

Viewing Notes for *Forushande/The Salesman* (2016)

VIEWER ADVISORY: AN ASSAULT ON A WOMAN SERVES AS A CENTRAL PLOT ELEMENT IN THIS FILM. THERE ARE NO DIRECT DEPICTIONS OF THE ATTACK, BUT POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS IS DEPICTED.

The key actors:

The husband Emad Etesami is played by Shahab Hosseini. He appeared in Farhadi's films *About Elly* and *A Separation*.

The wife Rama Etesami is played by Taraneh Alidoosti. She appeared in *Fireworks Wednesday* and *About Elly*.

A couple of tips for careful "noticing":

- Notice as you watch how often windows and doorways are used as framing devices throughout the film.
- When they get to the new apartment, notice the vertiginous camera angles, such as up the side of a building or around a turning staircase. These camera angles foreshadow the instability that will enter their domestic lives. Once the crisis has occurred, the camera work becomes more staid and draws less attention to itself.

On the director's vision for this film:

Farhadi has a background in theater but hasn't had an opportunity to return to stage work. He feels that all of his films are influenced by his theater background in the way a central conflict moves characters around a situation to look at it from various angles. In this film, he wanted to directly evoke his love of theater by using a stage play as a narrative through-line, in a way that "blends the boundary between life and theater, to the point that we ask ourselves if what we are watching is real life or theater." To this idea, note how the domestic space of the stage set echoes the domestic spaces of the couple's home. Also, the last major scene in the abandoned apartment is intentionally designed to feel like a play: the *mise-en-scene*, lighting, and acting are supposed to feel like a stripped-down stage performance. He is well versed in American theater, but his greatest influences are Iranian playwrights whose works have not been translated into other languages.

On using Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*--this play struck Farhadi as a good one around which to build his story, since humiliation is a major emotional register in Willy Loman's story. He sees humiliation as a motivator for self-destruction in that story, as well as in the real-life story, for Emad and the older man.

Farhadi is considered a rare kind of director in Iranian cinema because he walks a line between and appeals to fans of both arthouse films (which typically get exported and not watched in Iran) and mainstream Iranian movies, which aren't distributed in the West. He has succeeded with all types of audiences. He also walks a line politically, presenting stories that are open to interpretation as both progressive and conservative, depending on who is watching the film.

Scholar of Iranian film Sharareh Frouzesh argues that justice is a major theme in much recent Iranian film, specifically that the process of seeking justice becomes melancholic because it exists on a "receding horizon" for those whose lives are so controlled by external forces. That notion seems to apply to this film, as well.

About his most-celebrated movie *A Separation*, Farhadi made a statement that applies to the complex interpersonal relations in all his work: "It is the tensions within the society that make people behave badly towards one another. At the same time, there is a certain level of empathy that remains even between people forced to be at odds."