

A paper on Emin Alper's "Tepenin Ardı"

RCTV Film Culture Final Exam

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January 5, 2023

1 Introduction

Emin Alper is Turkish filmmaker and screenwriter known for his thought-provoking films that explore social and political issues. His 2012 film, "Tepenin Ardı" is a strong exploration of the impact on traditional ways of turkish life, the struggle between the individual and outer forces. By drawing a portrait of a town in the midst of a conflict between the locals and the never seen enemy, the Yörüks, the film takes a look at the "enemy" figure. In this paper, we will examine the biography and filmography of Emin Alper, the common themes and characters present in his work, and the cinematography techniques he employs. We will also dive into the story and themes of "Tepenin Ardı" as well as analyzing the characters and their motivations.

2 About the Director

Emin Alper is born in Karaman in 1974. He enrolled into the Civil Engineering Department of Bogazici University, but he switched his major to pursue a career in economics and history. He now holds a Phd in Modern Turkish History from the Bogazici University.

Since his adolescence years, Emin Alper was interested in movies. He had been jotting movie scripts and he was also a member of his university's cinema club. He spent most of his time

in that club as an active member writing critiques and reviews. Invited famous turkish directors and actors to give speeches and workshops.

His movie career officially started when he shot the first short film, "Mektup (2005)". Then, his first long feature film "Tepenin Ardı (20012)" was released. With the help of these successes he was now, known by the masses.

To talk about his vision, one common theme in Emin Alper's films is the exploration of social and political issues. In "Tepenin Ardı" for example, the film examines the consequences of the Turkish government's construction and its impact on the local community. Another theme that can be seen is the human resilience of individuals in the face of threat.

In terms of character development, Emin Alper often focuses on the portrayal of ordinary people and their struggles against the "enemy". Emin Alper generally plays on the "trust no one" theme, and his films often explore the complexities and flaws of his characters, as they struggle with their own personal enemies while trying to maintain their relationships with those around them. In Turkish society, it is common to see the "enemy" figure. As an foreigner, as the government, as the capitalist system, as the western culture... In short, as the "other". Emin Alper in "Tepenin Ardı" dives deep into this theme.

Turkish cinema had a long debate on the role of "the father" or "the men", some directors pictured men as a strong and proud figure, some directors opposed and painted a picture of weak and vulnerable male characters. Some mocked the masculinity, some praised it. Emin Alper is one of the directors who played on the "toxic masculinity" theme, especially in the movie "Tepenin Ardı".

Finally, to talk about Emin Alper's cinematography, his films often utilize natural lighting and landscapes to create a sense of nostalgia and sympathy for the characters. In "Tepenin Ardı" for example, the film uses sweeping shots of the natural surroundings to switch between the context of the characters and show their correlation as well as their isolation. The film also uses close-ups to emphasize the emotions of the characters. In the river scene, we can also see that he uses the Kubrick Stare for when Zafer (Berk Hakman) first sees the commandos, which we learn at the end of the film are just the goats. That scene is put there to emphasize the character's unhealthy sanity. One of the key cinematographical approaches that Emin Alper used specifically in "Tepenin Ardı" was to make the movie look western. He

used a lot of western music, western style long shots, and editing techniques. This was again to emphasize the "other" theme and the alienation of the villagers from the rest of the world.

