

Anayurt Hotel / Anayurt Oteli (1987)

Ö. Kavur

Overview

Arguably the first film to depict Turkish rural life by going beyond an emotional and nostalgic perspective, *Motherland Hotel* holds a significant place both in Omer Kavur's filmography and Turkish cinema history. The film's distinctive characteristics are its critical stance to its subject and its powerful use of cinematic expression. Adapted from Yusuf Atılgan's novel *Anayurt Oteli*, the film has been as impactful as the novel itself. It is now considered as one of the most successful adaptations in Turkish film history by scholars and critics. The restored print of *Anayurt Oteli* was screened in the 36. İstanbul Film Festival in 2017.

The film tells the story of Zebercet who is a hotel manager in rural Anatolia while making allusions to the contemporary history of Turkey, in order to examine the behavioral patterns, the moral struggles and the dilemmas of rural life, and to reflect upon the alienation of human beings who cannot make sense of their place in the society that they live in. After *Adı Vasfiye* (1985, Atıf Yılmaz), *Anayurt Oteli* is also one of the first handful of films of Turkish cinema that carries qualities associated with contemporary narratives. With its fragmented structure the film reduces the causal links in its storylines, renders the motivations of its characters ambiguous, interweaves the concepts of real and imaginary, and temporally disrupts its narrative. As such, it is an example of a contemporary narrative.

Cinematic Narration

The film's cinematographer *Orhan Oğuz* masterfully structures the world of the story by lighting, framing and camera movements, making a considerable contribution to the cinematic expression of the story. Tension, ambiguity and atmosphere created by the point of view shots of characters, especially from the perspective of Zebercet, brilliantly portrayed by *Macit Koper*; point of view shots without any definite subjects; camera angles and positions that do not belong to anyone present in the narrative world adds additional layers to the story and therefore to the film. *Anayurt Oteli* is divided into parts by temporal nouns or by the names of days that do not follow each other by any logical order. Sound also deserves mention as a powerful narrative tool throughout the film. The film creatively employs means of cinematic expression in terms of representing Zebercet's moods, dreams, and specific ways he perceives reality and himself.

Characters

Zebercet: In his thirties, the manager of the Motherland Hotel

Zeynep: The woman who does the cleaning, laundry and cooking jobs in the hotel

The Mysterious Woman: A beautiful, striking woman from the city, she has a relationship with a veterinarian

Synopsis

Anayurt Oteli tells the story of Zebercet's eventual suicide as he fails to deal with himself, his past, and the life he is leading. One evening, a mysterious, beautiful, attractive, confident woman arrives at the hotel, quite distinct from the customers of the town with her dialect and attitude. Travelling from the big city - considering the name of the train she arrives in, from the capitol Ankara - the woman says that she will be back and leaves the hotel to visit a village nearby. From that moment on, Zebercet starts to wait for the woman. He keeps her room unoccupied and preserves the room just the way the woman left it, with the bed unmade, the used towels, cigarette butts in the ashtray, and the glass she drank her tea from. The days pass on as usual, with guests arriving and departing, with Zebercet going out occasionally in order to have a drink, get a haircut, watch a film or buy clothes; yet the woman never comes back. Zebercet, filled with the disappointment of waiting for the woman who does not come back, oppressed by his tedious life in the town, urged by his emotional and sexual needs yet unable to make human connections with anyone, starts to lose touch with reality. He kills the cleaning woman Zeynep and the black cat by strangling them. He refuses to let anyone stay at the hotel. The day he plainly realizes that nothing awaits him and he waits for nothing, he hangs himself in the room the Mysterious Woman stayed in.

The Plot

There are countless moments in the film which would not be considered as events from a classical narrative standpoint such as guests arriving, paying their bills, their luggage being carried; a guest reading a newspaper; Zebercet counting back numbers, talking to himself, opening and closing doors. The film is made up of parts starting with names of days and times of the day.

A Delayed Train from Ankara The film starts with a woman arriving at the hotel and asking if there are any vacant rooms. It is unclear to whom she directs the question or what answer she gets. She looks directly at the camera. Even though the shot is from a subjective perspective, it is never shown who the subject is, who the woman faces. It is impossible to even know if there is a subject present. The next scene shows Zebercet in an empty hotel room and telling his life story to someone who we do not see and cannot be certain of their presence. The events that he recounts in his own life story, his birth, his circumcision ceremony and his mother's death, his military discharge, and him taking over the management of the hotel coincides with periods in Turkey's political history where significant breaking points occurred such as 1950, 1960, 1971, and 1980. He tells his life story to the person – or their illusion - that we guess to be the woman who we saw at the opening scene of the film, the one who came to the hotel with a delayed train from Ankara, and who left the hotel for a while.

