

WRITING TO GROW:
JOHN DEWEY AND THE CREATION
OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

For Dewey, learning was primarily an activity which arose from the personal experience of grappling with a problem. This concept of learning implied a theory of education far different from the dominant school practice of his day, when students passively received information that had been packaged and predigested by teachers and textbooks. Thus, Dewey argued, the schools did not provide genuine learning experiences but only an endless amassing of facts, which were fed to the students, who gave them back and soon forgot them. Dewey distinguished between the psychological and the logical organization of subject matter by comparing the learner to an explorer who maps an unknown territory. The explorer, like the learner, does not know what terrain and adventures his journey holds in store for him. He has yet to discover mountains, deserts, and water holes and to suffer fever, starvation, and other hardships. Finally, when the explorer returns from his journey, he will have a hard-won knowledge of the country he has traversed. Then, and only then, can he produce a map of the region. The map, like a textbook, is an abstraction which omits his thirst, his courage, his despairs and triumphs—the experiences which made his journey personally meaningful. The map records only the relationships between landmarks and terrain, the logic of the features without the psychological revelations of the journey itself.

To give the map to others (as a teacher might) is to give the results of an experience, not the experience by which the map was produced and became personally meaningful to the producer. Although the logical organization of subject matter is the proper goal of learning, the logic of the subject cannot be truly meaningful to the learner without his psychological and personal involvement in exploration. Only by wrestling

with the conditions of the problem at hand, “seeking and finding his own way out, does he think If he cannot devise his own solution and find his own way out he will not learn, not even if he can recite some correct answer with one hundred percent accuracy” (Democracy 160). Although learning experiences may be described in isolation, education for Dewey consisted in the cumulative and unending acquisition, combination, and reordering of such experiences. Just as a tree does not grow by having new branches and leaves wired to it each spring, so educational growth does not consist in mechanically adding information, skills, or even educative experiences to students in grade after grade. Rather, educational growth consists in combining past experiences with present experiences in order to receive and understand future experiences. To grow, the individual must continually reorganize and reformulate past experiences in the light of new experiences in a cohesive fashion. This dissertation has been designed to help create social consciousness in the students’ minds and hearts. In my mind, there is only one type of writing, writing to grow.

INTRODUCTION

Sociology invites us to stand back from our personal visions in order to view with greater clarity and objectivity the forces that shape and control our lives. It attempts to understand the social nature of things—in particular, the patterns and regularities of behavior that people exhibit as they go about their daily lives. A compelling reason for using sociology in this dissertation is that human experience—no matter how private and individual it may seem—is touched and shaped by social forces that are not individually made and controlled. Being sick or committing suicide are two seemingly private experiences that, when viewed sociologically, turn out to be affected by social forces. The sociological perspective is not a rigid, singular way of looking at society; there are various aspects to the discipline. Sociology allows us to examine the society and its various components as they contribute to the identity of the individual. By examining and understanding social functions of various societies we can create an understanding about behaviors, patterns of conflicts, and individual interactions. The purpose of this dissertation is to create a platform for understanding individual and group behaviors in selected societies and apply the findings to the curriculum of the composition classroom. Society is one of the most important factors that contribute to the identity of individuals. The major undertaking of this dissertation is the attempt to develop the following:

- **1- John Dewey and the Crossroad of Self and Society:** A detailed analysis of the role of reflection as a means to understand the individual student
- **2- Gender and Social Limitations:** The role of culture as it hinders the freedom for some particular female writers in various times and societies

- **3- Persian Cinema as a Social Document:** The role of political censorship in post revolutionary Iran (filmmaking in Iran since 1979)
- **4- Society and the Novel:** An examination of society's influence in the genre of the American novel (Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*)
- **5- Dewey in the Classroom:** Lesson plans on reflection, culture, film and the novel for the composition classroom

The individual is shaped by many factors. We are shaped by our family histories, gender, race, culture, religion and country of origin. However, the multi-colored fabric of our being has never been immune from the influences of society. For hundreds of years, society and its rules have managed to shape, change, and limit the individual. The composition classroom is an ideal place to examine some of these difference in an effort to create a more globally informed and tolerant attitude towards others for our students.

This dissertation will investigate the role and importance of combining sociology into a composition classroom as a tool to promote writing on subjects that matter in today's world. Each chapter will shed light on an angle of society where the individual is shaped, changed, or corrupted.

Chapter One: The Presentation of Self

This chapter will examine the role of society in shaping the individual using the concept of reflection as a teaching tool based on Dewey's theories. John Dewey was an educator deeply invested in the power of reflection as a major stepping stone in teaching. The reason for the selection of reflection as the core of chapter one is that I have come to believe teaching writing begins by hearing and acknowledging what each individual

student brings to the table in the classroom. This approach will attempt to create a sense of validation to the concept of personal voice and will result in creating a more engaging atmosphere for students. So before I teach, I listen.

Chapter Two: Gender and Social Limitations

This chapter will investigate the role of society in shaping the work of some female writers who due to the restrictions of their time and place, had to write from the margins. Tillie Olsen waited a lifetime before the social duties of marriage and motherhood allowed her to pick up a pen and reflect on her life's experiences. bell hooks grew up with the restrictions of her race feeling always on the outside and it was only after college that she was able to write and create some understanding about the condition of life and education for a black woman in America today. Simin Daneshvar wrote under oppressing conditions where the highest rank for a female in her society was being a schoolteacher. Defying the political climate of tension and censorship, she rose to the occasion by writing on the role of society in creating a prison for women where educational advancements were few and far between. The loss of her beloved husband created yet another platform where she could address the notion of identity in a marriage after the loss of a spouse and the unforgiving rules of society that works hard to keep women imprisoned in the domestic abyss of their daily lives. The other authors mentioned in chapter two have contributed on various levels to our understanding of the role of society and culture in shaping and in many cases limiting the individual in a given country.

Chapter Three: Society and Political Censorship

This chapter is a close examination of the role of post revolutionary Persian cinema in creating a social dialogue with the world. This chapter examines the elements of

censorship, religious thoughts, and other social restrictions that have shaped the current cultural identity of a less-known country. Dewey's theories will be used in the exploration of the pivotal role society plays in educating the individual and how, in the case I have chosen, censorship will become an enormous barrier for other societies to connect to and learn about a nation.

Chapter Four: Society in the Novel

This chapter will explore the role of society as a contributing factor to the formation of identity in the individual. I value the role of the novel in teaching writing. I have selected Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* to be the focal point of this chapter. The glitter of a big city, the inner desire to move forward, and the demands of society form and transform the characters of the novel to the point that some will meet their demise, while others can only find solace in isolation.

Chapter Five: Lesson Plans and Class Activities

The final chapter is a series of short assignments that can be used to teach about society and values in popular culture, sample assignments and other useful information for my fellow teachers.

I am a Persian woman; I am a mother of two and a teacher. I am married to an American. While I adore my country, I have not seen it in twenty years. I have lived in America, a country that has given me everything I have. Under the light of the American democracy, I have become a wife, a mother, and an educated woman. I have learned that I am a free woman, with thoughts, plans, ideas, and opinions. In the classroom, I see faces. I teach them writing. I teach them the value of close reading and understanding a text. I help them find the writer in themselves. In my eyes and in my heart, they are all

equal; equally gifted, eager, wonderful students who have been trusted to my care for a short time. I cherish their personal experiences and I only try to magnify the uniqueness of their past by helping them write. The mother in me cares for the child in them, and we make our connection work. And it does work.

The undeniable power of motherhood, however, is the one factor that has changed and formed my views about any and all political issues. I respect the Jewish people. I admire their strength in trying to create a sense of self for themselves. I cannot fathom the horror of all the Jewish mothers whose children were wrenched from their arms during the most catastrophic period in human history. I cannot fathom being asked which of my two children I would like to send to the gas chamber and my hesitation in making a choice would mean they would both go. I want to bow to any Jewish mother I meet, out of pure respect for all the suffering that the previous generations have been through. For their unutterable pain, I bow my head in shame.

But at the same time, my heart bleeds for all the Arab women who tear their head scarves when they are told they have lost a child, in any place where conflicts are sadly a routine part of daily life. I understand the power of the pain that makes an Arab woman commit such an act. On my paternal grandfather's side, I am linked to an Arab nation. I cook that food, abide those cultural rules, and pray to Allah. I know how to wail like them, how to shriek at the funeral of a family member, and how to repeatedly hit my own face to show the most unbearable sorrow. For their inexpressible pain, I bow my head in shame.

I form my views about politics and agendas and world affairs not from the standpoint of an Arab, or Persian, or American, or Muslim. I form my views from the stand

point of the logic originated from the heart and mind of a woman who has been given the most important title of her life, “mother.” If world leaders and policy-makers were all women, we would only use one adjective to describe our world: harmonious.

So to all Jewish and Arab mothers of the world, I feel your pain in every fiber of my being and I share your sorrow.