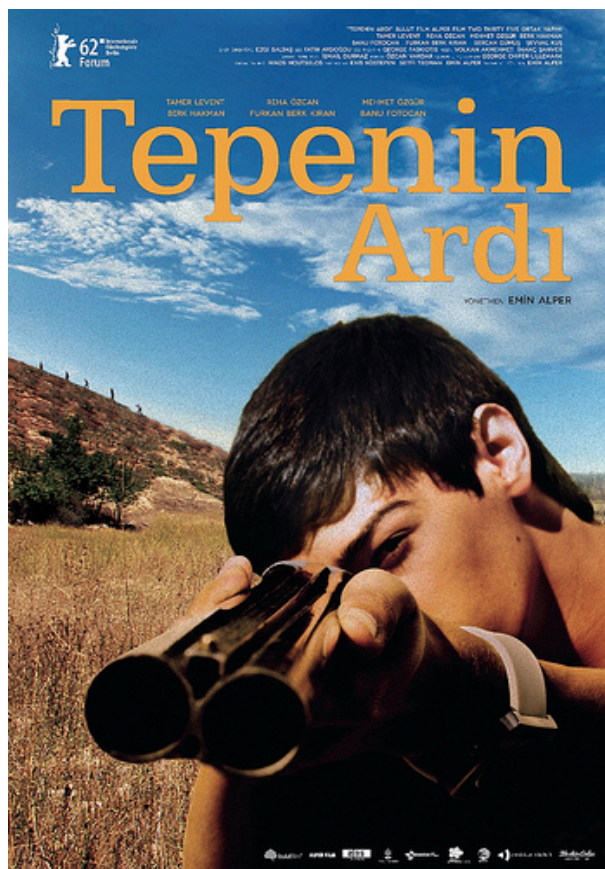


Figure 1: Tepenin Ardı (Emin Alper, 2012)

3 About the Film

"Tepenin Ardı", Emin Alper's first feature length film, is a 2012 Turkish drama film both directed and written by Emin Alper himself. The film was a critical and commercial success, winning numerous awards at national and international film festivals, including the Berlin Film Festival. It examines the social and political issues of contemporary Turkey in a realistic manner, and is an exciting first step in Emin Alpers's career. The film takes place in a small village in Karaman, and follows the story of Faik (played by Tamer Levent), an elderly man

living on his inherited land, and Nusret (played by Reha Özcan), who brings his two sons to visit their grandfather. What begins as a seemingly ordinary family reunion turns into a tragedy as Faik's increasing hatred towards the Yörük people, whom he accuses of stealing his goats and ruining his crops, leads to a series of events that escalate into violence.

One of the central themes of the film is the dangers of hatred and discrimination. Faik's initial feelings towards the Yörük people, grow into a societal paranoia as he becomes into thinking the Yörük people as the enemy. This theme is elaborated even more to portray Faik, a figure of authority within the family, using his hatred towards the Yörük people to manipulate and exploit other family members. This theme can also be read as an allegory to contemporary Turkey, our country that has been a home to diverse groups of minorities with different languages and religions. However, unfortunately, always struggled from armed conflicts towards or in-between the groups. Mainly, These conflicts generally has 2 sides that present themselves as one dominant group that tries to impose its own identity on the minority group, leading to a sense of fear and insecurity within the minority group. This is clearly seen in the film, as Faik's family is subjected to a broken identity imposed by the dominant group, and their actions are driven by fear and insecurity.

The fact that we don't see the Yörüks makes the film much more clever and interesting. At some point we, as the viewers, understand that they are only blaming their mistakes and their sins on an enemy that they can't see. This is a very subtle way to portray the "other" theme. The ending is even more cleverly put with the patriotic and military-like shots, showing them marching to the other side of the hill. The irony being that even a loss of a family member (supposedly a murder committed by Sülo) did not change their minds. They still believe that the Yörüks are the enemy and their bodies fill with even more adrenaline. As you can see, these themes are very closely related to each other and Emin Alper used many different view-points to portray one of the oldest problems of the humankind. The weak vs the strong, the minority vs the majority, us vs "the others". First, the Yörüks vs the villagers. Then, the men vs the women... All of these conflicts are just different versions of the same problem, the power dynamics. Emin Alper, played his hand on this problem and filmed the movie in a realistic and objective way.



Figure 2: The Power Dynamics (Power Dynamics in Writing Theory, 2019)

Getting to the technical side, in terms of character development, the film focuses on the portrayal of Faik, Nusret, and the two sons. Faik is a masculine and conservative character, whose motives are driven by his feelings of hate towards the Yörük people and instincts to protect his land. Mehmet, on the other hand, is a more understanding one, who tries to defuse the conflict between Faik and the Yörük people and maintain peace within the family. He even understands what is going on between the sons without blaming the other at some point. The two sons, play important roles in the film to make the plot go deeper and later unfold. In the end, the sons along with the rifles are the main reason that this crisis with the unseen Yörüks.

Overall, "Tepenin Ardı" is a film that explores themes of hatred, discrimination, and power dynamics through the portrayal of its characters. Through its allegories of Turkey, the film is a commentary on the social and political issues of our time. The film's naturalistic cinematography, which captures the beauty and tranquility of the village, serves a purpose to get the viewers into the emotional impact of the story and immerse them. Also, the western look is used to emphasize the "other" theme and the alienation of the villagers from

the rest of the world. The film is a great example of how a director can use the power of cinema to tell a story and make a statement on our society.

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