

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **Eşkiya (The Bandit)** (1996)

Yavuz TURGUL

### **Overview**

Yavuz Turgul's 1996 movie *Eşkiya*, along with *Tabutta Rövaşata* (Derviş Zaim, 1996) are seen as the beginning of a new direction in Turkish cinema. At a time when the Turkish film industry was about to die and foreign films were taking over the film market, *Eşkiya* reached and was watched by an audience of two and a half million people.

*Eşkiya* is considered to be one of Turgul's masterpieces. The metaphoric expression which he frequently uses in all of his films is also used in this film. The main conflicts in *Eşkiya* are based on village/city, good/bad and traditional/modern dichotomies. The story of the film is about Baran, who has been in prison for 35 years for being a bandit, which we can only hear from folk songs and stories. Baran goes to Istanbul to find both his love and the person who caused him to be in jail.

### **Visual Language**

In *Eşkiya*, it can be seen that the frame is most frequently arranged to make the subject clear and is built around the main characters. Because the narrative is based on the characters, the frames are arranged so that the character is positioned in the centre. One of the most important points in the frame arrangement is the creation of the illusion of depth. This illusion of depth is closely related to the use of light sources and in *Eşkiya*, backlight is treated as one of the most fundamental elements of depth image editing. Top-angle shots were used to add dramatic or psychological dimensions to the story from time to time. When the bewilderment of Baran in Beyoğlu is shown by top-angle shots, it is emphasized that the character is alone and a foreigner in the crowd.

Light and shadows play an active role in shaping and directing the audience's attention in *Eşkiya*. Turgul uses to advantage his background in the advertising industry, The use of light creates the atmosphere of the film. One effective example of the use of light is in Cumali's death scene. Shot by the mafia, he is waiting for death on the roof of the hotel, and the slowly setting sun illuminates the situation.

Sound, including elements such as sound effects and music, is indispensable for creating a meaningful and dramatic atmosphere in *Eşkiya*. Music plays an important role in Turgul's films. It can be said that the music starts slowly and ends in the same way; it does not start or end suddenly, between the stages and transitions. It is possible to identify the mental state of the characters through the music in *Eşkiya*. For example, the scenes in the village of *Eşkiya* have more warm colours than the other scenes. Turgul also starts the road scene closer and then gradually moves further away from the object. He especially likes to use close-ups in his emotional movies, and long, emotional, moment-containing dialogues. There are scenes in which he uses pan and tilt techniques. The camera is generally at eye level but in some scenes, especially when the movie is depicting the city (mostly Istanbul), the camera shots can give a worm's-eye angle. There are some scenes in which fade out and dissolve editing are used. In terms of *mise-en-scène*, costumes, hair and make-up are all very successful in general in Yavuz Turgul's movies: characters show facial expressions and use body language successfully and dramatically.

### **Characters**

**Baran (Eskiya)** was a bandit in his home village and has killed people in the past. Even so, he is innocent compared with the people in a big city because he regards it as right to do bad things to bad people and good to good people according to his conscience. Baran is merciful and fights for good. This makes the protagonist good as a character structure.

**Berfo** is the antagonist character of the movie; he is a city bandit and is the opposite of Baran. He reports on his best friend to the police in order to get the woman he loves, his acts are corrupted and he justifies this as proving that he loves her more than Baran does. Baran and Berfo are two characters who perpetrate similar evil acts but are distinguished as good and bad because of their conscientious values and their viewpoints on situations.

**Cumali** is a young man who lives in a suburban neighbourhood. He works as a drug dealer to make money. He is the leader of his group of friends but he is known to be a problem both in business life and in the neighbourhood.

**Keje** is the film's good and innocent female character and the woman with whom the protagonist and antagonist are both in love. She spends her life quietly while waiting for Baran and she uses her silence as a tool of resistance.

