

WOMEN'S WARD (Karilar Kogusu) 1989

Halit Refiğ

Overview

Based on Kemal Tahir's autobiographical novel of the same name (1974), based on his own prison experiences, the film narrates the story of the main character, Murat, in prison. The narrative includes the relationships of prisoners convicted of various crimes and with the prison administration and guards. In his film, Refiğ tries to address the concepts of justice, crime, criminal, conscience, punishment, good and evil, which are evident in Tahir's novel.

The Women's Ward is one of Halit Refiğ's works of maturity. At the 1990 Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, he won five awards, including the Best Film award. Hülya Koçyiğit and Kadir Inanır, who rose to fame during the Yesilçam period and are now mature actors, star in the film, which also has a strong cast. The film includes older generation actors such as Erol Taş and Sami Hazinses and performers from the new generation.

People

Murat A writer who had been sentenced to twenty years imprisonment in Malatya prison for political reasons.

Tözey A well-known prostitute who was sentenced to a month in prison for a fight she got involved in while working in the city's brothel.

Hanım A woman who was convicted of murdering her husband with her younger lover.

Şefika The woman who is assigned as the new guard after the death of Ayşe.

Mahmut He is the head guard of the prison.

Abdullah An inmate in prison who is about to complete his lengthy sentence.

Müdür Bey The warden of the prison.

Ayşe She is the guard of the women's ward.

Nebahat The head guard's young daughter.

Ali Hanım's underage lover.

Aduş The young daughter of one of the female prisoners.

Synopsis

The year is 1942. The place is Malatya Prison. Murat is a left-wing writer who was sentenced to twenty years by the government's courts at the time for his political views and has served five years of his sentence. The prison is a semi-open prison, allowing prisoners to move freely inside.

Murat is one of the few intellectual and political prisoners inside. Here, Murat writes and accounts for the prison administration, mentors and supports illiterate inmates in legal processes, and spends the rest of his time befriending prisoners and officials and working on his writings. Murat is a person who is admired by both the inmates and the prison administration for his positive qualities. He corresponds with his friend, the famous poet and intellectual of the period, Nazım Hikmet.

One of the prisoners in the women's ward, Hanım, is on trial for complicity with her lover and murdering her husband. Murat is closely involved in the case of Hanım. She faces a possible death penalty. On the other hand, he helps other prisoners by writing the petitions they want. Murat has gained popularity among female prisoners.

Tözey, one of the well-known and influential women of the city brothel, goes to prison to serve a month's sentence. Tözey, who falls in love with Murat, tries to win his heart by using his financial

power and influence to make Murat comfortable. Murat, who will remain in prison for a long time, avoids entering into an impossible affair by not responding to the attention of Tözey and other women.

When dealing with Hanım's case, Murat tells her that she should blame Ali since he cannot be sentenced to death because he is a minor. Hanım does not change her testimony to save Ali, even knowing that she can get capital punishment.

Following the unexpected death of the kind-hearted and helpful guard of the women's ward, Ayşe, the administration commissions her daughter, Şefika. Unlike his mother, Şefika is highly vicious and abusive. With the arrival of Şefika, unrest and tension increased in prison. Like other women, Şefika tries to approach Murat, but when she cannot attract him, she escapes with one of the guards and leaves her husband and children. Tözey was released after serving her sentence; however, she often visits Murat. Despite Tözey's insistence, Murat stays away from her and tries to change her mind.

The failure to prevent the immediate execution of Hanım's affects Murat deeply. Murat begins to write his novel, which covers various characters he encounters in prison and touches on themes such as crime, justice, innocence, good and evil.

Scenes

Murat He lies on his bed, reading a letter from a friend. When the little girl Aduş comes in, Murat chats with her childishly. A woman calls Aduş from the outside. Aduş is scared and hides under the bed. He asks Murat not to tell her she is there. The female guard with an open scar on her face comes in. They chat about her health. The woman tells him that her son mistreated her at home. He asks Murat if he wants anything from the market. Sefer, a lame man, comes into the room. They talk about amnesty and the government. The woman (Ayşe) says that the work of Allah and the government cannot be estimated. Aduş goes out with the woman. Abdullah calls Sefer from the outside.

