

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

Nazlı Bayram, Ph.D.

## Ömer Kavur (1944-2005)

### Biography

Ömür Kavur was born in Ankara in 1944. He finished elementary and secondary school in İstanbul. His interest in photography and cinema blossoms in these years, during his education Robert College and Kabataş High-School. For higher education he goes to Paris and studies cinema in Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographique. He begins his doctorate studies in this city but he drops out of the program and leaves for İstanbul in 1971.

While earning a living by shooting newsreels and documentaries for a company, he receives the offer of writing the script for *Yatık Emine* and being a director for the film. With this feature-length, Kavur takes the first step towards becoming one of the most important directors in Turkey. He directs 14 films between 1974 and 2003, and he wins many awards from important festivals in Turkey and abroad. He dies in İstanbul in 2005.

In the majority of his films, Kavur has written the script by himself or has at least worked on the script as a second writer. Other writers who worked in the scripts of his films are famous authors of Turkey such as Onat Kutlar, Barış Pirhasan and Feride Çiçekoğlu, and celebrated and successful actors such as Macit Koper. The scripts of his *Gizli Yüz* and *Göl* belong to Orhan Pamuk and Selim İleri respectively.

The themes of Kavur's films correspond to his biography. His father was a diplomat so since his childhood he had lived in different cities and countries. Later he went abroad again for his university degree, coming back to Turkey when he was 27. This nomadic life of his childhood and younger years when his personality and identity is formed may be related to the themes in his films such as being a stranger, loneliness, roads and journeys. His late period films which have a more pessimistic, dark atmosphere, and has themes such as time and mortality may be related to his illness.

### Filmography

#### As director:

*Yatık Emine*, 1974  
*Yusuf ile Kenan*, 1979  
*Ah Güzel İstanbul*, 1981  
*Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*, 1981  
*Göl*, 1982  
*Körebe*, 1985  
*Amansız Yol*, 1985  
*Anayurt Oteli*, 1987  
*Gece Yolculuğu*, 1987  
*Gizli Yüz*, 1990  
*Buluşma*, 1995  
*Akrebin Yolculuğu*, 1997  
*Melekler Evi*, 2000  
*Karşılaşma*, 2003

#### As scriptwriter:

*Yatık Emine*, 1974  
*Yusuf ile Kenan*, 1979  
*Ah Güzel İstanbul*, 1981  
*Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*, 1981  
*Körebe*, 1985  
*Amansız Yol*, 1985  
*Anayurt Oteli*, 1987  
*Gece Yolculuğu*, 1987  
*Buluşma*, 1995  
*Akrebin Yolculuğu*, 1997

*Melekler Evi, 2000*  
*Karşılaşma, 2003*

## **Cinematic Expression**

The filmic language of Ömür Kavur is straightforward, understated but effective. Examples like *Anayurt Oteli* and *Karşılaşma* demonstrate that he employs the tools of cinematic expression in a creative manner. Playing with the temporal cohesion of events, and the reality within the narrative he includes the audience in the process of interpretation, while also expanding the limits of traditional forms of narrative through cinematic techniques.

In his films we come upon old streets textured with cobblestones and timber facades, we see abandoned, tumbledown buildings, and we find ourselves in big open spaces. Kavur worked with cinematographers who worked in Yeşilçam movies. Against expectations, these cinematographers have produced impressive work in these films, this may be attributed to Kavur's directorial skills or they were able to find the possibility and the freedom to make use of their mastery in these films with good scripts and a good director. He has worked with Salih Dikişçi, Erdal Kahraman, Ali Utku, and Orhan Oğuz in many of his films.

Ömür Kavur is also significant in terms of his casting and his direction of actors. There is scarcely an awkward cast or a bad performance from an actor in his films. But arguably the main element of success in his excellent films is the nuanced dramatical structure of the scripts he authored. His close ups and two shots that reflect the self-conflicts of his characters and the tensions between them clearly helps his actors to put on their best performances.

## **Themes**

The most common themes of Ömer Kavur films touch on a diverse array of subjects. However, some recurring themes and patterns in his films can be grouped under some headings. These themes are based on Turkey's social problems, the universal contradictions of human existence and also Kavur's own life. The most frequent themes in the director's films are time, death, loneliness, journey, and alienation.