**Emel** is Cumali's girl friend.

## Summary

The film started with a former bandit Baran released from jail after 35 years in prison. When he returns to his village, he learns that everything has changed from his ex-friends, and that he does not live. He learns that his closest friend has denounced himself to get the woman he loves. Eşkiya sets off for Istanbul to find him. He meets Cumali on train journey and helps him not to be caught by police. Cumali gives him a place to stay and they become friends. One day he sees Berfo on TV and started to search him. When he finds him he also meets again his old love Keje. He promises her to take her again from Berfo. At the same time Cumali cheats the mafia for the girl he loves. To protect him from the mafia Eşkiya takes money from Berfo by promising he will not take Keje. However Berfo cheated Eşkiya second time and his check is not founded. Cumali is shot and killed by the mafia. And Eşkiya takes revenge from both Berfo and the Mafia.

## Story

**Background of the story** A group of bandits were captured by the police 35 years ago in the mountains of Cudi. In the last 35 years, all the bandits have died from illness or from retribution in the region. All except for one; Baran. The film's main character, Baran is a former bandit released from jail after 35 years in prison. When he returns to his home, he sees that his village has been flooded and is now under water and his home has gone. Everything has changed. He finds out that 35 years ago his best friend Berfo had betrayed him, taken his money and won a woman named Keje whom Baran loved and still loves. He decides to take his revenge on Berfo and sets off for Istanbul to find him.

**Going to Istanbul** On the train, he meets Cumali. Cumali has been working for the mafia and he needs Baran's help to avoid being caught by the police. Baran saves Cumali from the mafia and Cumali gives Baran a place to stay. Later, they become friends and start to search for Berfo together.

**Finding Berfo** One day, Baran sees Berfo on the television and learns that he is famous now and that he has changed his name. When he finds Berfo, he sees Keje and learns that she had promised herself not to talk to anyone for the last 35 years. When they meet for the first, time, Keje talks to Baran and he promises her that he will come and rescue her.

**Cumali's love** At the same time, Cumali is in love with a girl named Emel. She tells him that she needs money to save her brother from jail, but the man in jail is actually her boyfriend, not her brother. She even uses Cumali to visit him. Cumali works for a drug dealer so he decides to steal some drugs from him and sell them in order to get money to help her. He gets the money and gives it to her to save her fake brother. When he learns the truth, he kills Emel and her boyfriend. So now he becomes a criminal.

**Problems with the mafia** The drug dealer has caught Cumali and wants the money back which Cumali stole for Emel. Baran says that he will find the money and he goes to Berfo. Berfo gives Baran a cheque but in return Baran has to agree that Keje will stay with Berfo: this is the deal that they strike. Baran repays the drug dealer and saves Cumali. He chose the life of Cumali instead of Keje. But the cheque bounces and the drug dealer turns up and kills Cumali. When Baran learns about this, he goes out and kills Berfo, the drug dealer and his accomplices.

**The finale** At the end of the film, the police have cornered Baran on the roof of hotel where he is staying. He has no place to run. Because he has spent 35 years in jail, he is determined not to go back to jail; he sees fireworks and remembers something that he had once said to Keje: "When a bandit dies, he becomes a falling star". For him, the firework is calling him to join his old bandit friends. He runs straight at the police and is shot, and then he throws himself to his death from the roof.

## Themes

**Social change** The most obvious theme in *Eşkîya* is cultural and social change. The key issues of the film are the meeting, friendship and conflict experienced by an old-time bandit who is determined to defend his right to resort to violence only in the face of injustice, people who believe that they will survive and be powerful if they are like the new bandits of the modern world, and mafia bosses who are cruel liars and care only about money. The social and cultural changes which occur during the passage of time in *Eşkîya* are explained through the character of Baran, an old-school bandit who goes to Istanbul to search for Keje, the woman he loves. Baran's difficulty in adapting to the changing world is represented by her disappearance. Baran, who even looks at people's faces in his search for Keje, is surprised by the size of Istanbul. Making him a bandit seems to have been a thematically conscious choice. This is highlighted by the words "The bandit is now in the city", referring to the character Demircan who is the mafia man in the film. Banditry has changed its form and the new order has produced its own bandits. The bandits who rebelled against social conditions in their own way because they believed that they were unfair have been replaced by city bandits who are motivated only by financial interests. The bandit symbolizes the need for a saviour / hero in an environment where social values are being transformed. Baran, who does not resort to violence unless he is in a difficult situation, can find no other way of dealing with the outside world; he resorts to violence in order to save Cumali. The deaths in *Eşkîya* reveal the inevitability of change and show Turgul's negative and pessimistic attitude to social change.

