



Rhetorical Semiotics in “The Pear Tree” and its film Adaptation

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Abstract: Rhetorical semiotics is one of the types of "textual codes" in Daniel Chandler's tripartite classification, encompassing a broader range than previous rhetorical discussions and is not limited to verbal elements; rather, these signs can be sought in images, sounds, or the context of speech. In this semiotic approach, the relationships between signs and their implicit meanings are examined from a rhetorical perspective, and in addition to linguistics and literary works, it is applicable to other artistic forms such as cinema, painting, photography, music, and architecture. In this article, we examined "The Pear Tree" and its film adaptation based on rhetorical signs in four semiotics domains of symbols, intertextual elements, oppositions, and expressive elements, each of which consisting of several components. The results of these analyses showed that rhetorical signs such as metaphor, simile, irony, metonymy, synecdoche, proverbs, binary oppositions, paradox, and various symbols related to people, objects, sounds, and nature are embedded throughout the text, accompanied by hints that guide the audience to discover the rhetorical signs. Based on the analyses, instances related to the first category, semiotics of symbols, and the fourth category, semiotics of expressive elements, were found more frequently than the other two categories in the story and the film adaptation. Moreover, the most significant rhetorical sign of the two works can be observed in the title, the Pear Tree, which serves as a metaphor for the main character.

Keywords: Daniel Chandler, Dariush Mehrjui, Goli Taraghi, Rhetoric, Semiotics, “The Pear Tree”.

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1. Introduction

Rhetorical semiotics constitutes a key textual code within Daniel Chandler's tripartite classification of the semiotic theory. Rhetorical semiotics encompasses a broader scope in comparison to previous rhetorical discussions since it is not limited to verbal elements alone. Instead, these signs can be sought in images and sounds as well as within the context of speech. This study aims to examine rhetorical signs in "The Pear Tree" and its film adaptation by designing a four-part framework of rhetorical semiotics, including the semiotics of symbols, intertextual elements, oppositions, and expressive elements, each composed of several sub-sections. The short story "The Pear Tree" by Goli Taraghi served as the basis for Dariush Mehrjui's 1997 film adaptation. The story narrates a few days in the life of a writer and philosopher who goes to his family's garden in Damavand (Iran) to write his new book, seeking the tranquility he believes it offers.

2. Methodology

The current research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, drawing upon both written and visual sources and employing semiotic analysis. Daniel Chandler categorizes types of signs into three groups: social, textual, and interpretive (citation??). In this classification, rhetorical signs are an instance of the second category, i.e., the textual codes. In essence, rhetorical semiotics is an aspect of text analysis that studies and analyzes signs within a text. This type of semiotics examines the relationships between signs and their implicit meanings from a rhetorical perspective. In addition to linguistics, poetry, fiction, and dramatic literature, it is also applicable to the analysis of other art forms, including cinema, painting, photography, music, and architecture. Semioticians refer to metaphor and metonymy as rhetorical signs. According to Jakobson, metaphor is linked to encoding the message while metonymy pertains to its contextual dimension, the former being grounded in selection (a relation of similarity) and the latter in combination (a relation of contiguity) (Ahmadi, 1996: 62). Chandler argues that metaphors are not always verbal but can also be visual. For instance, a comparative relationship between two successive shots in a film functions as a metaphorical expression, allowing images to convey meanings that words cannot (Chandler, 2008: 192-193). Metonymy, like metaphor, can also take a visual form. For example, the display of one object in a film may signify another object to which it is closely related (ibid: 198). However, it can be argued that not only metaphor and metonymy but also other rhetorical elements such as irony, simile, contrast, antithesis, allusion, proverb, and paradox could be useful in semiotic analysis.

3. Results and discussion

The rhetorical signs were analyzed and organized into four categories: symbols, intertextual elements, oppositions, and expressive elements, with each category comprising several sub-sections. The categories reflect common rhetorical devices not only in cinema and literature but also, more generally, across textual and visual forms. Another reason for developing such a classification was the presence of rhetorical elements in “The Pear Tree” and its film adaptation. The first classification in this article pertains to the semiotics of symbols. Objects, sounds, natural elements, etc., may have different symbolic meanings across various societies and cultures; for example, a single element might symbolize one thing in one culture and something else in another. In both the story and the film, symbolic signs were examined in four sections: persons, objects, sounds (animal sounds and nature sounds), and nature (plants, animals, and natural elements). The second classification concerns the semiotics of intertextual elements, which were analyzed in three categories: references to popular culture, proverbs, and allusions. In the third classification, contrasting elements in the story and the film were examined. Antitheses have always been important themes in artistic and literary works. The semiotics of oppositional structures in these two works includes binary and paradoxical oppositions. The fourth classification pertains to the semiotics of expressive elements. The science of rhetoric (Ilm al-Bayan) is one of the three main pillars of rhetoric, comprising four components: metaphor, simile, irony, and metonymy. These four components also apply to rhetorical semiotics; however, their application extends beyond written texts and traditional rhetoric, and they are not conveyed solely through language. Instead, they exist as a concept embedded in an image or even a written text. The results indicate that rhetorical elements, from a semiotic perspective, are much broader than rhetorical elements in previous rhetorical discussions. Whereas past rhetorical discussions focused solely on discourse, this semiotic approach encompasses any communicative system that conveys an implicit concept. Such a system may take the form of speech, image, sound, or even an individual’s lifestyle, guiding the audience through subtle cues toward a hidden meaning.

4. Conclusion

In “The Pear Tree” and its film adaptation, rhetorical signs – including metaphor, simile, irony, metonymy, allusion, proverb, binary oppositions, paradoxes, and various symbols related to people, objects, sounds, and nature – are embedded throughout the text, accompanied by cues that guide the audience in interpreting each sign. The examinations revealed that instances belonging to the first category (i.e., the semiotics of

symbols) and the fourth category (i.e., the semiotics of expressive elements) occurred more frequently than those of the other two categories in “The Pear Tree”. Furthermore, the most significant rhetorical sign in both works is their title, i.e. the Pear Tree, which serves as a metaphor for the main character, with the story and film structured around this concept. However, other rhetorical signs –such as antitheses, particularly the opposition between silence and eloquence, as well as symbols, similes, and metonymies– play an important role in advancing the story and pointing toward its central theme, complementing the main sign to guide the audience in interpreting the work’s meaning and content.