**Time.** Represented by timepieces in films like *Karşılaşma*, *Anayurt Oteli*, *Akrebin Yolculuğu*, the concept of time is handled in a multidimensional manner and it appears as the concept itself, as the relation of human beings with time, as periods of a life, and as the monotony of life. On the other hand, he plays with the narrative assembly of his films, and he breaks up the natural temporal order of events and the tightly woven relationship between traditional narratives and chronological time.

In the parts of *Karşılaşma* where Mahmut and Hasan is on the screen, through the recordings of Osman with his handheld we go back to the past, and learn more about the characters and the history of the events, about the relationship between Osman and the other characters. Kavur does not hint to the audience for a flashback and he constructs a narrative by putting a stop to the chronological flow of events, by inserting bits of the past in between.

In *Anayurt Oteli*, the chronological flow of time moves in seemingly arbitrary jumps. We go from Tuesday to Thursday, from Monday to Sunday without any logical reason behind it. These jumps in time are significant since the narrative is constructed from parts designated with the names of the days of the week. On one hand these jumps disturb our sense of reality, but on the other hand they tell us how Zebercet himself experiences time, how a logical flow of time does not mean anything for this character, and how Zebercet has lost his perception of time/reality in the throes of waiting and hopelessness. Timepieces as objects also serve as metaphors that contribute to interpretation. These objects attend to aspects of the films, such as how Zebercet's pocket watch is a connection to his father and his past, his alarm clock to his Daily life, the grandfather clock in the hotel lobby to the hotel that makes up all his world, to the Mysterious Woman and to his mental distortions. In the last scene of the film, after Zebercet commits suicide and the camera wanders around the hotel for a last time, the only sound we hear is the clock ticking off seconds.

*Akrebin Yolculuğu* is almost entirely based on the concept of time. In the story, the past, the present and the future is intertwined. The main character Kerem is a clockmaker, an artisan of the object that we use to measure, determine and know time. The clock tower is crucial for the story. Because the day Esra's child had died, the clock on the tower had also stopped.

**Death.** In almost every Ömer Kavur film there are dying, dead or murdered characters.

In *Anayurt Otel*, Zebercet comes to the point where he cannot cope with his troubles. He kills Zeynep, the cat and himself. While he is raping Zeynep, he gets angry at her unresponsiveness, that she goes on sleeping. He strangles her, saying "You are always sleeping, this time wake up". Knowing that he cannot get the warmth, the love and the intimacy that he seeks, not from Zeynep, he kills her. The black cat that sometimes appears in the hotel throughout the film, the one that Zeynep used to care for, he kills with a frying pan. The cat reminds Zebercet of his helplessness, that he desperately raped Zeynep. On the other hand, Zebercet's mental disorders have deepened to the point where he cannot tolerate anything living around himself. He cannot even tolerate his own existence. He says "What am I even waiting for" and he kills himself.

In *Karşılaşma*, Mahmut and Hasan is murdered by Osman. Mahmut had goaded Osman into killing him. Filled with a burning anger to his father Mahmut, Osman is easily provoked. Hasan also agitates Osman since he constantly follows Osman's mother Aslı around and he tries to send Sinan away from the town, the man Osman considers as a second father. Just as he had found someone who would be a real father to him Hasan seems to stand in the way so Osman kills him with a gun.

In *Amansız Yol*, Yavuz is killed by the criminals he stole money from. Yavuz has betrayed everyone, putting his wife and kids, and his childhood friend Hasan into danger. His death comes in the hands of the gang who does not tolerate any kind of betrayal.

In *Akrebin Yolculuğu*, Kerem is murdered by his childhood love Esra.

In *Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*, Bedri commits suicide. He is an art teacher who came to the town from somewhere else. Even though he appears to have adapted to the relationships, the behaviors of a rural town, he is a lonely person. There is no one to share his paintings with, no one to listen to music with. In his words, the life in the town is "just booze and gambling". While talking to Aysel about living in the town, he says "Life repeats itself every day". Feeling lonely eventually brings him to suicide.

In *Yusuf ile Kenan*, Falconetti kills Böcek. Falconetti is a kid used by Çarpık as a thief, who is cheated, who can Express himself by his actions rather than his words. In order to survive in the harsh, cruel world of the streets, he is constantly on his toes. So, when Böcek teases him, rather than answering him with his words, he responds by stabbing him.

