this movie – so far removed from the kind of cinema that India makes. *Timbuktu* opens with a group of gun-toting men in an open van chasing a deer in an African wild. The panicky animal is running for its life even

as the men tell each other not to kill it, but just tire it. This just about sums up the mood and theme of the film: to enslave people to a religious doctrine by tiring and terrifying them into stupor, into demeaning obedience.

Sissako seems to suggest that the new plague in Africa is not colonialism, but the religious terror inflicted on the inhabitants by radicals. And the movie was shown at Cannes uncannily at a time when 300 Nigerian schoolgirls had been abducted. Sissako revolves his plot around a couple, who live with their little daughter and a herd of cows in an almost idyllic condition outside a town. Their innocence is played out against and elaborated through a series of fundamentally crazy episodes.

And we are told that religion or even a trace of it is just an excuse to trample insubordination. This could not have been brought out more explicitly than in the final scene where we see the daughter running in a state of absolute fear. She takes the place of the deer. And like it, she is alone with her parents gone.

**To continue next week.**

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