Men's ward Murat enters the ward and greets the people inside. Mr. Nazmi welcomes him and offers him a cigarette. Murat explains that Ms. Huguş invited him to write a petition. Nazmi complains that both she and the lady have been blacklisted. He talks about being indicted for insulting the National Chief and how he can clean up his record. Murat says that the only way to do this is to submit, which he has been on the blacklist for years.

Appeal Nazmi calls Huguş through the window. The woman says that she has been in prison for four months for insulting Ismet Pasha and that she expects Murat to write a letter saying that she is innocent and asking for forgiveness. When Hanım approaches them, Murat asks about the recent situation in her case. Although Hanım claims she is innocent, Murat says the evidence and the witnesses show otherwise. Hanım tells him her statement was taken by force. Another woman comes up to them and asks about her case. She is on trial for murder too and afraid of being hanged.

The head guard's daughter Murat meets Abdullah in the hallway. Abdullah says that the eyes of the women are on Murat. Murat disagrees. The old female guard and Aduş come from the market. Murat goes to the head guard Mahmut Efendi's room. There he sees the guard's daughter. The young woman gives him wool for winter as a present. The guard who comes in tells Murat to see the prison manager.

Warden of the prison Murat enters the warden's office. The warden asks Murat if he keeps his prison accounts properly. Murat asks about the war. The warden says the Russians are regressing. When he leaves the office, he delivers the work to Murat.

A visit Hacı Abdullah reports that Hanım has been sentenced to death, and her lover Ali has been sentenced to thirty years. Murat says he expects that to happen. Ali's mother visits him. Murat asks her to be compassionate to Hanım. She is in a challenging situation, and in return, he promises to write an excellent appeal to the court for his son. The woman becomes happy.

Salvation Murat tells Ali that Hanım should blame him and that the court cannot impose the death penalty because he is underage. He explains it is the only way out of the Hanım's execution.

At the courtyard Hanım comes to the courtyard. They talk to Murat after the bars. Murat says he will file a petition for an appeal and overturn the sentence, but she must also cooperate.

Fortunetelling Murat mentions Hanım's case and other things in his letter. Topal invites him out for coffee with the others. A new inmate of the women's ward, Tözey, offers coffee to everyone. They play an instrument, sing and have fun. They laugh at Aduş when she dances. The corporal of the gendarmerie arrives. He also wants coffee. Tözey reads the future –a custom for having fun- from the

empty coffee cups. In Murat's fortune, Tözey says, a woman thinks of him. Murat says it is not possible, that in many years he will only be out.

At the office Murat works in the office of the warden. The warden enters. They talk about the difficulty of Hanım's case and Murat's conviction. The warden sends Murat to the courtyard to calm him down.

At the courtyard Murat talks to Hanım in the courtyard. He has written the appeal and wants her to sign it. Hanım would not dare blame it on Ali. A woman approaches. She mentions that her husband has asked for her valuables and asks Murat for a bit of advice. Murat instructs her never to hand over the gold without a promissory note. Huguş asks Murat to write a petition to get revenge on her husband and her lover. Murat gets angry and says he will never write an appeal to lock up a free person. Tözey comes to the courtyard. He shows Murat the letters he has. She tells him she has been sentenced to a month for beating up a man. They chat. Tözey says she thinks about Murat.

A conversation with Abdullah Abdullah enters Murat's room. They have a short conversation about hope, despair, the past, and the future. Murat asks Abdullah how Tözey was in his youth if he slept with her. Abdullah explains that he had an affair with another woman in the brothel and never approached Tözey. When he is out, he says he will not go to the brothel anymore because the women who work at the factory do it for free. Murat disagrees. He claims that men cannot fool a financially independent woman.

Visitors Her friends from the brothel come to visit Tözey under the insult of male prisoners. Tözey introduces her friends to Murat. While they chat and joke, Tözey tells the women that Murat is a political prisoner. The head guard's little girl comes. She talks to Tözey about her sister. Little girl and Tözey do not like each other. Her friends want to convince Tözey to write a letter to her lover. She is upset. Murat suggests she write a letter too.