This dissertation is a witness to how I have evolved as a woman, a teacher, and a free individual. I teach to shed light on society for my students. These are times of expanding views, reaching across the curriculum and departments, examining cultures and ethnic make-ups in order to create and contribute to the diversities we face as teachers and human beings on a daily basis. The colors of the world are all around us, inside and out. Each class contains an amazing puzzle of gifted writers, critical thinkers, and interesting human beings. For me teaching is not a job, but rather a calling in life. In the classroom, I see faces. I teach them writing. I teach them about the world, mine and theirs, and all the issues that surround us all. I teach them thinking. I celebrate the diversity of my students. And with a heavy heart, regarding the current political atmosphere of the world, I dedicate this dissertation to all the Jewish and Arab mothers of the world.

CHAPTER ONE: JOHN DEWEY AND THE CROSSROAD OF SELF AND SOCIETY

For sociologists, many of our daily activities can be explained as the self-conscious effort to manage and control the impression we make on others. In part to keep up appearances and save face, in part to get what we want from situations. Examples of this abound. According to Erving Goffman, our daily lives have an “on-stage” quality to it. He claims that in most cases, the people one tries to impress—the audience—will act as if the performance were real. There is an unspoken pact: you support my act and I will support yours. Violations by actors and audiences lead to friction, hostility, and problems. While occasionally individuals will attempt to create an antisocial impression, often times people strive to live up to socially accepted ideals of behavior. Since this “on-stage” way of life can hinder learning in the classroom, by allowing reflection as a mode of writing to take place, we can help students reach within and reflect on various topics from a more private and secure angle and point of view. This chapter will explain the theories of educator John Dewey on how reflection can be an important tool in creating a platform for writing in the classroom and reaching the individual student in their educational journey. There is no denying it. We live in society and society lives in us. To say that we are separate and detached from the influences of our society is inaccurate. Our daily lives and our past influence the individuals we have become. Society creates changes, obstacles, successes and disappointments in our lives. Some of these changes result from our own actions, and some are beyond our control. Education follows the same logic. To exclude or discredit the influences of society in the pattern of learning is to deny the truth

about how the world works. A classroom is a perfect example of how, the individual and the society, come together to create the phenomenon of learning. We don't learn by simply reading, but by living the experience. To help students understand the connections between what they read and are asked to learn and remember and the reality of the world around them, we must shed light on the connection between their education and the society they live in. Culture, religion, tradition, history, geographical location, and the concept of time shape and color the lives of individuals on a continuous basis. In order to learn, we must look; to grow, we must write; and to understand, we must think. Education is the result of a series of experiences being interwoven into the fabric of the self. Only then we can be certain that what is learned is part of the individual. After all, as John Dewey puts it in *How We Think* "education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."

For Dewey, there is a deep connection between democracy and education. Education therefore carries the dual purpose of social and individual approaches in order to be considered a valuable education. Dewey believes that both the short and long-term effects of education are important. The burden of responsibility is therefore on the educator to provide students with the experiences that are ultimately valuable and can enable the students to contribute to society. Dewey's education theory examines two aspects of education which are traditional and progressive. He sees these two approaches as being intertwined with the learning and the well-being of the individual. First he examines the structured, disciplined, and carefully planned traditional education; then he moves to evaluate the unstructured progressive education. Dewey partially disapproves of traditional education for lacking an in-depth understanding of the students and for

following lesson plans and programs that value content rather than content and process. *Progressive education* however is defined as a system with greater emphasis on the needs of the individual child than traditional classroom teaching and involves greater freedom of choice, activity and learning, stressing social as well as academic development. Dewey believes to take a free approach without defining how this freedom can be most useful in education is a weak theory and approach. He claims that teachers must fully understand the role of experience and its connection to childhood learning. He believes that the two hallmarks of education are continuity of experience and the interaction or link that a person makes between past and present experiences. Continuity suggests that for better or for worse, each experience has the capability of influencing the future of the individual. Interaction means that one's present experience is a function of the interaction between one's past experiences and the present situation. Dewey claims that experiences do not have individual values and only after we link them to various events and functions in our life, they become meaningful. So a positive experience for one person could be a negative one for another. Therefore the effects that an experience or event has on a person will determine the genuine value of that experience. According to Dewey once we as teachers understand the value of the theory of experience, we can set about progressively to organize our subject matter in a manner that validates the students' past experiences, then provide them with tools to open up, rather than shut down, through writing and create an access to future growth experiences, further setting the stage for possible future contributions to society. And this is where reflective thinking and writing come in.

While reflection is an exceptional method to engage students and create a platform for learning on every level, due to the complexity of assessment, some scholars

and even educators have dismissed it as a valid practice. Dewey however believes strongly that reflection is an intricate, meticulous, rational, and poignant enterprise that comes to fruition in due time. No teacher can rush a student in writing an in-depth reflective piece unless adequate time has been provided for reading, discussion and a deep engagement with the material covered in class. Dewey's theory encourages educators to evaluate reflection as an important source of students' engagement with the material so that it does not fall into disuse over time. His theory creates a definition of reflection for educators to examine and fall back on if there is any sense of doubt about it as a valid instructional tool in today's classrooms. In this chapter I will examine Dewey's view of reflective thought and offer a starting place for talking about reflection as a teaching tool so that it can be taught, learned, assessed, discussed, and researched. My purpose is to provide a platform for educators on how to learn and examine new ways of deriving meaning from experience.

John Dewey articulated his concept of how we think in a book by the same name (*How We Think*, 1910/1933). He identified several modes of thought, including belief, imagination, and stream of consciousness (involuntary engaged thinking), but the mode he was most interested in was reflection. While his work is frequently cited, and many educational settings claim to teach their students how to become an educator who values reflection and uses it as a mode of engagement to the material taught in the classroom, a clear approach to the process and purpose of reflection as he outlined it is missing. The following section examines Dewey's approach in creating an arena for teachers to understand, practice and ultimately evaluate reflection.

1. Reflection is a tool for us to understand our past experiences and link them to our present and future endeavors. The learner is therefore traveling from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking with its roots in scientific inquiry.
3. Reflection needs to occur in community, in interaction with others.
4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and others.

Reflection as a Process

The first criterion is loaded with several important sub criteria, each inseparable from the others and part of a coherent, if complex, whole. Connection among pieces that together form a whole, in fact, resonates in Dewey's view of reflection. To understand in depth what this criterion means and to arrive at the centrality of reflection, it is necessary to examine its pieces separately. I start with the whole: Dewey's view of the purpose and meaning of education. It is critical to understand that for Dewey the purpose of education is the intellectual, moral, and emotional growth of the individual and, consequently, the evolution of a democratic society, the worth of which is measured by:

The extent in which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups and the

extent to which it makes provisions for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms. (Democracy 99)

Such a society is democratic, Dewey argues, and needs a brand of education that can give the individual “a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder” (Democracy 99). Dewey defines education as “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases one’s ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Democracy 74). Dewey essentially defines education as a verb rather than a noun. In doing so, he also gives us a definition of learning. Within this definition, which echoes throughout Dewey’s later works, one encounters the interactions, habits of mind, fullness and freedom, and social relationships articulated previously. In an effort to understand all that is contained in the definition, I will systematically examine the terms contained therein, beginning with Dewey’s notion of experience.

An experience, according to Dewey, can be broadly conceived. It is more than simply a matter of direct participation in events. It could be that, or it could be something as ephemeral as interacting with “objects which one constructs in fancy” (Experience 43). It could also be the solitary reading of a book or a discussion with others. What is important is that there is interaction between the person and his or her environment. “The environment,” Dewey argues, “is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had” (Experience 44). An experience, then, is not an experience unless it involves interaction between the self and its circumstances, the material world, the natural world, an idea, or whatever

constitutes the environment at hand. Dewey goes on to point out that because an experience means an interaction between oneself and the world, there is a change not only in the self but also in the environment as a result. The effect is dialectical with implications not just for the learner but for others and the world. Through interaction with the world, we both change it and are changed by it. Interaction, then, is the first important element of experience. The second, which is inextricably linked to the first, is continuity. The concept of continuity is central to an understanding of Dewey's notion of learning and teaching and is implied by the term "*subsequent experience*" found in previous definition. Dewey speaks of continuity on both a broad and a narrow scale. Broadly, it is the march of civilization, what he calls social continuity. "The continuity of any experience through renewing of the social group," he writes, "is a literal fact. Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life" (Experience 39). He attributes the advances in science, technology, and law, as well as more civilized ways of interacting with one another, to continuity.

More narrowly conceived, continuity means something very close to what Piaget means by schema-building. That is, we make sense of each new experience based on the meaning gleaned from our own past experiences, and knowledge we have about the world. Dewey writes, "What an individual has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes the instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continues" (Experience 44).

Interaction and continuity are the elements of experience. Without interaction learning is sterile and passive, never fundamentally changing the learner. Without

continuity, learning is random and disconnected, building toward nothing either within the learner or in the world. If experiences are the basis of one's learning, however, they are not necessarily always constructive, or educative, experiences. According to Dewey, there are both educative and "*mis-educative*" experiences. A mis-educative experience is one that arrests and distorts growth. A close reading of Dewey also conveys that a mis-educative experience can also be one that leads someone into "routine action," thus "narrowing the field of further experience," and limiting the "meaning-horizon" (Democracy 78). Routine action suggests that one acts without an awareness of the effect of one's actions on the environment (including others). One is therefore closed to the impact that the environment might have on him or her. Thus the cycle of growth that results from two-way interactions is halted. Routine habits, Dewey points out, possess us rather than our having dominion over them. The former suggests lack of awareness and self-serving motives; the latter, awareness and the desire to contribute to the larger good.