**Change in human relations** Changes in human relationships are observed in the film within the framework of the love and friendship relationships between the characters. Although Baran and Keje have waited for each other for many years to fulfil their love for one another, they are nevertheless willing to sacrifice their love for the sake of a human life in a world in which everyone is stabbing everyone else in the back. Baran does not hesitate to put his own life in danger for the sake of friendship. In addition to this, other relationships of friendship and love which stand out in the film have become much more superficial and corrupt as a reflection of modern times, such as the relationship between Emel and Cumali.

**The east/west dichotomy** An east/west dichotomy begins in *Eşkîya* with the arrival of Baran in Istanbul from Urfa. Anatolian people are pure, honest and easily deceived. In *Eşkîya*, Baran can never keep up with the city, in the end, he is doomed. *Eşkîya* is a film which carries traces from the narrative tradition of the East with its love story and its fairy-tale structure. The lovers who have waited for 35 years, the amulet carried by Baran and the 'bandit who turned into a star after his death' are elements which strengthen the fairy-tale structure. Emphasizing that the Eastern thought in this film lies in Cumali's death scene, Turgul has stated that the words "You will go to the land at the end of fear" which Baran says to Cumali are based on the view in Eastern philosophy. The film's director commented that *Eşkîya* is a movie which "carries eastern mysticism in itself but does not overlook the western reality" (Ersümer, 2013).

**Male friendship** The two most important characters in *Eşkîya* are Baran and Cumali. Murat Şahoğlu, as Berfo is now known, is another very significant character with his conflicts and his contribution to the story. The friendship between Baran and Cumali in *Eşkîya* is based on coincidences. Baran, who has gone to Istanbul to search for Keje who was still loyal to him after 35 years in prison, realizes that his search will not be easy in the face of changing times and places. Cumali, on the other hand, is a character who grew up in the outskirts of Istanbul and wanted to take a short-cut to becoming rich. The paths which intersect between Baran and Cumali during the train journey ensure the start of a new friendship between them. One of the characters who set up the conflict in *Eşkîya* is Berfo (or Mahmut Şahoğlu as he is known after coming to Istanbul). The clash between Baran and Berfo has resulted from both characters falling in love with Keje. This was the reason why Berfo betrayed Baran, who was previously his best friend; he did not hesitate to inform on Baran, which shows the power of his love for Keje. It is therefore difficult for Berfo to understand why Baran would sacrifice his love to save Cumali's life; he states this incomprehension with the words "You give up the woman you love to save an ordinary man from death".

## Character Analysis

**Baran (Şener Şen)** He is a bandit who has been in jail for 35 years. When he goes out after 35 years, he has a hard time keeping up with the changes in the world. He was trapped in the order of 35 years ago. So now his prison is this new world. Therefore, it is the roofs where he feels most comfortable. Roofs remind him of mountains where he were a bandit once upon a time. Although he does not want to return to his old bandit chronicles, the new order of the new world will return him. But he will return not for himself but for the Cumali who he has placed in his absent son.

*Traditional* He represents the traditional country life. He never keeps up with change. His clothes, the way he talks and everything about him reflect the past. He carries a pair of binoculars with him and says that the binoculars are a memory of the past for him. All these things show us that he does not like change and is still searching for the life which he had got used to before. He is a good, kind, respectful and fair man. He represents bright positivity. Even though he was a bandit and killed many people, in the film we never see a bad side of him. Even when he kills the drug dealer and his enemy, it is for justice.