Cigarettes Murat has no more cigarettes. Tözey sends him five boxes of quality cigarettes. Murat is disturbed by Tözey's interest and turns down her gift. The older woman cannot make sense of it. She says Tözey is in love with him.

Tözey Tözey is annoyed at the women's ward that Murat rejects her. Women say he will serve another ten years in prison, and it will be wrong to give him empty expectations. Tözey says she will take good care of Murat.

Death Topal comes to Murat. He says Tözey is very sorry, and she wants her to comfort him. Tözey holds cigarettes in Murat's hand as he goes to the women's ward to see her. After Murat leaves, Ayşe, the old female guard, dies of a heart attack.

The new guard The head guard recommends Ayşe's daughter, Şefika, as the new guard. In prison, Tözey organizes prayer for Ayşe. The new guard, Şefika, has been assigned. The manager does not like her attitude. Abdullah tells Murat that he has learned that Şefika is not a good person. Murat asks Abdullah about the news on the radio. Abdullah talks about the Germans' advance to Russia. He appreciates the Germans and Hitler. Murat claims that Germany will eventually be defeated. Abdullah changes the subject and reminds him of the new guard issue.

Intimidation When one of the male guards sees that Şefika is not on duty in the morning, he wakes her up yelling. Şefika attacks the man and reports the incident to the head guard. After the man is afraid and apologizes to Şefika, she comes to Murat's room. Tözey has sent her to see if he needed anything. Murat says he has spoken to the warden about her attitude and advises her to be careful with her behavior and clothing. Şefika says that she can wear whatever she wants and act the way she wants. She also threatens Murat not to be involved in this.

Nebahat When Murat goes to see Tözey, he sees her talking to Abdullah. On the way back, he meets Ali. Ali says that Murat is the only hope of Hanım. Murat goes to the head guard's office. The head guard's daughter, Nebahat, is there. During their chat, she mentions the marriage proposal she has already received.

Release Tözey comes to Murat's room with the guard, Şefika. They joke with Tözey. Tözey says she has been released but will revisit him and asks if he needs anything. Tözey cries as she leaves.

Sweater Hanım chats with Murat in the courtyard. She asks if he has appealed to the court to save her. She complains about Tözey. She gives Murat the sweater she knitted.

Divorce Şefika comes to Murat's room. She mentions Murat her plan about leaving her family and asks Murat to write an official application. Murat says he does not want to file a petition for something

like this. He advises Şefika to turn to worship. Şefika's husband comes in with the kids. Şefika does not want them, and they argue. Murat gets angry and kicks them all out of his room.

Two visitors Tözey visits Murat. She wants to sacrifice a ram and distribute its meat to the prisoners as a gift. Murat thanks her. When he goes to the head guard's office, he meets his daughter, Nebahat. When they chat, Tözey comes. Murat introduces two women who get nervous. Tözey whispers to Murat that she bribed the soldiers to take him to her place conveniently.

Complaint Murat goes to the warden's office. The warden tells there is a complaint about him, that the gendarmerie commander does not approve Tözey's visits. Since he was a political prisoner, the commander wanted the warden to be careful about Murat. The warden calls the commander to speak. The commander reiterates that Tözey should not often be seen in the prison. Murat disagrees. They argue, but Murat convinces the sergeant with diplomacy.

Nightmare Murat feels sick when he wakes up in the morning. The head guard sends him to the hospital accompanied by a soldier. The corporal brings him to the brothel where Tözey lives. However, Murat sees Nebahat here. He cannot believe his eyes.

Abdullah's release Murat wakes up to Abdullah's voice. Abdullah will be released the next day. He is excited. He says he is afraid of being outside. Tözey revisits Murat. She is mad at her for not eating the food she has sent. Hanım sees them. She says that she will keep Tözey responsible for her execution. She claims Murat neglects them because of Tözey. When Abdullah goes out, Murat advises him to be careful. Abdullah is released.

At night Murat witnesses one of the male guards and Şefika talking at night. Şefika and the guard make love.

Escape Şefika's husband rushes to Murat. He says Şefika runaway with the guard. He asks her to file a petition for adultery and cries. Abdullah visits Murat and tells him that Tözey has found a new lover. Murat does not seem to be surprised. Nebahat appears again. Murat tells her not to wait for him. She cries.