An educative experience, on the other hand, is one that broadens the field of experience and knowledge, brings awareness to bear, and leads in a constructive direction toward "intelligent action." It is characterized by forward movement rather than stagnation. Intelligent action is considered critical rather than impulsive and is shaped by data garnered from experience at one end and one's goal and purpose (one that serves society) at the other. "It is the aim of progressive education," wrote Dewey, "to take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them" (Democracy 119).

Experience alone, however, even educative ones, are not enough, claims Dewey. What is critical is the ability to perceive and then weave meaning among the threads of

experience. “Experience is not primarily cognitive,” Dewey asserts. That is, an experience is not the same as thought. Rather, it is the meaning that one perceives in and then constructs from an experience that gives that experience value. An experience exists in time and is therefore linked to the past and the future. “The measure of the value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up. It includes cognition in the degree in which it is cumulative or amounts to something, or has meaning” (Democracy 140). And here, at last, we come to the role of reflection.

The function of reflection is to make meaning: to formulate the relationships and continuities among the elements of an experience, between that experience and other experiences, between that experience and the knowledge it carries, and between that knowledge and the knowledge produced by thinkers other than oneself.

In discovery of the detailed connections of our activities and what happens in consequence, the thought implied in cut and dry experience is made explicit. Hence the quality of the experience changes; the change is so significant that we may call this type of experience reflective- that is, reflective par excellence. (Democracy 170)

The creation of meaning out of experience is at the very heart of what it means to be human. It is what enables us to make sense of and attribute value to the events of our lives. Dewey ascribes the act of meaning making to the soul. He ponders:

What is the point to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul; loses his appreciation of things worthwhile, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply

what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experience as they occur? (Experience 49)

An experience has meaning because of the relationships that the individual perceives. It has been said that “experience is not what happens to you, it is what you do with what happens to you.” Dewey might alter this to say that experience is what happens to you; what you do with what happens to you is directly dependent on the meaning you make of it. And though the experiences that befall us may be out of our control, the meaning that we make of them is not. To move the discussion to the realm of teaching, we can say that a reflective teacher does not merely seek solutions, nor does he or she do things the same way every day without an awareness of both the source and the impact of his or her actions. Rather, from his or her practice and the students’ learning, the teacher seeks meaning and creates from this a theory to live by, a story that provides structure for the growth of the students and the teacher. When the teacher seek solutions, he or she also pursues connections and relationships between solutions so that a theory no longer serves, at which point, through more reflection, it is either revised, refined, or discarded, and a new theory is born.

Reflection as a Mode of Thinking

In *How We Think* (1933), Dewey explores the process of reflection in great detail. It is complex, and Dewey uses a variety of terms to describe it. This may be one of the reasons that educators have shied away from tackling his vision of reflection. He mentions three kinds of thought that he distinguishes from reflection: stream of consciousness, invention, and belief. Although he clearly values reflection as the road to

learning, at the same time he does not dismiss these other kinds of thinking, acknowledging that they often serve up the very questions that reflection can productively tackle. The first of these kinds of thinking is stream of consciousness. It is the thinking that all of us are involuntarily engaged in all the time. An “uncontrolled coursing of ideas through ours heads,” Dewey calls it (How We Think 4). This is often the only kind of thinking teachers have time for. Reflective thought in contrast, comprises “definite units that are linked together so that there is a sustained movement to a common end” (How We Think 5). The second kind of thinking is invention. Invention stands in contrast to direct perception of facts – it is, in short, imagination. Although Dewey contrasts imagination with the rigors of reflection, he does see its importance within reflection. Reflection requires that the thinker draw on past experience. Imagining is therefore a subset of reflection but cannot be counted as equivalent. The third kind of thinking Dewey identifies is *believing*. He characterizes this kind of thought as “prejudgments, not conclusions reached as the result of personal mental activity, such as observing, collecting, and examining evidence” (Experience 7).

Reflection in contrast to acceptance of conventional belief constitutes “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it lends” (Experience 9). Dewey cites Christopher Columbus as a reflective thinker, noting that he must have concluded that the world was round rather than flat based on his experience as a navigator. The impulse to reflect is generated by an encounter with, and the conscious perception of the potential significance inherent in an experience. Not everyone is able to perceive this potential. Therefore, it is important that one be open to the nature of an

experience and be open to its potential meaning. It is the bridge of meaning connecting one experience to the next that gives direction to growth. The process of reflection, Dewey claims, moves the learner from a disturbing state of perplexity to a harmonious state of “settle-ness” or equilibrium. Perplexity is created when an individual encounters a situation whose “whole full character is not yet determined” (*Democracy* 150). That is, the meaning of the experience for the learner is one of disequilibrium. It is a yearning for balance that in turn drives the learner to do something to resolve it, namely, to start the process of inquiry, or reflection. An additional source of motivation is curiosity, without which there is little energy for the hard work of reflection; “Until we understand, we are, if we have curiosity, troubled, baffled, and hence moved to inquire” (*How We Think* 132). Although curiosity comes naturally to children, a childlike wonder about the world is something that adults often must cultivate in them. The process of reflection can be broken down into six phases. Let it be said that Dewey himself is less than clear about these phases and leaves it to the reader to divide them up. For example, in *How We Think* (1933), he identifies first two and then five phases. In *Democracy and Education* (1944), he writes of five slightly different phases: interpretation of the experience, naming the problem, generating explanations, ramifying the explanations and testing the hypothesis. He uses terms ambiguously, first making a distinction between, for example, an idea and a suggestion, and then interchangeably. However, he does make it clear that a reflective thinker moves deliberately from the data of the experience to formulating a theory, to testing his theory about experience.

Understanding the Experience

As soon as one is in an experience, as well as after an experience, spontaneous

interpretation of what is going on ensues. In the initial phases of reflective thought, this interpretation is involuntary. Things leap to mind. From the “felt-ness” of the experience possible meanings suggest themselves. These suggestions, as Dewey calls them, come out of our previous experiences and are therefore sensible, though not always thoughtful conclusions. To stop the thought process here is irresponsible. Dewey argues, because an interpretation necessarily leads to an action, and an action based on a “leapt to” conclusion could be an inappropriate or even harmful one. It requires discipline and patience:

A person may jump at a conclusion without weighing the grounds on which it rests; he may forego or unduly shorten the act of hunting, inquiring; he may take the first answer, or solution, that comes to him because of mental sloth, torpor, impatience to get something settled. One can think reflectively only when one is willing to endure suspense and to undergo the trouble of searching. (How We Think 16)

Dewey notes that the first step once one is in an experience is to “note or perceive” a fact: “the seen thing is regarded as in some way the ground or basis of belief in the suggested thing; it possesses the quality of evidence” (How we Think 10). This is a critical point. What one sees, that is, what one directs one’s attention to is limited, especially in a classroom setting where it is impossible to see everything. One can, however, develop one’s ability to be present, to perceive more rather than less. Experienced teachers seem to have this ability; their awareness spreads like a net over the infinite number of “facts” of classroom life. Therefore, the suggestions, inferences, or interpretations a teacher

makes depend on what she perceives and on her experience, which in turn, Dewey notes “depends upon the general state of the culture” (How We Think 96). This issue points to the important role of commitment to one’s growth and an attitude of open-minded play. Dewey is acutely aware of the need to slow down the interval between thought and action in this phase of reflection. Time to reflect is essential, he writes, especially with the novice. It may be that one sign of the experienced teacher is a shortening of the time needed between thought and action. In other words, a veteran teacher may move through all six phases of reflection in a relative instant. A related difference might reside in the depth of the teacher’s experience. The important and relevant aspects of an experience are quickly recognizable to the veteran because the connections that have been formulated over time are broad, and the skills one might draw on to respond are well developed. A yawning student to an expert may suggest a number of possibilities, ranging from fatigue to resistance, with a range of concomitant responses from which to choose. To a novice it may only suggest boredom, eliciting, for example, a self-judgmental or an angry interpretation: “I am a boring teacher,” and a reaction that punishes the student and the teacher, rather than one that responds to students’ needs.

The difference is a question of wisdom garnered through experience, “being able to select and apply just what is needed when it is needed” (How We Think 65). So an expert’s spontaneous interpretation may be much wiser than a novice’s considered response. Yet Dewey would contend that even an expert’s interpretation is not beyond question. The store of one’s wisdom is the result of the extent of one’s reflection. It is also often in the slowing down that teachers, especially experienced teachers, begin to discover what is that they already know; what is later called “tacit knowledge.”

