



Watchtower

A film by Pelin Esmer

"(A) lovely gem... Original, well-made and dramatically fulfilling"
— Wendy Mitchell, *Screendaily*



Turkey, France and Germany / 2012 / Drama / Turkish with English subtitles / 100 min. / 2.35:1 / Dolby Digital

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SYNOPSIS

Haunted by a tragic incident, Nihat isolated himself by becoming a fire warden in a remote observstion tower far out in the wilderness. Seher lives in a makeshift room at a rural bus station, and she has taken a job as a bus hostess to escape her own traumatic past. Destined to come to a crossroads, they go about their solitary lives until their fates collide. Beginning at first as muted antagonism, their relationship quickly turns into tender domesticity as they settle together at Nihat's mountain-side watchtower. Yet the weight of the past presses on the silence between them, serving as the ultimate catalyst in their impassioned relationship with each other, and with higher powers that guide their spiritual lives.

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

WINNER – Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, Best Supporting Actor – **Adana Golden Boll Film Festival**
NOMINATED – Tiger Award – **Rotterdam International Film Festival**
OFFICIAL SELECTION – **Toronto International Film Festival, Goteborg International Film Festival,**

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR PELIN ESMER

In your previous film (10 to 11) one of the main characters was a real person. This time, both of the main characters are fictitious. How were the writing processes different?

10 to 11 I was inspired by my uncle Mithat Bey. He was the motivation for the script. The questions that he aroused were my primary source of inspiration while writing the script. Whereas while writing *Watchtower* I met my characters along he script. They appeared page by page. I had known neither Seher nor Nihat personally but I could have easily met them anytime, anywhere.

How were you inspired for this story or these characters?

Guilt was the main inspiration. Conscience... Then the locations... Once the watchtower and the bus station appeared in my mind, the characters appeared. Years ago I had seen a photo of a fire watchtower in a newspaper, an image that I had never seen or heard of before. A family lived there, in the middle of nowhere, watching the forest all day.

This was their job. Years later when I started the script and write about my character Nihat, this tower appeared in my memory. Then I visited many of these towers. The one that we found was the perfect setting for my character. Then I could imagine more about my character after I found where he was going to live. My other main character, Seher, is a young woman whom I do not personally know but who is around me all the time, with similar feelings and stories. But the first image that I have had about her was very vague. I have travelled many times by bus in Turkey, and have been often a passenger in one of these local bus stations. I remember not the image but the voice of a girl announcing the buses, a sound between a computer speaker and a human, almost mechanic. I have never seen her. I imagined as if that was the last announcement she would make, leaving and walking on the main road to an unknown destination. This image of her may have made me curious, and years later Seher appeared in this bus station with reasons I would not have imagined by then.

How was the casting done?

This time I did not write the characters for specific actors. After I finished the script we started to work on casting. The casting agency and my actor friends helped me to meet many actors and actresses. For Nihat, I did not have so many alternatives in mind. Olgun Simsek was one of the ones I would really want to work with. He is a great actor and as a person he also fits the character perfectly. Olgun's relationship with nature and life was very close to Nihat's. We spent hours sitting and chatting about the script, about life and about Nihat. For me these chats were more important than rehearsals, which actually we did not do much.

I met many young actresses for Seher. Finally Nilay Erdonmez was the one whom I felt would be closest to Seher. She is a theater actress and a director herself. It would be her first film and naturally she was quite nervous at the beginning. She worked very hard, and coming to the location and spending some time with us at the locations before the shooting helped her quite a bit. We had very long walks and talks together like I had with Olgun. It was a very hard task she had, but she did a great job at the end.

The story is quite universal, how do you think the local characteristics have added to the film?

These characters could easily be from somewhere else, from anywhere, anytime. And this story could be lived or told anywhere too. What interests me more are the things that don't change in humans. The differences are there hidden somewhere, in details, which is very important. Every spectator can find it in different corners, based on her/his life perception and experience. Or some can smell something but you cannot explain the smell. It just smells.

We know from your previous films that you consider sound as important as picture. Was it the case in Watchtower as well?

Yes, it was. Sometimes what I hear may be more imaginative and valuable than what I see. Sound allows one to imagine more since you cannot see, like music or literature. In *Watchtower* some of the main characters are the wardens whom we never see but only know them with their voices. They are not with Nihat physically, but with their voices.

What is the role of the locations in the film? Why did you prefer a forest watchtower and a road-side bus terminal?

They are like my characters. They are temporary, transient places. They do not have a sense of belonging, just like Seher and Nihat. Neither is home. They are safe; they are shelters, yet places to be left.