Monday Zebercet wakes up. While washing his face he sees that he has a moustache. He wakes up the cleaning lady Zeynep. He breakfasts. He attends to the customers. Knocking on one of the doors, he wakes the occupants. A woman's voice answers. At that moment, Zebercet remembers the moment that he woke the Mysterious Woman who had stayed at the hotel, and he remembers her voice. He leaves the hotel for the town.

He enters a barbershop to get a shave. He sees his moustache in the mirror, asks the barber to shave it off. The barber tells him that he must surely be joking, which makes us sure that the matter of the moustache is one of Zebercet's delusions. However, when he gets back to the hotel, a guest's remark "You have cut your moustache" makes us realize that throughout the movie the surface reality shows cracks and our guesses as to what is true or false will inevitably fail.

Zebercet eats dinner at the hotel's kitchen. At this moment we learn that Zeynep's maternal uncle used to come every month to get her pay but he has not shown up for 6 months. At the hotel register, we see that room Number 1 is vacant. Zebercet is keeping the room for the Mysterious woman.

He enters the room that the Mysterious Woman previously occupied. Nothing has been touched. Everything waits just like the woman left them: A glass with some tea left in it, an unmade bed, the towel that she used, the cigarette butts with lipstick marks on them... He approaches the room where a teacher couple is staying and listens to them having sex. He enters Zeynep's room and rapes her.

Tuesday In the morning while the teacher couple is leaving the hotel, they shake Zebercet's hand and thank him. Zebercet lowers his hand and makes a gesture as if he wants to relive the feeling of the touch. Just as the woman is about to get out through the door she stops for a moment, half turning her head to where Zebercet is standing but not looking at him, we hear the sentence she uttered while she was making love with her partner in the night: "How I am yours!" It's not quite certain whether it's Zebercet or the woman who remembers this moment. Because if the voice is inside Zebercet's mind, then it seems the woman heard Zebercet's own voice inside his mind. This is another one of those moments where the film confounds the audience. Guests come and go. Zeynep asks Zebercet if there is any news from his Uncle.

Thursday After sending news with his apprentice, the barber comes to the hotel himself and asks Zebercet why he doesn't come in to get a shave. While he leaves the hotel, he says: "You have shaved your moustache, it suits you, you look younger." Again we find ourselves in a game: Was there a moustache or not? In the evening, Zeynep has fallen asleep in the kitchen. Zebercet saves the dinner just as it is about to burn. While a guest asks about how the hotel is being heated, they talk about the history of the building. Built in 1839 as a mansion, the building was converted into a hotel in 1923. Both dates point to significant times in Turkey's political history: The Gülhane Rescript, in other words the first step towards westernization, and the latter, the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The same guest says to Zebercet: "You have not been outside at all for six days." At this point, we become confused yet again. While we thought that the events separated by names of days signified a certain period of days, we realize that there have been temporal jumps and there was never any chronological order to what we watched. Zebercet enters into the room where the Mysterious Woman stayed. We see the woman, she raises her head and looks at the camera, smiling.

Friday In the room of the Mysterious Woman, Zebercet sweeps the wood pieces that fell down from the ceiling. He refills the glass with the leftover tea with the same amount and leaves it just where the woman left it. After leaving the room and closing the door, he knocks back on the door as if she is in there. "Yes...I'm up" The voice we hear is the voice of the Mysterious Woman in Zebercet's mind. The old guest who asks Zebercet if there is any message for him everytime he comes in, leaves the hotel. He pays for the seven days he stayed. Zeynep asks if room number 1 will be cleaned up or not. Zebercet says that the room is clean and does not allow Zeynep to enter.

The Night Zebercet turns down a regular guest of the hotel, the prostitute who comes with her customer. This moment marks the first of the days he starts refusing customers into the hotel. He has started to lose hope of the Mysterious Woman ever coming back. So he writes down his own name for the vacant room that he saved for her. New customers arrive, he sends them away, saying there is no vacancy. Zebercet starts to sever his touch with reality even more. He enters into the Mysterious Woman's room. He dreams about what she said, her demeanour. He gets naked, smells the towel she used and cries: "I would have died if you didn't come...You had said that you would be back in a week."

Tuesday Three customers who have previously stayed at the hotel come back. He also refuses to let them stay. He takes down all the keys, hangs only the number 1 back in place. He tells the paper boy that he does not want any more newspapers. He goes outside. The day is October 29. There are Republic Day celebrations all around town. He leaves the main avenue, sees a young woman, and starts to follow her. After the woman shops around town, she meets with her boyfriend. Zebercet goes to a tavern to drink, then to a cock-fight, then to a film with a young man he met at the fight. He cannot decide whether to take the young man to the hotel or not. He dreams about the Mysterious Woman in her bed. He enters into Zeynep's room, he rapes her, and he kills her by strangling her. After that, he kills the black cat of the hotel.