Finding the Critical Point

Dewey calls this phase of thought intellectualization, or locating the problem. These are phases of observation and description of the experience. There is a distancing of the problem as it were getting enough distance so that one can see, like backing away from a painting to see the whole picture. In addition, one's first emotional reaction, along with the visible facts of an experience, becomes an object of thought. One moves from an impressionistic sense of things to an articulated idea. "There is a process of intellectualizing what at first is merely an emotional quality of the situation. This conversion is effected by noting more definitely the conditions that constitute the trouble." Formulating the problem or question itself is half the work. As Dewey says, "A question well put is half answered" (How we Think 108). There can be a great sense of relief and accomplishment at this stage of the reflective process because making meaning has begun. It is not a casual process but a disciplined one that demands the individual continually ground his or her thinking in evidence and not overlook important data that may not fit his or her evolving ideas. The discipline of description as distinct from interpretation can bring these facts to light. This phase also demands that the learner align those data and the questions he or she poses. This is perhaps one of the more challenging aspects of reflection. The question that a learner is able to formulate depends directly on the completeness and complexity of the data or description that he or she has gathered and generated. The completeness and complexity of the data are in turn made visible according to the extent of the teacher's own ability to observe, pay attention, receive, and be open to all that is happening in the classroom.

Possible Expectations

In this phase the individual returns to the suggestions that arose in phase two, either refining them so that they are more like probabilities or rejecting them as improbable. Dewey calls this formation of tentative hypotheses. It is the first phase of analysis. The explanations that arise will come from a synthesis of the meaning derived from the current experience with that drawn from previous experiences. In addition, the learner goes to other sources beyond himself or herself. Bringing in other resources, both people and books, is paramount to deepening and broadening the scope of one's understanding. The point here is that a number of possible connections are now being generated, and meaning is beginning to take shape, rather like a sculpture that has undergone its first defining chisel.

Possible Solutions

The division between this phase and phase four is difficult to discern; one flows seamlessly into the next. Phase five is a more intense and focused version of phase four, but they both involve analysis. Dewey himself condenses them at an earlier point under the heading of "reasoning" (Democracy 150). It is these two phases, Dewey contends, which set reflective thought apart from other forms of thought. Reconstructing or reorganizing experience means more than just taking swipes at the obvious elements of experience, the sculptor hacking away at a protrusion on the marble or wood. It means spending enough time with the data of an experience, with the texture and density and grain of it, so that it can emerge in all its complexity. What might have been a reaction based on a simple-minded analysis is thus transformed into a possible reflective response

based on full knowledge of its ramifications. This phase could be understood as a series of intellectual dry runs through the problem/question and its various conclusions. It provides a platform of reason and understanding from which one can take the next step, intelligent action. Dewey understood the implications of depriving teachers of this phase of reflection. He frequently referred to the intellectual dependency teachers have on authorities such as school boards, textbook publishers, principles, etc, to make their teaching decisions for them. As early as 1904 Dewey deplored “the willingness of our teaching corps ... to accept without inquiry or criticism any method or device which seems to promise good results. Teachers flock to those persons who give them clear-cut and definite instructions as to just how to teach this or that” (152). He consistently cites the need to develop teachers’ professionalism. Such professionalism, he argues, grows out of the scientific (reflective) approach to education. As with any learner, teachers who are given a chance to reflect systematically on their experience can come to an understanding of what their students do and why. With such understandings, they are better equipped to articulate their needs and their students’ needs, to take stands, and to propose actions, both inside and outside the classroom walls.

Experimentation

Often those who write about reflection will stop before this final phase, forgetting that for Dewey reflection must include action. Dewey’s notion of responsibility, one of the four attitudes he felt were integral to reflection, implies that reflection that does not lead to action falls short of being responsible. Reflection is not a casual affair. Nonetheless, he also understood that the action that one does take is not definitive. That

is, it is an experiment, a testing of one's theories. The consequent action that one takes is intelligent and qualitatively different from routine action because of the thought that has preceded it. While a reaction is a quick reply, a response is based on careful assessment and thought. The anatomy of a response is actually quite complex. It is based on knowledge and awareness of the learner, oneself, the subject matter, the contexts within which we all operate, and the dynamic interactions among all of these. For example, while the reaction to the news of a death in family can be emotional and unrealistic, eventually people will come to term with the death of a family member, understand the circumstances surrounding it, and come to accept it as a natural part of life.

Reflection in Community

Dewey knew that merely to think without having to express what one thought is an incomplete act. He recognized that having to express oneself to others, so that others truly understand one's ideas, reveals both the strengths and the holes in one's thinking. "The experience has to be formulated in order to be communicated," he writes. Then he continues,

To formulate requires getting outside of the experience, seeing at as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form that he can appreciate its meaning. One has to assimilate, imaginatively, something of another's experience in order to tell him intelligently of one's own experience. A man really living alone would have little or no occasion to reflect upon his past experience to extract its net meaning.

(Democracy 6)

He also knew that in the act of sharing, one's field of experience broadened: "In so far as we are partners in common undertakings, the things which others communicate to us as the consequences of their particular share in the enterprise blend at once into the experience resulting from our own special doing" (Democracy 186).

The self-discipline required for the kind of reflection that Dewey advocates, especially given the overwhelming demands of a teacher's day, is difficult to sustain alone. When one is accountable to a group, one feels a responsibility toward others that is more compelling than the responsibility we feel to only ourselves. Although reflection with others is essential, to speak of reflection in community and to ignore the dispositions that are needed is to neglect an essential part of the act of reflection. Dewey was very aware that reflective work, and especially work in reflective communities, demanded particular attitudes. It is to these attitudes that we now turn.

Reflection as a Set of Attitudes

Human beings are not normally divided into parts, the one emotional, the other coldly intellectual; the one matter of fact, the other imaginative. The split does, indeed, often get established, but that is always because of false methods of education. Natively and normally the personality works as a whole. There is no integration of character and mind unless there is fusion of the intellectual and the emotional, of meaning and value, of fact and imaginative running beyond fact into the realm of desired possibilities. (How We Think 278)

Dewey's awareness of what educators call affective dimension of learning is often overlooked. Because he wrote *How We Think*, and not *How We Feel*, it is perhaps not

surprising. But Dewey had a keen understanding of the role that affect plays in learning, which he explores, at least in part, in his discussion of attitudes, or dispositions in both *How We Think* and *Democracy and Education*.

Dewey believed that the attitudes that the individual brought to bear on the act of reflection could either open the way to learning or block it. Awareness of our attitudes and emotions, and the discipline to harness them and use them to our advantage, is part of the work of a good thinker, he argues. He recognized the tendency in all human beings to see what we wish were true, or what we fear is true, rather than to accept what evidence tells us is so. Dewey cautions against the dangers of believing “that which is harmony with desire” (How we Think 30). By the same token, there are also those of us who tend to believe the worst, that which we fear most. When desire, need, fear, and other strong emotions direct the course of inquiry, we tend to acknowledge only the evidence that reinforces that premise, causing learning to become tightly circumscribed. In contrast, reflection that is guided by wholeheartedness, directness, open-mindedness, and responsibility, though more difficult, stands a much better chance of broadening one’s field of knowledge and awareness. Of course, one is seldom wholly open-minded, wholehearted, and so forth, or wholly fearful or needy. We are usually some combination of these.

Whole-heartedness, also called single-mindedness in *Democracy and Education*, indicates a genuine, no-holds-barred enthusiasm about one’s subject matter. A teacher’s subject matter can be seen as threefold: It includes the actual content that is being taught; the learner’s learning, and the teacher’s teaching and its effect on the learning. These factors interact to form a dynamic combination.

In this chapter I have discussed four criteria for reflection that come primarily from *How We Think*, *Democracy and Education*, and *Education and Experience*. I have demonstrated that reflection is not an end in itself but a tool or vehicle used in the transformation of raw experience into meaning-filled theory that is grounded in experience, informed by existing theory, and serves the larger purpose of the moral growth of the individual and society. It is a logical, forward-moving spiral from practice to theory and theory to practice. I have emphasized that the process of reflection is rigorous and systematic and distinct from other, less-structured kinds of thinking. It has its origin in the scientific method and, as such, includes precise steps including observation and detailed description of an experience, an analysis of the experience that includes generation of explanations and development of theories, and experimentation. This experimentation, which involves interactions between the self, others, and one's environment, in turn serves as the next experience from which learning can continue, a phenomenon Dewey called continuity. This can all happen in solitude, but in community with others the learner will broaden his or her understanding of an experience beyond where it might go in isolation.

At the same time that reflection requires cognitive discipline, it also calls upon an individual's emotional discipline. As much as possible, one needs to remain reengaged in the experience as it is happening, in an undistracted way. By accepting that a shift in understanding of an experience may call for a new outlook, we can create a platform upon that experience where future learning can take place.

Dewey was precise in his description of what it means to think reflectively. By adhering to the essential rigor inherent in his definition, teachers can achieve many goals.