Execution The warden tells Murat that Hanım will be hanged that night. He warns him not to inform anyone. Officers wake Hanım out of her sleep. She cries, begs, and screams for help from Murat. Murat cannot do anything.

Closing Murat enters the warden's office. The warden mentions that he wants to raise little Aduş as a foster parent. They talk about good and evil. The warden hands a letter from Murat's friend Nazım Hikmet. Murat replies describing his new novel on the portraits from the prison.

Themes

Compassion Murat, the main character of the narrative, is a helpful and compassionate person. He takes a close interest in the problems of the prisoners around him. He is especially concerned about Hanım's case. Not only does he write appeals and applications to various authorities, but also he tirelessly tries to convince Hanım to change her testimony. He suffers in Hanım's execution. On the other hand, it does not help Şefika to leave her husband and children. He is not willing to take part in Şefika's abandonment of the infants, causing them misery.

In other characters besides Murat, this matter of compassion arises. For a long time, Tözey persistently tries to pursue Murat and prove her love. After she has been released from prison, she visits Murat repeatedly. On one of these visits, Hanım tells her that she will be the main responsible if anything happens to her. She thinks he is not interested enough in her case because Tözey plays with Murat's mind. This talk severely affects Tözey. Sadly, Tözey never revisits Murat after this incident. She feels compassion for Hanım.

The old female guard Ayşe is also good to the prisoners in her ward. She tries to help them many times. She takes little Aduş, who has to stay in prison with her mother, to go out and meet her various needs.

Authoritarian state One of the themes depicted by the film is the contradiction between an authoritarian state and freedom of expression in 1940s Turkey. Murat did not commit any crime under the law but was sentenced to long imprisonment to criticize the current authority. In the film, Murat's innocence and unidentified crime are mentioned several times. Murat, who is described as an "enemy

of the state” as a political criminal, will not be easily pardoned, and both he and those around him reiterate it.

A teacher and Huguş are also convicted of insulting the president. To get rid of accusations, Huguş asks Murat to write a letter to the president’s nephew explaining her innocence.

While Murat talks to the teacher, who is in prison for his poem, they argue that the only way to salvation is to accept the charges, apologize and write things that the government would like. These two examples represent the rule of power in the country and arbitrariness in governance rather than law.

Love and Passion The film also depicts the existence of love and passion even under prison conditions. Tözey falls in love with Murat. She strives to win his love. Head guard Mahmut’s daughter Nebahat also loves Murat. Although Murat enjoys the women’s attention, he is likely to serve many more years in prison, avoiding having a platonic relationship with both women.

Some of the characters are imprisoned for crimes of passion. Abdullah killed a man for the woman he loved. Hanım and Ali are in prison for killing Hanım’s husband, an obstacle to their relationship.

Punishment Punishment is one of the main themes of the film. Inmates in prison have been convicted of various crimes. In addition to those convicted of murder and manslaughter, some are accused and punished for expressing thought. Some prisoners, especially intellectual ones, have been imprisoned for phony crimes that are not defined as crimes in the law. That is why some people inside do not even know whether they have committed a crime. Since there is no crime in some cases, they do not know what to do to fix the situation. Huguş and the teacher are among these inmates.

Character Analysis

Murat Sentenced to 20 years in prison as a political prisoner, Murat spends his days trying to help other prisoners and studying his writings. Almost everyone admires him, whether they are inmates or officials. He is intelligent and has a diplomatic, compassionate, considerate, calm, and mature character.

Tactful Murat often tries to balance the guards’ and the ignorant prisoners’ attitudes and behaviors. He fends off the offers and directions directed at him without being angry, without hurting others, not by taking care to gain their hostility, but their friendship. He responds patiently and by presenting appropriate arguments to Tözey and Şefika’s persistent behavior. He politely refuses them.

After the newly arrived gendarmerie commander tried to prevent Tözey from visiting Murat, he spoke to him in a semi-threatening, semi-friendly manner, softening the commander, who was initially angry, and changing his attitude.

Intellectual Murat is the most educated person in prison. He is one of the few political prisoners. Since he is almost the only person who can read and write in his environment, the prison administration has assigned him to account and writing. On the other hand, prisoners always consult with him and ask for help with his legal issues and petitioning. Murat also tries to write a novel and corresponds with his friend, Nazım Hikmet, one of Turkey’s most important poets.