In almost every film he directs, Kavur reminds us the inevitability of death, the deepest contradiction of a human life. Death is the inevitable end, the destiny of a human being. Just like it says in a poster in *Karşılaşma*: "The future is here".

**Loneliness.** Nearly all films of Kavur is filled with lonely people, people suffering from being isolated or people who choose to be alone. These characters are either lonely because of what they went through or their choices, or they are alone because they reckon with themselves, they search for something elusive. It is possible to find sub-themes in this heading such as lack of communication, lack of love, and search for meaning. In other words, lack of communication and love makes solitude unbearable. On the other hand, we also meet forlorn characters who left behind everything to search for something that would make their lives meaningful, or simply people who run away from their problems. Aysel and Bedri (*Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*), Hasan (*Amansız Yol*) are such characters. Even though Zebercet (*Anayurt Otel*) wants to, he cannot have satisfying relationships with other people, and that is why he is lonely.

Aysel, one of the characters of *Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*, have asked for her appointment to the town because she had enough of fake relationships, of people who spend their times in meaningless pursuits and because she lacked a purpose. She hopes that in the town she would lead a useful, meaningful life. Bedri had also come to town with similar reasons and hopes, but had not been able to find such a life there. While talking with Aysel, he says that what he found in the town instead was loneliness.

The main character of *Anayurt Otel*, Zebercet is someone who does not have any kind of emotional or intellectual communion with anyone else, aside from the necessary conversations he must have because of his job, or the times he goes to the town center. He is at his most natural, sincere and emotional when he is having imaginary conversations with the Mysterious Woman.

In *Akrebin Yolculuğu*, the hotel manager who we do not know much about also seems lonely. His confidant is a parrot left behind by a guest. He is actually at ease when he shares his thoughts and emotions with the parrot. When the real owner of the parrot comes back and takes it back, he dies.

**Alienation.** The film that Ömer Kavur most intensely deals with this theme is *Anayurt Oteli*. The main character Zebercet is the perfect example for an alienated individual. Lack of love, loneliness and hopelessness makes him doubt his own existence. Alienation brought about by existential dread severs him from reality so much that he kills Zeynep, the cat and himself.

In *Amansız Yol*, Yavuz is a character who has sacrificed all his values to his greed, who has become someone who does not even care about his child. Townpeople in *Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi* put their individual interests above everything, casting out love and nurturing relationships from their lives. Çarpık in *Yusuf ile Kenan* tyrannize over people like him, and tries to move up in the world by using them. All these characters are so alienated that they cannot find meaning in their lives.

**Journey.** The road and the journey are frequent themes in Ömer Kavur films. Searching, running away, reckoning, finding oneself are subthemes that enrich this overarching concept. The stories of *Amansız Yol*, *Karşılaşma*, *Akrebin Yolculuğu*, *Gece Yolculuğu*, *Yusuf İle Kenan*, and *Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi* either take place on the road or begin with a journey from someplace to another.

In *Amansız Yol*, Hasan gets on the road towards Diyarbakır to deliver the goods loaded into his truck. He also takes Sabahat and her daughter Ayşe with him. He plans to leave them in Mardin, with Sabahat's relatives. This is a long journey from Turkey's west to its eastern provinces. During this journey of a few days, we witness Sabahat and Hasan getting closer again, their regrets and grief about their choices in the past, their hopes, and how they give up. We come to know both of them, alongside Ayşe and Yavuz. Sabahat runs away before the journey is finished, and disappears. Yavuz dies at the end of the road. Taking Ayşe with him, Hasan gets back on the road again to rebuild his life. The road takes them somewhere in the end, good or bad.

In *Karşılaşma*, Sinan and Mahmut's journeys takes them to a different end. Mahmut, on the road to have a family, dies at the end; Sinan, on the road to get over his curiosity over a photograph and a murder, to alleviate his guilt over his son's death, falls in love at a town he arrives at, befriending new people. It is not possible for him to forget his son. However, he realizes that he can forge new emotional relationships with other people.

Yusuf, the older of the two children in *Yusuf ile Kenan*, lands in a reformatory in İstanbul. Kenan becomes a child worker. Both have left their villages in order to save their lives and to stay alive with the help of their uncle. But their adventures in İstanbul takes them apart.

These themes exist quite explicitly in Kavur's cinema. It would not be reaching to see this as an effect of Kavur's journey to France, his stay in there, his return to İstanbul and his search for cinematic and existential meaning during this period. On the other hand, the thematic richness in his films and especially the theme of the road, demonstrates that Ömer Kavur is a director constantly in search for something, and both his cinematic language and the profound depth of his perspective on stories and characters proves his quest.