First, the process of reflection, and the steps of observation and description in particular, require the teacher to confront the complexity of students and their learning, of themselves and their teaching, their subject matter, and the contexts in which all these operate. Any action the teacher takes, therefore, will be considered rather than impulsive and based on a deep knowledge on each of these elements and their interactions, which ultimately can only benefit students' learning. In this manner, once teachers learn to broaden their own thinking, they can teach their students to do the same, for teachers teach what they understand deeply from their own experience. From there, they can encourage their students to confront thoughtfully the phenomena of their world. Second, because reflection is a particular, defined way of thinking, it can be practiced, assessed, and perfected. Once reflection can be talked about with precision by teachers and researchers as well as students, it cannot be easily dismissed as soft, not lost in a flurry of vaguely defined movements. How to think reflectively, after all, is not bandwagon issue. It is not a fad whose time has come and gone but perhaps the most essential piece of what makes us human, of what makes us learners.

Finally, with a clear language of reflection, there can be reflection on reflection, including research on impact of reflection on both teachers' practice and students' learning. It is in these ways, as Dewey knew well, that there will be growth in our learning about how to think, to teach, and to learn. Dewey would urge us to reflect carefully upon his theory of reflection in light of our collective experience, changing that theory as our experience and accumulated knowledge dictate, thinking to learn.

So the bottom line is that we write reflectively in order to create a connection with our fellow human beings. But this connection has not always been an easy one to make.

Society in various capacities has hindered the effort of women writers who needed to shed light on various aspects of their lives. The next chapter will examine the journey of a select group of authors who had to rise above the limitations of their culture and societies in order to create an understanding about the conditions in which they were trying to survive.

The cornerstone of Dewey's thought is growth. What contributes to individual and social growth is good. In fact, the value of education exists to the extent it creates a desire for continued growth. The school is a miniature community. It provides for social and individual growth. He rejected the teaching of subjects for their own sake. Any subject is merely a means and not an end in itself. It is the means by which the individual reconstructs his experience, extracts its meaning and thereby prepares himself for the future. Even freedom is itself a means. The only freedom with enduring importance is the intellectual freedom of observation and judgment exercised for an intrinsically worthy end or purpose. Education is a reorganization of experience which adds meaning and ability in the directing of subsequent experience. The subject matter of the school should consist of facts which are observed, remembered, read, discussed and suggested for the purpose of solving some felt problem. Interest and motivation are essential elements in the learning process. Activity by itself never constitutes experience. The concept of experience involves the aspects of doing and undergoing. When the individual experiences something, he both acts upon it and enjoys or undergoes the consequences of it. The connection between these active and passive elements in experience is the measure of the experiential value. Since society changes, the individual must learn how to think in order to cope with a changing environment. When a teacher achieves this with

every student, the class no longer merely perpetuates society. It becomes an essential force in the reconstruction of society. The next chapter will allow a detailed examination of the functions of societies that are outside of the student's immediate surroundings. By making a connection to the functions of various societies, a teacher will not only teach, but open the gateways of learning about the world to each and every student.

CHAPTER TWO: GENDER AND SOCIAL LIMITATIONS

John Dewey held an expansive view of democracy. He believed that democracy did not proceed exclusively through cumulative behaviors such as voting, nor did it take shape solely through formal institutions such as parliamentary government. John Dewey did not delimit his vision of democracy to a properly political domain. A democratic spirit and a concern for the social and political problems of contemporary societies animated his writings even as he discussed non-political subjects. His approach to the women's suffrage movement and equal rights were as parallel to his views on the importance of democracy. This chapter will examine how gender inequality, culture, and political boundaries can hinder and damage the growth of individuals, especially women, in a different society. Dewey advocated a far-reaching, fundamental, and yet personal view of democracy: democracy constituted a way of life. In an 1888 essay titled "The Ethics of Democracy," Dewey contradicted instrumentalist conceptions that regarded democracy as an institutional framework established to secure social stability and consensus.

The significance of democracy lay not in a predetermined end, but in the means of gender equality. In language revealing his early adherence to idealist philosophy, Dewey explained that democratic and aristocratic theories of governance shared the same goal—the mutual fulfillment of the individual and the social organism. However, democratic ends could not be obtained for citizens by others; citizens themselves had to achieve democracy. Its achievement could be envisaged because the democratic ideal was "already at work in every personality, and must be trusted to care for itself" (1888/1969, 243).

Fifty years later, Dewey continued to advance an expansive yet quotidian notion of democracy. In a 1939 essay titled "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,"

he defined democracy as “a personal way of individual life.” As such, democracy signified “the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life” (1939/1991, 226). This definition of democracy highlighted the indispensable role of publics in establishing and sustaining gender equality. Fundamentally, this definition relied on an optimistic assessment of human potentiality, one that could not be circumscribed by “race, color, sex, birth and family, [or] material or cultural wealth’ (1939/1991, 226).

Specifically, it prescribed a strong link between successful democratic praxis and vigorous public engagement: democracy could not function properly if citizens did not participate actively in public life. The need for public participation, in turn, depended crucially on an optimistic assessment of citizens’ capacity for public deliberation and judgment. Dewey explained that “democracy is a way of personal life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished’ (1939/1991, 227). Dewey protested that his views were not utopian, for they arose from a “democratic spirit” animating his surroundings. Moreover, a faith in human intelligence was absolutely required of advocates of democracy. To doubt citizens’ capacity to participate in democratic methods like public deliberation was to doubt the very possibility of democracy itself.

Yet Dewey’s critical assessments also tested his faith—perhaps nowhere more so than in his most extensive inquiry into the present condition and future possibilities of the public sphere, his 1927 book *The Public and Its Problems*. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey wrote of a public in eclipse. Born in local communities, American democratic practices had expanded on a vast scale, and this vastness reconfigured societal relations on impersonal,

perplexing bases. At the same time, technological developments had increased social complexity, such that citizens no longer could discern the indirect consequences of human actions nor judge confidently issues affecting them.

Dewey observed that “the public seems to be lost; it is certainly bewildered” (1927/1954, 116). He described a public that had become too large, too diffuse, too scattered to enact collective judgment. The problem, Dewey explained, “is not that there is no public, no large body of persons having a common interest in the consequences of social transactions.” Instead, the opposite situation prevailed: “There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and too intricate in composition. And there are too many publics.” Increased social scale and complexity had created an age in which each consequence of human action “crosses the others and generates its own group of persons especially affected with little to hold these different publics together in an integrated whole” (1927/1954, 137).

In this chapter I will apply Dewey’s theory of public in eclipse to women writers across the globe that for centuries have been treated as second class citizens. In this context, detailed investigation of Dewey’s articulation of the relationship between the eclipse of the public and the role of multiple publics takes on particular significance. If the existence of multiple publics is not necessarily tied to diminished publicity, then Dewey’s reflections on the condition of the public and his prescriptions for the public’s recovery may serve as an important resource for contemporary public sphere studies. Dewey’s analysis of the public in eclipse evidenced a historical not a conceptual judgment. He did not reject multiple publics per se, but focused his critique on existing relations among publics: he did not object to multiplicity but to uncoordinated multiplicity.

Reading Dewey as a theorist of gender equality as the basis of democracy and

education foregrounds his potential contributions to public sphere studies. Most directly, Dewey's theory of the public sphere stands as an important antecedent to contemporary models emphasizing multiplicity. His theorizing may help fill in a history of public sphere scholarship and unsettle the sometimes disproportionate focus in this scholarship on the Western culture. The compare/contrast of women writers and their work on the role of gender in society validates and proves the universality of Dewey's theory that democracy is only complete when both genders receive the same treatment across the board.

The traditional assumption that men and women are born with different abilities and temperaments which makes them naturally suited for different social roles is a myth. From the day they are born, children are given subtle and direct clues as to sex-appropriate behavior and feelings. Cross-cultural studies show beyond any doubt that femininity and masculinity are not inborn qualities, but part of different sex roles—that is, social guidelines for sex-appropriate appearances, interests, skills, and self-perceptions. Nevertheless, traditional masculine and feminine ideals influence most of us. Eastern cultures expect women to want marriage and family, to put their family first; to depend on their husbands, financially and socially; to live through their husbands and children; to be passive and self-sacrificing rather than aggressive and self-assertive, as well as loving and kind to the husband's family. This is not to say that women in general are totally powerless. However, gender roles, cultural boundaries and social limitations play important roles in how women across the globe see and value themselves. This chapter will examine the work of various writers who have tried to shed light on the imbalance of the notion of gender roles, social and cultural expectations, and how women strive to not only be heard, but to change this dynamic for the better. This chapter will

examine the role of cultural identity, the history of the novel in Iran, and the reaction to cultural violence by various Eastern and Western writers. The multiplicity of voices presented among the authors covered in this chapter shapes the theoretical discourse validated by bell hooks. In *Talking Back* she examines the underlying fabric of this discourse in order to shed light on several concepts crucial to understanding the place of silence, anger, and transgression in women's responses to society and its boundaries.

Society shapes the identity of Eastern women on so many levels. When I was a little girl, the most told and re-told bedtime story I heard was the one about the pretty lady cockroach. This is how the story goes:

Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful cockroach. One day she decided it was time for her to go into the world and find a husband. So she made a dress out of rose petals, a chador out of onion skin, and shoes out of almond shells. She left her home and began her journey. First she ran into the grocer. "Hello beautiful lady, where are you headed to?" he asked with a smile. "I'm headed on a journey to find a suitable husband who will feed me wheat bread and I won't have to ask my dad for my daily bread." "Will you marry me?" the grocer asked. "Well, if I marry you, what will you beat me with?" she asked. "With the scale." "Oh, no, if I marry you, I will be killed." So she went on.