*Regretful* When he goes to talk to Mustafa, we can understand that by not killing him, even though Mustafa is waiting for him to kill him, he actually wants to avoid making conscientious and old mistakes (because he does not want to return to the old bandit days). Even going to a big city which he had no knowledge of is an example of courage, but he is listening to the sound of his heartbeat when he is searching for Keje with Cumali on the street without knowing anything about the new city life.

*Loyalty* There is a great example of loyalty when Baran does not even touch Sevim Hanım, whom Cumali sends to him one night, telling her that he loves someone else. Even though he never gets together with Keje, he loyal to his love. The father/son relationship which Baran establishes with Cumali is entirely involuntary for both of them and they formed it when they needed it. For this reason, even though Baran does not want to be a bandit again, he loses control of himself after Cumali's death; perhaps he thinks that nothing has been solved by goodness so he reverts to being a bandit.

*Friendship* Even in Baran's agreement with Berfo to save the life of Cumali, which means that he must give up the woman he loves, we can understand Baran's love for Cumali like a son. Of course, he is a spiritual man who believes in what he did and tells bandit stories: in the film's final scene, because he has spent most of his life in prison, the very word 'prison' now gives him a claustrophobic fear and he is prepared to do anything not to go back to prison again, even if it means dying.

**Cumali** He represents the uneducated element of the country; people who are exposed to change and who become degenerate Cumali has many bad habits; gambling, drug dealing, using a gun and working for the mafia. He says that he keeps up with social change and that his way of life is necessary. He has a character that seeks trust and love however he can do bad things while seeking good things. Therefore he can be easily deceived.

*Traumatic childhood* He has a tragic family past: because of an unfortunate childhood, he was sentenced to choose a life which he did not want. We see that he had a traumatic childhood through the examples he gives of his childhood life, such as being persecuted by his aunt's husband and his step-mother's suicide by throwing her off the roof before his eyes. We can think that he has attachment problems and value problems because of his experiences. So maybe all he wants is to love someone and to be happy. Also, his own mother never loved him, which is why he is always searching for love. But he got cheated easily and experienced the same rejection by his father. That's why he puts Baran as a father and attaches to him very closely.

*Life on the extremes* He has no middle ground: someone is either good or bad for him. As we see in the scene in which he dies, he reveals that he has a fear of being abandoned; he is frightened when he is dying and he asks Baran not to leave him. Although he can kill his lover easily he frightened now dying.

*Search of happiness* He thinks that he is living his dream with Emel, he risks his life by doing business with the mafia for the sake of her happiness. He can do whatever needed for finding love and happiness without logic. This situation is related to his traumatic childhood. Therefore he can do easily childish action without thinking.

**Keje** Keje is a pure and good woman who loves Baran character. Although she is in a new life in the big city, she continues her old life habits. She chooses the path of silence to combat what was presented to her in life. She never looked at the face of the man (Berfo) to whom she was forcibly married and did not speak to him. She is a devoted woman. She could give up the man (Eşkiya) who had been waiting for years for the life of a young boy (Cumali). Her character has a fairy tale side.

*Loyalty* She loves Baran and has waited for him. Even though Berfo forced her to marry him, she decided never to speak again and she has stayed silent for 35 years. This remarkable act of silence represents her loyalty for Baran.

*Silent resistance.* When Berfo bought her from her father, she did not disapprove, and when Baran chooses to save Cumali's life over her, she stays calm. She never goes against the flow of life. Keje can also be seen as the true love of the film's hero. We can describe her as having an embittered life from a very young age, when the man she loved went to prison and she was 'bought' from her father by his best friend (who was responsible for putting the man he loves in prison). After moving to Istanbul with the husband she was forced to marry, she never spoke again. She was treated with violence by her husband because she did not speak, but despite this violence, she neither spoke a word nor gave birth to a child. She has been loyal to her true love, just like Baran himself has. She is someone who knows well how to wait. However there is resistance under this acceptance. With this silence she punishes Berfo. She does not let Berfo be happy either like herself.

*Mystical* At the same time, Keje believes in mystical events such as Baran telling her that bandits will become shooting stars when they die and, as we see in the film, she understands that Baran would die as a shooting star, so she knows that Baran had not yet died because of this mystical belief.