## Characters

Both as a scriptwriter and a director, Ömer Kavur is an undeniable master of creating characters. The depth of his characters is revealed in their choices, their relationships, their contradictions, and their reckonings with their own selves. Following a more thematic approach, his characters can be grouped under the following headings. Just a reminder, a character does not only have one quality from a single group. Ömer Kavur's success comes from his ability to invest his characters with a depth that makes them more than types. This is only possible when a character is a reflection of a multitude of qualities. Another feature of Ömer Kavur films, the dramatic weight that would normally fall on the main character is divided amongst multiple characters. In other words, in most of his films seemingly secondary characters carry the same importance as the protagonist.

**Restless ones.** According to Şükran Esen, characters in Kavur's films are "restless people who feel they do not belong anywhere (2002, 441). Looking at main characters, we really see this restlessness, we see people who are unable to know where they belong or who they are. The children in *Yusuf ile Kenan* is like this, and so is Sinan in *Karşılaşma*, Bedri in *Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi* too. This feeling of being completely homeless is more overt in road films such as *Amansız Yol*, *Akrebin Yolculuğu*, and *Gece Yolculuğu*.

Kerem, the protagonist of *Akrebin Yolculuğu* is a travelling clockmaker. Overall, he is a happy, even joyful character. However, he has doubts, questions about time, life, who he is. He writes them down in

his journal. The other main character of the film, Esra's child has died at a young age, and now she is leading an unhappy life Mister Agâh, who is a bully. The reasons behind her actions are a little murky. Peace is something that she had lost alongside her child years ago, something that she would never find again.

As much as *Karşılaşma*'s Sinan who feels guilty for the death of his son, Mahmut is also a restless character: rich but emotionally alone, fighting with a deadly illness. Yet Osman may be the most restless among the film's characters. In an island with limited possibilities, he has grown without a father, knowing nothing about him, without a father's love and the safety he provides.

**The outsiders.** Esen groups Ömer Kavur's characters as "the insiders and those who come from the outside", noting that those who come from the outside disturb the insider (2002, 441). Aysel in *Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*, Emine in *Yatık Emine*, Ali in *Gece Yolculuğu*, clockmaker Kerem in *Akrebin Yolculuğu*, and Sinan in *Karşılaşma* are some examples of outsiders in Kavur films.

Aysel (*Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*), as a beautiful and unique woman who comes from the outside, from the big city poses a threat to the male dominated, traditional relationships in the town. The love affair she has with Fuat temporarily disrupts the balance of the richest family of the town.

Emine (*Yatık Emine*) is also considered as a threat. She is cast out, excluded, marginalized or she is crushed, insulted through sexual violence.

Kerem (*Akrebin Yolculuğu*) poses a threat, maybe not for the whole town, but for one of the rich people of town, because the secrets of Mister Agah and his wife Esra would be revealed.

**The isolated ones.** Zebercet in *Anayurt Oteli*, hotel manager Katip in *Akrebin Yolculuğu*, Falkonetti in *Yusuf ile Kenan*, and Bedri in *Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*, are either unhappy because they lack communication, they are misunderstood or they express themselves through violence because they cannot communicate.

At the beginning, it seems Zebercet is able to manage the hotel despite his mental, spiritual troubles. He has a respectful, ordinary communication with his guests. However, as the narrative unfolds and Zebercet's hopes are dashed, he severs communication with others entirely. He starts to turn back guests of the hotel.

Falkonetti in *Yusuf ile Kenan* is a kid who cannot communicate through speech. He expresses himself through violence. Maybe there isn't even a possibility for him to assert or express himself in the job that he goes in order to survive in his environment. He has already learned that in that place, physical force is the only road towards power.

Bedri (*Kırık Bir Aşk Hikayesi*) seems to be a character with proper, smooth relationships with other people. He gets along with Fuat. Yet neither Fuat, nor the other townspeople are people who he can show his paintings to, people who he can listen to music with. Bedri is unable to share his sophisticated tastes with anyone, his communication with townspeople remain limited with his role as a teacher..

## Reference

Esen, Ş. (2002) Ömer Kavur: Sinemamızda Bir Auteur, İstanbul: Agora Kitaplığı.