So our little cockroach continues her journey. In her path she will encounter the butcher who will want to beat her with a butcher knife and a mouse who will want to beat her with his tail. She will end up marrying the mouse as the safest of all her suitors. The irony of this tale is the casual representation of violence against a female in a marriage as an accepted fact. She does not ask for a house, or jewels, or children, or being loved. She

wants to know what their weapon of abuse will be so she can either evaluate it or prepare herself. What kind of cultural identity does this tale present to a five-year-old child? Men will beat women and women will accept it. As I was growing up there was no doubt in my mind that whoever my future husband would be, he would have the right to hit me and my only way to avoid that was by being extremely obedient. This notion was carried over to my life in the West, and my struggles as a woman with my cultural identity has continued into my forties. A sense of inferiority envelops the women in cultures where male dominance is causally, continuously, and deliberately mentioned and validated as accepted behavior. In the West cultural identity has a different shape. While some writers of color have addressed the issue in their work as a way to shed light on an ongoing problem, violence against women in society is nothing new and has continued through centuries. Various cultures have variations of the same patterns of thinking when it comes to women and their role in marriage, family, and society. Tillie Olsen addressed her concerns in her brilliant book *Silences*. bell hooks covers the violence, voicelessness, and racial tensions as they contribute to teaching and learning. Simin Daneshvar addresses this area in the form of storytelling from the margins, shedding light on the plight of ordinary Persian housewives, trapped in the prison of marriages ruled by mean-spirited spouses. Without a voice, women have nothing. This chapter will examine the role of violence, voice, and writing as contributing factors in how we as women see, understand, and accept ourselves as individuals. In *Talking Back* bell hooks writes “The liberatory voice is characterized by opposition, by resistance. It demands that paradigms shift—that we learn to talk—to listen—to hear in a new way” (5).

Since 1965 feminist writing in the United States has taken seriously the roles of

silence and anger in the lives and literary production of women. One of the authors whose work gives voice to women silenced by forced domesticity is Tillie Olsen. Her short story *I Stand Here Ironing* allows a look into the journey of a mother, ridden with guilt, at her own poor treatment of her daughter Emily due to domestic duties, broken marriages, and poverty. In *Silences* she explores the role of forced silence on women who otherwise would have the drive to write and create change to improve life for themselves and their children. This chapter is an analysis in a cross-cultural exploration of responses to gender roles in texts by writers from non-Western countries as well as the United States.

The voices of the authors I explore extend from the formal and academic to the highly personal and autobiographical. The range of texts discussed invites an examination of cultural and class-based differences in the nature of the violence that women have experienced, the costs of breaking cultural taboos against speaking out, and the strategies enabling women to violate societal expectations without forfeiting the chance to be heard.

A writer faces contrary imperatives: to be honest, and to be heard. It can be difficult for the writer herself to look closely into the systems that justify and perpetuate violence. Once one has identified the violence, it can be difficult to name it publicly, and difficult to make oneself heard. For a woman writing from the margins, whose work may clash with these assumptions, acceptance by the literary mainstream too often means silencing a part of what she sees and knows. To write honestly may thus mean transgressing, violating the literary boundaries of the expected and accepted. This double bind is particularly strong for women writers of color, especially so if their vision is shaped by a language other than English. What is read by the dominant group as alien, rough-edged, shaken, and piercing is more likely to offend when it comes from a woman.

If the woman writer's root culture also has strong injunctions against "making noise," the temptation to self-silencing increases, as does the risk and necessity for breaking through. This risk often influences the way a writer shapes her work, its dramatic and narrative strategies, its language and imagery. Women have responded to gender roles and its limitations within their writings for decades. The collective voice of the writers presented in this chapter has one unified message: women's voices must be heard and acknowledged as valid and valuable by the society in which they live.

A Voice to Be Heard

The multiplicity of voices talking back to each other within and among the authors covered in this chapter shapes the theoretical discourse validated by bell hooks. In *Talking Back* she examines the underlying fabric of this discourse in order to shed light on several concepts crucial to understanding the place of silence, anger, and transgression in women's responses to society: *decentering*, *heteroglossia*, *dialogic*, and *travesia*.

Decentering, a process essential to postcolonial literary practice, redefines both subject and object of critical attention. When those who are marginal to the dominant power replace the center, making the margin the new center of their own subjectivity, different perspectives on violence become possible. The *monologic* discourse of the imperial center tends to recognize as violent only what it perceives as threatening to itself. Shifting the vantage point of the subject allows one to see forms of violence that had been invisible, or to see in unfamiliar ways. When the gaze is redefined, what it encompasses changes, deconstructing the master narrative (hooks 5).

The need for this shift away from the old center is clear in the work of such writers as Simin Daneshvar and Abdul JanMohamed, who provide valuable ways of understanding and thus disrupting the binary operation of the dominant discourse. Daneshvar confirms the need for a “certain work of displacement” without which “speaking about” only partakes in the conservation of systems of binary opposition (subject/object; I/It; we/they) on which territorialized knowledge depends” (Daneshvar 38). Also implicit in the monologic discourse of the dominant group is what JanMohamed calls its “Manichaeic economy, a structuring of the world along rigid us/them lines” (JanMohamed 41). Such global binary oppositions go beyond simple nonjudgmental distinctions; inherently unstable, they tip easily onto a vertical axis: superior/inferior; better/worse. As long as the dominant hear no voices but their own, their monologic “truth” blinds them (42). As JanMohamed shows, when the colonizer attempts to know the colonized, he generally sees not the other but only his own reversed reflection, either demonized or idealized (44). Or, as Mary Louise Pratt shows, he sees nothing at all; only a landscape from which all human presence has been erased, containing only resources for the taking (Pratt 10).

Heteroglossia, emerging from the specifics of social context, frees the monologue from its constricting knots. When a multiplicity of voices enters the discourse, when the margins talk back to the imperial or neocolonial center, the binary structure unravels. In Rosario Ferré’s novel *Sweet Diamond Dust*, when the family’s history is retold by the household servant, the orthodox truths dissolve, other truths emerge, the shape of the story shifts, and what had been presented as courage and conquest becomes violence, violation (Ferre 11).

Dialogic, the constructive discourse of conflict becomes possible when multilateral discourse interrupts the dominant monologue. The dialogic process is inherently confrontive, exposing discrepancies, contradictions, rifts. Thus the perceived threat: “Everything was nice and harmonious before. Now you’re creating divisions. The divisions and differences were there all along but were simply whitewashed into invisibility. Dialogic allows us to begin to see” (hooks 12).

This movement toward understanding is the crossing, which is the other side of transgression. Whatever the ground one stands on, whether center or margin, one faces in each moment another ground, which is the threatening not-known. Only by violating the boundaries of the familiar and proper, risking conflict, can one reach toward connection (hooks 13).

Travesía applies not only to the unknown ground of the other; it also means questioning what had seemed familiar, the very ground under one’s own feet. The task for each of us is, as Minh-ha says, “to listen, to see like a stranger in one’s own land; to fare like a foreigner across one’s own language”(Minh-ha 44). Particularly for readers shaped by a monologic discourse, confrontation with unfamiliar and widely differing texts and perspectives can be disconcerting. For one thing, to realize that the invisible was “not, not there,” as Toni Morrison says, can be humbling (Morrison 207). It is not simply that the voices of working-class people and people of color have been stifled; they also have been unheard and rendered unhearable, actually erased. And the dominant group, too, has been damaged in the process, deprived of access to crucial experience and ways of seeing. Polyvocal discourse can render visible the vacant spaces (Morrison 210).

Culture Making a Difference

As Morrison reminds us, “Cultures, whether silenced or heard, whether repressed or repressing, seek meaning in the language and images available to them” (209). Texts by authors writing out of culturally diverse contexts question the reader’s awareness of their cultural specificities. What socio-historical conditions made it possible for these women to write at all? What traditions exist in their cultures of women writing? And what oppressive or liberating structures have shaped their responses to violence?

In many cultures and periods, the only women likely to have access to literacy and to a literary tradition, as well as the resources and leisure for writing, were the daughters or wives of rulers or aristocrats or courtesans or religious devotees. The early poetry of India, for instance, is rich with the work of women who were Buddhist nuns or, later, followers of Siva. Farzaneh Milani points out that in the Arab world and Iran, women Sufis wrote some of the earliest mystic poetry in that tradition (eighth century in Arabic, eleventh in Farsi). In certain cultures and periods, women across a broader social spectrum were actively involved in literary production. In many oral cultures, from pre-Islamic Bedouin Arabia to the twentieth-century Inuit, each member of the community was considered a potential poet, and women along with men took part in the poetic competitions and celebrations that constituted the heart of their culture (Milani 19).