Watchtower is the place where Nihat could watch rather than be watched; where he could hide from his story. And the small bus station along the road is the place where Seher could hide from hers and yet try to exist. It is a place of refuge, a cold, grey, noisy transit area where Seher is as transient as the passengers who stop for only a 15-minute break.

How was the location search? Where did you shoot?

We shot in the western Black Sea region in Turkey, around Tosya and Cide in Kastamonu.

We scouted for a long time for watchtowers and bus stations. There are not many left of these old type bus stations, many have been replaced by big shopping complexes. By pure coincidence we found this bus station just like I imagined and very close to the tower. The place was amazingly similar to what I imagined while writing. Even her bed was there when I first entered the room!

There are watchtowers all around Turkey wherever there is a forest. We started searching from the western Black Sea region. We have seen many there and found this beautiful stone one with this great view. It had been deserted for the past two years and there were no more wardens staying there. The ministry of forestry was about to demolish it and we could stop them for the film so this became the tower of Nihat. Now it still stands there watching us!

Were the filming conditions difficult?

We had to respect to the decisions of nature and befriend it. We had to obey its rules for sun, clouds, rain, fog and cold. It was not easy but at the end we managed to get along very well.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Pelin Esmer – Filmmaker and scriptwriter

Pelin Esmer was born and grew up in Istanbul. After she majored in sociology in Istanbul, she attended the cinema workshop of the Turkish director Yavuz Ozkan. She worked as a first assistant director in a number of Turkish and foreign projects. She gave lectures about documentary filmmaking at Istanbul Kadir Has University in Istanbul. She founded her own film company, Sinefilm, in 2005, and currently produces her own projects as an independent director and producer, together with her producer colleagues Tolga Esmer and Nida Karabol Akdeniz.

Her first documentary film, *The Collector* (2002), was screened in many festivals. Her first feature documentary, *Oyun (The Play)*, premiered at the San Sebastian Film Festival in 2005. It has screened in over 50 festivals around the world and received many awards, including "The Best New Documentary Filmmaker Award" at the Tribeca Film Festival. Her first feature, *10 to 11*, was one of the six chosen projects by Cannes Film Festival's Résidence du Cinéfondation in Paris, where she worked on her script in 2007. An official selection of the San Sebastian Film Festival, *10 to 11* received many awards in various festivals around the world.

The directors of world's leading film festivals selected her as one of the world's most promising directors in the *Take 100: The Future of Film: 100 New Directors* (Phaidon). She completed her second feature fiction *Watchtower* in 2012.

FILMOGRAPHY

2002 – The Collector (Short documentary)
2005 – The Play (Feature documentary)
2009 – 10 to 11 (Narrative Feature)
2012 – Watchtower (Narrative Feature)

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Olgun ŐimŐek – Nihat

Olgun ŐimŐek was born in the village of Yenice in Bűyűkorhan, Bursa. His father was a primary school teacher and his mother was a housewife. He graduated in theatre from the Istanbul University State Conservatory and began acting professionally in 1993.

ŐimŐek acted in the play *Otogargara* with Demet Akbag and Yilmaz Erdogan. He had a small part in the films *Tersine Dűnya* in 1993 and *Yer Őekimli AŐıklar* in 1995. In 1998, he acted in the film *KarŐık Pizza* for which he won the Most Promising Actor award at the Ankara Film Festival.

ŐimŐek also had appearances in television series such as *Sihirli Ceket*, *Yedi Numara*, *BeŐik Kertmesi* ve *Alacakaranlık*. In 2004, he starred in the film *Yazı Tura* directed by UŐur Yűcel where he played a disabled soldier. For this, he won several awards, including the Golden Orange for Best Actor, as well as Best Actor awards at the Ankara Film Festival, Istanbul Film Festival, Adana Golden Cocoon Festival and the SİYAD awards.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

1995 – Yer Őekimli AŐıklar
1998 – KarŐık Pizza
2002 - Green Light
2004 – Yazı Tura
2008 - Kiralík oda
2012 – Watchtower

CREDITS

CREW

Director and scriptwriter
Producers

Pelin Esmer
Tolga Esmer
Nida Karabol Akdeniz

Co-Producers

Pelin Esmer
Mustafa Dok
Guillaume de Seille

Cinematography
Editors

Ozgur Eken
Ayhan Ergursel
Pelin Esmer

Art Director
Sound Recording
Sound Designer
Sound Mix

Osman Ozcan
Kasper Munck-Hansen
Marc Nouyrigat
Frédéric Théry

CAST

Nihat
Seher
The Boss
The Driver
The Mother
The Father
The Chief

Olgun Simsek
Nilay Erdonmez
Menderes Samancilar
Kadir Cermik
Lacin Ceylan
Riza Akin
Mehmet Bozdogan