

A Critique of 'Negative Aesthetics' in *Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others*

Elnaz Khojasteh Zonoozi^{1*}
Mahboubeh Mobasheri²

Abstract

As an important and comprehensive critical method, "critical aesthetics" of the Frankfurt School, deals with art and literature to show that the emergence of liberty in a capitalist society confronts certain obstacles that are manifested, in different ways, in economy, politics, ideology, art, culture and the media, and through an organized process, ultimately lead to the appearance of a consumerist society. According to Adorno's and Marcuse's sociological views, "negative aesthetics" analyzes consumerism in the West so as to challenge the anti-rationalistic aspects of a "unidimensional society." These ideas finally lead to the emergence of a phenomenon known as "culture industry" which uses devices like the media and propaganda to deceive individuals. Therefore, the consumers are dominated by these devices and are deprived of their will and awareness. Marjan Shirmohammadi's novel, *Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others*, presents an image of such a consumerist world which turns individuals into rivals over consumption. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the present study demonstrates that consumerism and commodification turn the characters into subjects in a world replete with consumerist objects and the prevalence of the cultural industry creates a deep rift between native and foreign cultures. As a result, concepts such as consumerism, accumulation and abundance, can be used to criticize the different dimensions of "negative aesthetics" in the false identities of the characters.

Keywords: Negative Aesthetics, Culture Industry, Adorno, Marcuse, *Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others*

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The Frankfurt School of critical theory analyzes the emerging socio-economic situation of societies, and provides us with a comprehensive understanding of

*1. PhD in Persian Language and Literature, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

(Corresponding Author: ekhojaste92@yahoo.com)

2. Associate Professor of Persian Language and Literature, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. (mobasheri2016@gmail.com)

economic, cultural variables, and capital and production. It can help us examine the outcomes of the 'culture industry' in industrial and developing societies, esp. its effect on literary production in the West. The present article tries to offer a critical approach to culture in the novel *Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others* by analyzing the principles of negative aesthetics, thus studying the effects of the cultural and economic effects of the West on the one-dimensional Iranian society.

2. Theoretical Framework

The Frankfurt School theorists divide culture into authentic culture and mass culture. They believe that art and culture in the modern times have turned into a commercial commodity, serving the ruling system. Adorno finds art a negative event and has tried to discuss the negative aspects of art, associating it with the term "negative aesthetics". Marcuse, however, regards art as being the affirmative aspect of freedom. In the present study, the negative aspects of art are discussed in the novel *Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others*.

3. Methodology

Adopting the descriptive-analytical research method, the present study tries to criticize the foundations of culture industry and then examine negative aesthetics in the novel *Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others*.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others criticizes the values of a society that is devoid of spiritual aspects through describing the everyday life of a modern family. The consumerist identity in this novel, based on the ideas of Marcuse, represents the hegemony of societies that give them their identities. Negative aesthetics questions the totality of this novel and reveals the negative aspects of art in this novel. In this novel, art has turned into a tool for controlling the masses. According to Adorno, in order to purify art, social challenges should be discussed so that audiences are encouraged to resist the status quo.

5. Conclusion

In the novel *Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others* negative aesthetics is employed to criticize the culture of Iranian society. Culture industry tries to control people by distorting social and cultural realities. In this novel, the characters, who have been subjugated by the culture industry, try to develop a new identity for their lives. Culture industry turns individuals into consumerist subjects, who try to develop a new definition of identity and social values. This

has been reflected in the behavior, taste and lifestyle of the characters of the novel.

Select Bibliography

- Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. 1385 [2006]. *Dialektik-e Roshangari*. M. Farhadpour and O. Mehregan (trans.) Tehran: Gaam-e No.
- Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. 1396 [2017]. *Beh Souye Manifest-e No*. A. H. Eftekharirad. Tehran: Cheshmeh.
- Adorno, T. 1399 [2020]. *Alaih-e Idealism*. M. Farhadpour (trans.). Tehran: Hermes.
- Baudrillard, J. 1388 [2009]. *Jame'eh-ye Masrafi*. P. Izadi (trans.). Tehran: Sales.
- Bottomore, T. 1394 [2015]. *Maktab-e Frankfurt*. H. A. Nozari (trans.). Tehran: Ney.
- Marcuse, H. 1394 [2015]. *Ensan-e Taksahati*. M. Mo'ayedi (trans.). Tehran: Amirkabir.
- Nozari, H. 1394 [2015]. *Nazaryeh-ye Enteqadi-e Maktab-e Frankfurt*. Tehran: Agah.
- Richard, B. 1388 [2009]. *Ravankavi-e Farhang-e Aameh*. H. Payandeh (trans.). Tehran: Sales.
- Storey, J. 1389 [2010]. *Moteleat-e Farhangi Darbare-ye Farhang-e Aameh*. H. Payandeh (trans.). Tehran: Agah.
- Thorstein, V. 1387 [2008]. *Nazaryeh-ye Tabaqeh-ye Tanasa*. F. Ershad. Tehran: Ney.

How to cite:

Khojasteh Zonoozi, E. and Mobasheri, M. 2021. "A Critique of 'Negative Aesthetics' in *Azar, Shahdokht, Parviz and the Others*." *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi* 12(2): 99-118. DOI:10.22124/naqd.2022.17063.2045

Copyright:

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi (Literary Theory and Criticism)*

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original work is properly cited.