**Berfo** Berfo is Baran's enemy. He betrayed his best friend, stole Keje from him and also got all his money. He came to the city with the money he stole from Eşkiya and became a well-known businessman here in the city with this money. He does not recognize any rules for performing requests. Although he actually got everything he wanted, he could not be happy, because the woman he loved did not look at his face and never spoke to him for a lifetime. Now he is dealing with health problems and all the money that he earns does not help him. But still, he is angry enough to screw his old friend into his last breath.

*Everything is licit* Doing bad things for love is acceptable for him. He is so in love with Keje and says that he did all of these things for her love. Therefore he has a selfish and arrogant nature. He both betrayed his best friend and put the woman he loved in silence like a prison in order to obtain his own desires.

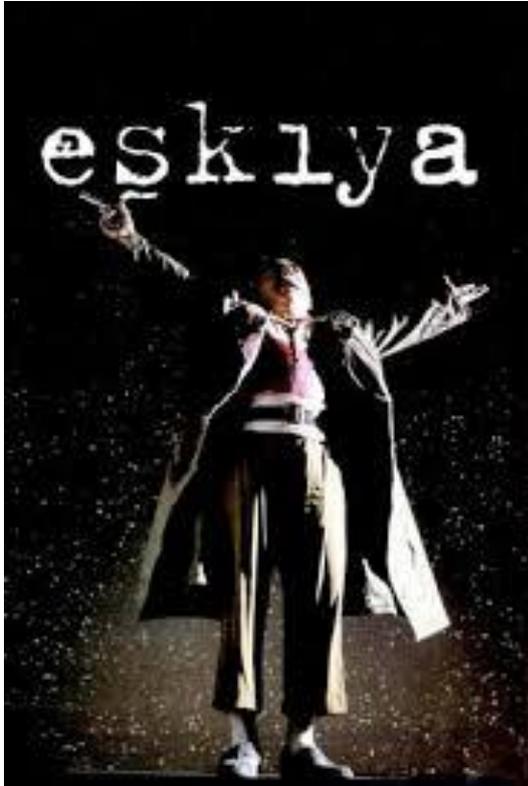
*Bad and disrespectful* He represents the other side of the conflict: he is on the bad side and receives a just punishment at the end of the film when he is killed by Baran. He is still the angry side or the relationship between him and Eşkiya even though he takes both the woman who Eşkiya loves and his money, he betrays Eşkiya and causes the death of Cumali who Eşkiya puts in the place of his absent son.

**Emel** Emel is the woman whom Cumali loves. But she is a hypocrite woman and she uses people for her own benefit. For example, she uses Cumali by telling him a lie in order to save her boyfriend from jail. She cheats Cumali. In doing so she becomes a character who sets the turning point in the story. She understood Cumali's hunger for love and used his love for herself. She is killed by Cumali for this deception. She doesn't have any rules for getting her requests like Berfo. She is the new generation of Berfo.

*Traumatic family* She is also a victim of degenerate family relationships. She and her mother have a very bad relationship. They have no love or respect for each other. In the film, we are presented with Emel as Cumali's lover. In general, we see her communicating in front of her house or through a window. We can understand from what she says and from her attitude that she does not like her mother very much.

*Manipulating by Sexuality* She uses her sexuality (her charm) even when she is persuading Cumali to take her to her older brother Sedat in the prison. She learns from her mother that to gain visibility she has to use her femininity. When she introduces Cumali to her 'brother' after stating that he needs money, Cumali finds the money for her even though it is difficult, and we see Emel's happiness. On the day after this event, we learn that the person we know as her 'brother' is actually

her lover. We can now realize that Emel pretended to love Cumali only to find the money. We also see that Emel is a manipulative person. The distinctive feature of Emel is that she does nothing illegal, unlike all the other characters in the film, but doing the wrong things for the man she loves makes her just as bad as Berfo.



Film Poster of *Eşkiya*



*Eşkiya*, Keje and Berfo



Cumali is shot and he is about to die.