Until fairly recently, the vast majority of women in literate cultures worked too hard and were too poor to have the chance to read, much less write. Literacy has been mainly a privilege of the well-to-do, and then only in certain countries and times, and only for the fortunate. According to Morrison our knowledge of women who did write has been limited by the politics of transmission: works considered important at one

period could disappear in the next, in part through patriarchal bias in the institutions responsible for literary publication, distribution, and preservation (Morrison 208).

Some female authors write with an awareness of a long line of literary foremothers while others draw from ancient traditions in which “literary” composition by women has been oral rather than written. Middle Eastern women writers such as Etel Adnan and Simin Daneshvar work out of a literary heritage going back more than 4,000 years-to Enheduanna, the poet-priestess of Sumer who composed elaborate hymns to the goddess Inanna around 300 BCE and is the earliest poet known by name; and to Kubatum, another Sumerian woman, who wrote lyric poetry around 2031 BCE.

In some cases, the relations between societies that were at differing stages of literary development created extraordinary space for women’s creative work. Japan, which had no indigenous written language until around the seventh century CE, depended for a long time on China, whose written language was nearly two thousand years older. During the four hundred years of the Heian Period (794-1185), “serious” Japanese literature was written in Chinese by Japanese men educated in the foreign Chinese tradition. The young Japanese script, considered inferior and appropriate only for trivial writing, was left to the use of women who proceeded to invent what were to become the most significant forms of subsequent Japanese literature: the tanka, the haiku, the novel

In the present century, postcolonial writers have worked in similarly complex cultural and linguistic situations. Senegalese novelists Mariama Ba and Aminata Sow Fall, for example, inherit both a written African literary tradition, beginning with the early pharaohs of Egypt, and a rich oral tradition. Each has chosen to write in the language of the French colonizers, which is more widely accessible than their native

languages. Laguna Pueblo novelist-poet Leslie Mormon Silko, who draws inspiration both from a long oral heritage and from the ancient Aztec and Maya written traditions, writes in English. This increasingly wide use of English and other European languages by writers from Third-World cultures has expanded the range of those languages embodying cultural differences.

This opening of the doors of mainstream US literature to voices outside the walls has necessarily shifted the understanding of the canon that never clearly defined but strongly guarded fortress of “Indisputable” Great Literature. Toni Morrison, discussing the startling absence of African Americans from the founding works of canonic nineteenth-century American literature, shows how deeply in fact the “presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the languages, and the structure—the meaning of so much American literature” (Morrison 210). Her concept of the “unspeakable things unspoken” and the “Invisible things [that] are not necessarily not-there” (210) is crucial to understanding the role of cultural silence by literary institutions and by the dominant cultural ideologies that shape them (210).

Cultural communities split by language and forced dispersion have found other ways of defining and preserving a common bond. Writers of the African Diaspora, marked by widely divergent histories and cultures, see themselves as linked by the shared experience of colonization, slavery, and racist oppression as well as by the consciousness of a rich common cultural heritage in the continent of Africa. Shared oppression and culture likewise unite the peoples of other Diasporas such as the Jewish, Palestinian, and Iranians.

An Overview of the Short Story Writing in Iran

Modern Western fictional genres, particularly the short story, are relatively new in Persian Literature. The writing of Persian short stories began in 1921 with the publication in Berlin of (*Once upon a time*), a collection of six stories written by M. A. Jamalzadeh during the previous four to five years and printed in *Kaveh*, a Persian monthly magazine published by a group of distinguished Iranian scholars in Berlin. In these stories Jamalzadeh had criticized the social and political conditions of his homeland in a charming style replete with colloquial words and idiomatic expressions. However, it was not the stylistic quality of its language, or even the author's critical views, that made this little volume a real novelty. Both characteristics had already appeared several years earlier in certain journalistic writings of the time, most notably in (*Balderdash*), a series of satirical articles by the encyclopedist A. Dehkhoda. The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 and the subsequent period of relative political freedom had prepared the ground for the mushrooming of countless newspapers filled with open attacks on the government and the country's established institutions. It was rather the charming plots of the short stories in the garb of an alien form that captivated readers' minds and marked the birth of the new genre in Persian literature. Jamalzadeh, who by then had spent over ten years in Europe, was well aware of the need for a radical departure from the norms and traditions of classical Persian prose.

Although the Constitutional Revolution failed to fulfill its promise to usher in an era of political freedom and social justice, it did break many old barriers and set the history of Iran on a new course of radical changes. It marked the beginning of an unending struggle which even now, after numerous decades, is far from having achieved

its ultimate goals. And yet it did provide the right atmosphere for the gradual appearance of a new cultural awareness. It succeeded in making headway for a cultural revolution, even though the political one continued to show few, if any, signs of permanent success. Another influential writer to start his career in the forties was the more famous, hotly debated, and politically controversial figure of Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) the late husband of one of Iran's most acclaimed writers Simin Daneshvar. Being enormously talented, energetic, and passionately interested in the fate of his nation's culture and political future, Al-e Ahmad played a decisive role in shaping the mind and actions of an entire generation of young intellectuals. Restless, impatient, and aggressive by nature, Al-e Ahmad showed the marks of his future career both as writer and social critic even in the stories of his first collection, (*Exchange of visits*, 1946). Three more volumes appeared between 1947 and 1952. He also wrote four novels. The shortest and least successful among them, (*The Tale of Beehives*, 1955), was an allegory of the exploitation of Iranian oil by foreign companies. In 1958 came (*The School Principal*), which was enthusiastically received by the public. It decries the deplorable conditions of Iranian education through the example of an elementary school in which children coming from needy families suffer from malnutrition, and funds are not sufficient for the purchase of facilities. The principal of the school, who perfectly mirrors the narrator and is identical with Al-e Ahmad himself, reappears ten years later in the novel (*The Cursing of the Land*) as a school teacher in a village which, in the wake of Iran's land reform, is losing its traditional system of agriculture in exchange for modernization and mechanical tools. The resulting confusion and failure, as depicted by Al-e Ahmad, is meant to lend credence to his basic thesis, forcefully detailed in a most influential sociopolitical essay

called (*Plagued by the West*), according to which imitation of the West and the latter's exploitation of the East are at the root of the ruin and backwardness experienced by Eastern nations.

In 1961 Al-e Ahmad published his third novel, (*By the Pen*), an allegory expressing the interaction between government and society and the role of the intellectual elite in Iran. Told in the form of an historical tale projected back into sixteenth-century Safavie times, it offers a detached statement about religion and government in Iran and the fate of political movements. Al-e Ahmad's typical telegraphic prose, revealing both arrogance and impatience even with grammar and syntax, became the model for some aspiring talents. He impressed his audience as one who knew the diagnosis and had the remedy for the troubles of his country. Some termed him "the wide-awake conscience of the nation." Nobody, even among his opponents, would deny his power of intellect and sharp insight. It is his vital contribution to the establishment of an even less progressive and democratic regime, with all the devastating consequences of political upheaval, that is held against him. He undoubtedly was, and will be, remembered as an outstanding though controversial figure of Iran's intellectual life during the fifties and sixties.

In the hands of these and a number of other writers of fiction, Persian prose, which for over a thousand years had been treated as the illegitimate child of Persian literature, achieved great maturity and, in the appealing form of short stories, assumed a social responsibility greater than poetry had ever displayed. The rapidly politicized mind of the Persian people turned from the other-worldly and religious themes of the past millennium to secular problems. The imported genre of short stories creating cultural awareness lent itself as the most suitable vehicle for direct exhibition of social concerns

as exemplified by countless daily incidents. The group of distinguished writers mentioned so far was joined in the fifties and the following two decades by a host of promising talents. The momentum gained from over thirty years of experience, fueled by fresh ideas offered in translations from numerous languages and cultures as well as ever-increasing personal contact with the outside world produced an intellectual atmosphere that was both inspiring and challenging. Censorship blocked publication of many works and inflicted considerable pain on a number of poets and novelists. But it was not able to break their pen or their will to continue blasting what was wrong and defending human rights and dignity.

Some Persian short stories offers scenes of middle-class daily life, narrative recollections, romantic episodes, and some flashbacks to familiar religious myths daringly satirized. Among these Golsestan's *Safar-e-esmat* contains vocabulary that is carefully selected and elegantly arranged. The flow of harmoniously measured sentences causes his prose to glide smoothly into a semi poetic mode. The book is one of the jewels of modern Persian literature. In the field of imaginative literature, Persian women, having achieved a certain degree of emancipation, hold an important position, and the number of emerging talents among them is growing rapidly.

Simin Daneshvar (b. 1921), is the first outstanding female novelist of Iran; her earliest volume of short stories, (*The Quenched Fire*), appeared in 1948. Her preoccupation with the plight of Persian women was more outspokenly expressed in her second collection, (*A City Like Paradise*, 1961), and in the rest of her writings through the years. Her real fame rests upon, (*The Mourning*, 1969), an extremely popular political novel that depicts the tense living conditions of a family in Shiraz during World War II

when foreign troops were present in Iran.

