

Freedom of Choice as an Achievement of Modernity: A Comparative Study of Two Movies by Farhadi and Two Novels by Ishiguro

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

A semiotic study of Asghar Farhadi's *The Fireworks Wednesday* (2006) and *The Salesman* (2016) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989) reveals some commonalities regarding the tradition-modernity issue. They see the transition to modernity as essential, yet their characters' identities are defined by tradition.

2. Aim

This study compares two novels written by the English-Japanese author, Kazuo Ishiguro, with two films directed by Asghar Farhadi regarding the transition to modernity. Farhadi offers his answers to get over the difficulties of this transition by depicting his characters in the struggle related to it (Ahmadgoli and Yazdanjoo 2022: 6). In Ishiguro's early novels, modern characters behave the same when encountering this transition, which implies the fact that the author sees Farhadi's answer as the rationale behind his cultures' easy transition to modernity.

3. Theoretic Framework and Methodology

This paper uses Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics to decode the cues of tradition and modernity. The basis of Saussure's semiotics model is the relationships that exist in any sign system between signs at the two levels of association and connotation (Sujudi 1387: 49). In the linguistic system, the sequence of words and their relationship with the preceding and following words follows the rules that Saussure refers to as association. Along with this linear relationship, one's mind deduces the

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precise meaning of a word by evoking the potential alternatives or connotations in Sussure's terminology (Chandler 2007: 84).

Roland Barthes uses semiotics to decipher the signs in an image, treating it as a text. He therefore paves the ground for film studies. The arrangement of shots in a film can be used to trace association; for example, a particular shot may give a new meaning in a different sequence when combined with other shots (Chandlerer 2007: 81). Connotation, on the other hand, refers to the elements of creating a shot, such as mise-en-scène, camera angle, and shot timing.

4. Discussion

Asghar Farhadi is one of the few foreign filmmakers who has won two Academy Awards. In 2017, several months after Farhadi's second Oscar, Kazuo Ishiguro was granted the Nobel Prize in Literature. Their similar characterization has allowed them to garner worldwide attention. Both of them choose regional characters, but present them in a way that is relatable to people everywhere. The current comparative study seeks to show that Farhadi and Ishiguro have highlighted similar features in their characterizations, focusing on the clash of tradition and modernity. Surpassing unquestioned standards of society which seems inevitable, both Farhadi and Ishiguro's avant-gard characters desire to practice subjectivity and universality as two pillars of modernity that Farzin Vahdat introduces in his book *God and Judgment* (2002). Not only in nature but also in action, these characters have a lot in common. They strive for their own choice of life and try their best to educate others about this right, despite the traditions of their societies.

According to Vahdat, the first pillar of modernity is "subjectivity," which refers to "characterizing the autonomous, self-willing, self-defining and self-conscious individual" (Vahdat, 2002, p.1). A man can freely choose his way of life, putting aside all social standards. The second pillar is "universality," "the mutual recognition of each other's subjectivity" (Vahdat, 2002, p.1). In other words, modernity glorifies individual rights regardless of their backgrounds. Both Farhadi and Ishiguro artistically glorify modernity by portraying modern personas in the way Vahdat prescribes. On the one hand, they try their best to live freely while seeking for the same opportunity for the rest of the society. By studying the signs, this paper aims to disclose the similarities of these two authors' attitudes toward the tradition-modernity debate in a semiotic framework. In this regard, two movies by Farhadi entitled *The Fireworks Wednesday* (2006) and *The Salesman* (2016) and two novels by Ishiguro named *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1989) have been chosen.

The first section uses semiotics to examine the works' details to identify the representations of tradition and modernity on either side of the controversy. The

next section is devoted to contemporary representations in works and how they honour universality and subjectivity. Traditional orders are radically altered by modernity. By emphasizing the human being and his capacity for reason, it renounces metaphysical ideas. Consequently, a new way of living and thinking is introduced, bringing with it all kinds of implications, the most basic of which are subjectivity and universality.

5. Findings and Conclusion

Having identified the representatives of modernity with the help of association and connotation, this paper attempts to show the behavioural similarities of modern characters. All the representatives of modernity in these four works consider living with a mind free from the bonds of tradition as their absolute right, a point that Farzin Vahdat refers to as subjectivity in modernity. Similarly, they also consider such a right for others in their surroundings, which at first glance seems in contrast to subjectivity, but it is another pillar of modernity, universality.

This study showed that both Asghar Farhadi and Kazuo Ishiguro consider these two components to be the most essential aspects of modernity. Considering that Ishiguro tells the stories of these two novels in the historical context after the war, this issue can be important. He portrays the challenge of tradition and modernity with a distance, and after experiencing its results. Therefore, the similarity of his approach with Asghar Farhadi, who lives in the middle of the challenge, can be a seal of approval for the proposed efficiency that he presents in these two films. Each individual should be free to choose his way of life and recognize the same rights as other members of society.

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