Compassionate Murat is sensitive to the problems of everyone around him, whether they are prisoners or officers. For many prisoners, he appeals tirelessly to the authorities to save them or get better conditions. On the other hand, when the same prisoners ask to help for the bad of others, he refuses them. Şefika does not help when she asks her husband for help and advice to divorce and leave their children. He does not want to get involved in one inmate’s indictment of another. He tries to save the murder-convicted Hanım. When he fails to do so, he suffers.

Murat also carefully avoids entering into an impossible love affair, giving hope to women who approach him because he knows he will be in prison for a long time. Such an emotional relationship will hurt both him and the woman opposite.

Patient Murat, a patient character, often welcomes the impatient and impulsive behavior of those around him. For example, without getting angry, he tries to discourage Tözey and Şefika patiently by talking, when they insist on approaching him even though he does not want to.

Tözey An aging prostitute who works in the city’s brothel, Tözey is a spoiled, persistent, passionate but also robust, influential, and respected character among the prisoners. She falls in love with Murat in prison in a short time.

Powerful The majority of the prisoners respect Tözey because of her influence. Tözey often assigns women on the ward to do various tasks. Among them is to serve Murat. Tözey also manages the female guards and soldiers as she pleases them through bribery. However, the women known as “decent” do not respect her; Tözey tries to get approval with her financial strength and character and manage her environment. She cannot stand people rejecting her.

Passionate Tözey, who is in love with Murat, is always after him. She tries to talk to Murat and win his heart at every opportunity. Tözey sometimes cries in the women’s ward because Murat is not interested in her. She says she even will wait another ten years until Murat comes out, and she promises to take care of him during this time.

Pushy Tözey constantly sends her gifts to win Murat’s heart. She tries to meet his needs and visits him both while she is in prison and after she is out. Disturbed by this situation and Tözey’s insistence, Murat tries to reject and stay away from her without upsetting her. Tözey ignores Murat’s objections and continues to insist on her efforts to get close to him. The woman who sees that Murat’s cigarette is gone sends her quality brand cigarettes, but Murat does not want to accept them. Finally, at Tözey’s insistence, he unwillingly accepts the result.

Hanım She is a woman sentenced to death for murdering her husband, but she is a mild-mannered, good-natured, considerate person.

Kind Despite the brutality of her crime, Hanım is a quiet, kind character who is mild-mannered and does not think about the evil of people, tries to build good relations with them. She is anxious that something wrong is going to happen to Ali. She tries to save Ali. She also knits a sweater to thank Murat for his help.

Helpless While her trial continues, she waits for the court decision in fear. She is terrified of a great punishment and expects Murat to help her because she is illiterate. However, Murat has no basis other than his appeals to the court and the letters to the capital’s bureaucrats and politicians.

Honest She is an accomplice and does not try to get away by blaming her boyfriend Ali for killing her husband. Those around him, especially Murat, try to convince her that if she does not blame the underage Ali, she cannot get away with what she did. There is even a risk of receiving capital punishment. Hanım, fearing the punishment, waits for the court’s decision without appealing. She does not change her initial testimony.

Şefika She took the place of her mother, prison’s kind-hearted and beloved women’s ward guard. Unlike her, she is tough, wicked, combative, self-indulgent, and cunning.

Vicious and combative From the very beginning, she tries to expand her sphere of influence by intimidating those around her with her vicious and combative personality. She bullies the guard who attempts to give her orders. The head guard and the other prisoners are wary of her attitudes.

Independent Although Şefika is vicious and combative, she has an independent personality. She does not let people comment on her clothing and attitude. She warns those who attempt it harshly. She scolds men who try to control her.

Irresponsible Dissatisfied with her life, Şefika is highly indifferent to her family, especially to her children. She does not take responsibility for her sick children. She wants to leave them with their father. Towards the final, she runs off by one of the male guards.



Murat and Tözey.



Murat watches courtyard at night.



Fortunetelling in women's ward. Tözey and the others.



Murat and Ali speaks to Hanım at the courtyard.



Hanim is taken for the execution.