Monday He brings the hotel registry records to the police station; in the market square, he finds himself among people praying for someone who died, announced from the mosque's minaret, but he feels uncomfortable among these people, and he does not know what to do. While he gets back to the hotel, two men approach him and ask for the towel that the Mysterious Woman left behind. Zebercet takes them to a different room but the towel is there. The men attempt to tie down Zebercet to the bed. After some back and forth, they give up. Two police officers come to the hotel, asking for the old guest who left a while ago. They say that the old man strangled his own daughter. Zebercet goes outside again to wander around town; in a store selling TVs, a film showing a man trying to strangle a woman plays on the screens. He goes to the local court, watches the trial of someone who had killed a relative. He walks around the park. He runs into an old man who knows Zebercet's family, then encounters the prostitute that he knows from the hotel. In the tavern, he listens to a man recently released from jail talking, and he feels worse. He buys roasted chestnuts and goes to the cinema. In the film, one of two boxers tries to strangle the other one. He runs outside to puke. He returns to the hotel by taxi. Without getting in, he walks to the train station. He watches the departing train then he goes back to the hotel. In the room filled with old objects, while rocking an empty crib, we see that there is a woman in the old photographs that he is looking at who looks very much like the Mysterious Woman and who we guess to be her mother. This photograph, combined with Zebercet's problematic perception of reality, makes us doubt if the Mysterious Woman even exists at all. At the end of the film, we think that the woman he dreams about is actually the mother he lost in his childhood. This helps us make sense of Zebercet's hunger for love, his difficulties in establishing close relations, and his disjointed presence in human contact.

Sunday He hangs himself in room number 1 that the Mysterious Woman stayed in.

THEMES

Alienation. The main theme of Anayurt Oteli is alienation. Alienation of a human being from their own existence, from their environment, and from other people causes problems in how they perceive themselves and their reality, and as a result distancing them from human emotions, thoughts and acts. Alienation makes one unable to feel their existence, unable to ascribe meaning to their existence, and ultimately unable to find meaning in living. The main character of the film Zebercet is leading a mundane life without being close to any living being and his fragile balance is disturbed by a guest of the hotel, the Mysterious Woman. While his dreams about her show how close to the woman he feels, they also demonstrate how he has become alienated from everything else. His alienation extends from his doubt about whether he has a moustache or not, to his murder of Zeynep and the cat, and to his suicide. His alienation from his own body, from his own existence; and how the only meaning he can find in his life

is connected to a single dream, and from this dream to someone who only exists in his past, to his mother, allows us to sense what is wrong with Zebercet.

Desire. In the relationships of Anayurt Oteli's main character Zebercet with other people, we also witness his need for sexual intimacy. His lust for the woman teacher, his ambiguous intentions for the young man in the cock fight, his rape of Zeynep, his stalking of the woman in the town reveals that he dreams and lives his sexuality as a healing pleasure rather than as a result of an emotional and intellectual process. In his world, the need for love and intimacy becomes mere acts corresponding to a sexuality devoid of emotion and meaning. Desire and sexuality devoid of meaning strikingly demonstrates how far the character is gone in terms of being human.

Apathy. Apathy emerges as one of the main themes of the film. In his book *The Man's Search for Himself*, Rollo May argues that apathy or lack of feeling is the dominant mood of contemporary humans. Emptiness and apathy rising from this feeling of nothingness are among the fundamental problems of an alienated individual. According to May, these feelings of emptiness and nothingness are born out of people's feelings of powerfulness in terms of being able to change their lives and their environments. A human being in this situation becomes an apathetic, uncaring being who has given up on wanting and feeling. It can be argued that the two main characters of Anayurt Oteli represent the apathetic human Rollo May describes. Zeynep character is an even stronger representation of an apathetic being. Her reaction to a burned dinner on the stove is the same reaction that she shows to being raped or the disappearance of her uncle. It really seems like Zeynep is not feeling anything. Even though he seems to feel terror, disappointment and sadness in the scene where he gives up hope of the Mysterious Woman ever coming back, Zebercet is acutely emotionless and apathetic in the cock fight, in the film at the cinema, the moments of murder on the TV, and most importantly after he murders Zeynep and while he prepares for his own death.

Death / Killing For the alienated, apathetic, unfeeling human being who lives like everything is hopeless and devoid of meaning, death becomes an ordinary concept, and killing becomes an insignificant act. The theme of death becomes important for both appearing in turning points of the narrative and for being an often repeated motif throughout the film. Death and killing serves as motifs feeding the themes of alienation and apathy, while also signifying how feebly, how fragilely it's characters are attached to life. Throughout the film, Zebercet kills three living beings. Zeynep, the cat, and himself. For the first two, there is no indication that he feels any remorse or sadness. Even during the preparations he makes for his eventual suicide, he is calm and emotionless. It is said that the old man, one of the guests of the hotel, is a criminal who strangled her own daughter. The accused in the trial that Zebercet watches in the court has killed one of his relatives. Zeynep's maternal uncle is dead, that is why he does not come to get her pay. Zebercet's mother died when he was ten. She had 4 miscarriages before he was born. One of the characters in cinema and television films tries to strangle the other one to death. In this way, the audience never gets far from death and killing throughout the film.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Zebercet: The manager of the Motherland Hotel. In his thirties. A character with childhood traumas, lonely, maladjusted, restless, sometimes he loses touch with reality, experiences delusions, and has trouble emotionally connecting with people. He has grown alienated from himself and from external reality. From its start to its finish, Anayurt Oteli is filled with scenes and moments focused on Zebercet, allowing us to witness what goes on in his mind, his emotions or his thoughts. It would not be wrong to say that the film is completely made up of these moments. For this reason, what is written in the narrative part of this text can also be read as moments descriptive of this character.

The Moustache and Mirrors In some moments when he looks in the mirror, he sees his moustache. Reactions from people he encounters are also contradictory in this sense. Neither the audience nor the main character can be sure if the moustache exists or when it exists. However, these moments allow us to understand that there are some problems with the character's relation to reality. The moustache and the moments he looks in the mirror are also representative of Zebercet's problems with existing-being.

Rape and Murder At the scene of his last visit to Zeynep's bed, he expects her to stay awake. Not being able to get a reaction, either in the form of resistance or intimacy, exacerbates both of his problems: his problems with being-existing and his inability to form loving relationships. This accelerates the process leading to murder, then his suicide.

Suicide Zebercet kills himself by saying "What am I even waiting for". He had waited for the Mysterious Woman arriving with the delayed train from Ankara and realized that she was not coming.

Maybe she had never arrived. After strangling Zeynep, everywhere he goes he comes upon news and images of murder. His mood becomes increasingly depressive. We get the impression that what he goes through is a much deeper disappointment than fear, remorse or sadness.

Zeynep: A country woman who has been left at the hotel by her maternal Uncle for her to work there. She is an emotionally frozen, unreactive woman. It appears as if she has become inured to everything going on around her. As if she lives as a mere body. On the other hand, this character can be read as representing a people who never reacts to what is being done to them, just acting according to what is being asked of them.

Apathetic: Even when she is raped by Zebercet, she goes on sleeping or does not react at all.

She does not find it weird when Zebercet asks her to not clean up room number one.

She wonders why her Uncle is not coming to collect her pay and asks Zebercet but she does not question this further; she makes do with the answers she gets and the ones she does not.

The Mysterious Woman: An urbanite woman who has a relationship with a village veterinarian but who we know very little about other than her being beautiful and fascinating. To speak it more plainly, she is Ankara; the capital of the Republic of Turkey and she is unattainable. She resembles the woman in the photograph at the end of the movie, who we guess to be Zebercet's mother.

Unattainable: When she first comes to the hotel and even more in the moments when she looks at Zebercet (the camera), she appears strikingly different from the other customers with her pristine Turkish, her refined and highly confident manner.

In those rare moments when she appears in the film she looks straight at the camera (Zebercet), and smiles mesmerizingly. In all these moments, she appears both very warm and intimate, and unattainable. She is aware of herself, her charms, and her superiority.

Towards the end of the film, when Zebercet's delusions, his hopelessness and his disappointments mount up, we see the profile of the Mysterious Woman for the first time, and indeed she seems colder and seems to have an unhappy expression. She is pulling away from Zebercet. This forces the impression that the Mysterious Woman is a figment of Zebercet's imagination.



The Mysterious Woman arrives on a delayed train from Ankara.



Zebercet starts to lose hope of ever seeing the Mysterious Woman again.



Zebercet in the barbershop. Did he have a moustache? Or not? Was this a joke?



The moment of indecision. Zebercet cannot decide if he wants to take the young man he met in the cock fight back to the hotel.



Zebercet kills Zeynep after raping her: "Don't sleep! You are always sleeping."



Zebercet starts to turn down customers saying that the hotel is full.



Is the Mysterious Woman Zebercet's mother who has died on the summer of his circumcision?