Mahshid Amir-Shahi (b. 1940), the author so far of four volumes of delightful stories and a novel, (*At Home*, 1986), does not dwell only on the dark side of life, as had been the overriding concern of many other writers. Her characters are mostly average middle-class individuals caught in the hustle and bustle of their daily lives with all their sunny or gloomy moments. Beautiful and often humorous memories of a happy childhood, touching expressions of affection, particularly for a gentle mother, reminiscences of school years, and teenage pleasures, as well as later disappointments in life, are just some of the enjoyable qualities of Amir-Shahi's fiction.

A quite different tone, that of a psychological approach to society and social life, rings through the fiction of Shahrnush Parsipur (b. 1946), the author of a well-known novel (*Tuba and the Meaning of Night*, 1987) which, in spite of—or perhaps because of—its complicated and perplexing plot, has captured the imagination of several critics and inspired different interpretations. In it Parsipur has presented a combination of political, religious, and social factors in the personal fate of a girl who passes through changing times and the ordeals of both old-fashioned and modernized family life.

In an earlier, equally fascinating novel, (*The Dog and the Long Winter*, 1976), she had already treated (though without much symbolic allegory) the similar subject of the oppressive cultural atmosphere of the time and the agony inflicted by middle-class traditions and religious norms; the former she condemns, the latter she considers declining. Parsipur's emancipated, somewhat resigned, mental attitude and approach to love and life is demonstrated in her story (*Trial Offers*), written in 1970. Generally speaking, it must be admitted that these female novelists are not exceptional in their

preference for scenes from middle-class problems and occupations. Numerous other novelists likewise write about the cultural habits, vanities, and moral or immoral behavior of Iranian bourgeois and nouveau riche circles, deriding their emptiness and devotion to fun and base pleasures.

It is true, as many would say, that Iranian novels and short stories are usually depressing and leave the reader with the impression that Iranians are a nation of mourners with no glimmer of joy and hope and no trace of humor visible in their lives. Without venturing to explain the historical reasons for this sad reality, one might qualify this assumption as only partially true. Iranian writers, especially after 1953, may be divided into two distinctive groups, with only a few being in the middle or completely beyond the borderlines: the committed, anti-establishment writers, led by Al-e Ahmad, who fought the regime, and those for whom the overthrow of the monarchy did not constitute the exclusive purpose and motivation for writing. Several novelists belonging to the first camp made politics and political issues the substance of their stories. With them the meaning of their craft became identical with their political stance, a trend that can hardly be rated positively. Among the second group, we find some of the best novelists and poets, who are more flexible in the choice of their subjects. Even within the limits of this anthology, there is no shortage of stories that dilute this purported seriousness with a dose of healthy humor (by Jamalzadeh, Amir-Shahi, Tonokaboni, Daneshvar, and even Golestan). Some others may not be uplifting, but neither are they depressing; they are rather descriptive or political or even suspenseful in type (e.g., Taraqqi, Sadeqi, Parsipur, Alavi, Ashurzadeh, Khaksar).

As a whole, it seems that Iranian writers, and poets as well, have grasped the

opportunity to tear the veil aside and publicly expose the reality of life in their country after centuries of oppression, plunder and torture, neglect and abuse of all human rights by authorities of whatever stamp, whether in the name of God or of the State, but in reality to quench their own thirst for money and power. These courageous poets and writers have tried, with more sincerity and honesty than any other leaders and institutions in the past, to open the minds of a nation. To a certain extent, they have succeeded. This intellectual movement started rolling with the Constitutional Revolution. Since then it has been supported and fed by a variety of fundamental changes, and no power has been able to slow its momentum.

During the last twenty years, a number of poets and writers, together with artists and scholars, have chosen to live in exile. Several of the most brilliant among them have died either at home or abroad. Many others are enduring the pains consequent upon resistance at home. And a generation of promising new talents is now also rising. They could not, except for three or four, be included in our anthology; they need, and deserve, a separate volume to themselves.

Culture-Based Differences in Women's Responses to Violence

What one is capable of seeing as violence depends on one's angle of vision. When Cherrie Moraga speaks of the "threat of genocide" suffered by people of color, she is referring not only to violence of overt action but also to hidden, structural violence and to the passive acquiescence that permits it to continue (Moraga 181). Women born into relative privilege, defended from racial and economic oppression, often find it hard to recognize how they stand with one foot each in the camps of the dominator and the

dominated, how they, however unconsciously, have benefited from and been complicit in the oppression of others. As Peggy McIntosh points out, “the heavy price paid for privilege is a peculiar blindness, the inability to see that the privilege exists; men frequently suffer from this blindness on matters of gender, middle-class people on class, European Americans on race” (McIntosh 31).

In part because of their recognition of interconnected oppressions, the writing of women of color has tended to avoid reductive oppositions between women and men. At the same time, they are often bitterly impatient with men in their communities for attacking as “disloyal to their people” women who point out connections between gender oppression and other forms of oppression. As hooks reminds us, “To be critical of one’s culture is not to betray that culture; in fact, it is the withholding of criticism that constitutes betrayal, complicity in holding the community back” (McIntosh 32). There are no simple dichotomies. Men, despite the problematic advantages of gender domination, have also been scarred by patriarchy. And men are not the only oppressors. Women, whether overtly privileged or not, have frequently played a role in keeping the mechanisms of patriarchy in place, as many men have worked as allies in dismantling them.

The specificities of cultural difference reveal varying forms of resistance to oppression, and varying forms of silence and anger. Unconsciousness and acquiescence as responses to violence can be explained in terms of internalized oppression, the incorporation of the attitudes of the oppressor by the victim, or of the colonizer by the colonized. Bell hooks claims that “Where violence is opposed, resistance may not be conscious: madness or anorexia, for instance, may be an embodied repudiation of a

gendered situation that seems to allow one no other control” (hooks 34). On the other hand, conscious anger is not necessarily productive; it may simply be reactive, a lashing out harmful to self and others. When constructive, anger may not be direct. It can be explicit without being voiced: expressed nonverbally, for example, or communicated within overt politeness.

Conscious anger openly expressed may serve as a counterforce to the heavy weight of conformist silence. Many Third-World texts emphasize the necessity for such cultural anger and action. Others portray counter-community, empowered by shared silences, as the most effective opposition to violence. At times, in what Mary Daly has called “space on the boundary” outside the system of domination, the impact of violence can be resisted or healed through collective ritual and myth (Daly 42). In still other cases, silence may be a means of survival, or of subversion-disguise, masking, and “warrior duplicity.” Examples of subversive silence appear frequently in works by nineteenth-century women writers as coded invitations to their women readers to read between the lines what could without danger be said outright (Daly 44).

Poet Janice Mirikitani calls us to shed our debilitating silence, to “birth our rage” from the “mute grave” of patriarchal history (37). But rage can be dangerously transgressive. Cultures differ greatly in the comfort or discomfort their members feel with overt anger or any direct expression of conflict. Anger is a form of energy that can be constructive or destructive depending on context. Aimed at the perpetrator of violence rather than at the violent act, it merely replicates the problem. As a counterforce to the wrong itself, anger is capable of transforming the opponent into a potential ally. Constructive anger is thus not something one ever “gets beyond.” We can use its power

to move us from unconscious passivity into clarity and the will to act. In this sense, anger is awareness amplified so it can be spoken, speech amplified so it can be heard.

But what if the hearer resists hearing, either in an effort to avoid pain, or from fear of having cherished values challenged, or from resentment of anger misread as personal attack? Any undermining of established assumptions can seem threatening. Yet, as readers, our experiences of marginalization and subordination can serve us. As adults who were once children, most of us have been members of dominated as well as dominator groups; and we can call on this remembered experience to free us from an imprisoning monologic view of the world.

Women and Cultural Boundaries

Trinh Minh-ha reminds us, “The challenge is thus: how can one re-create without re-circulating domination?” (38). Undoing binary structures mean destabilizing not only the master narratives of the patriarchy but also our own. Women assume varying, often contradictory, positions in response to multiple hegemonies, and as Sally Robinson points out, it is through these shifting positions that we constitute our multivalent subjectivities (Robinson 25). At the same time, however, we may be denying the multivalent subjectivities of the *other*. As Minh-ha puts it, Western thinkers “extol the concept of decolonization and continuously invite into their fold the challenge of the Third-World. Yet when they confront the challenge in the flesh, they do not hear, do not see. They promptly reject it as they assign it to their one-place-fits-all *other* category” (Minh-ha 40). Similarly, in *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-Building*, Laura E. Donaldson argues for the need to do away with what she calls *the Miranda effect* the

tendency among feminists to construct and then be trapped by a universalizing image of women's solidarity. Attempting to squeeze all women into this ideological construct, ignoring differences of history, economic class, and culture, one falls into blindness akin to the blindness that kept Miranda from “seeing” Caliban (Donaldson 38). Strategies that displace the imperial center “defy the world of compartmentalization and the systems of dependence it engenders, while filling the shifting space of creation with a passion named wonder” (Donaldson 42).

The need for this shift in vision became clear to me some years ago when I was involved in an organization called Women of Color at the University of Arizona. In the beginning, exhilarated by the connections among women from cultures as diverse as Russia and Afghanistan, Vietnam and the Philippines, we organized our meetings and agendas thematically, focusing on what we as free Americans saw as the startling “universals” of women’s experience. As we gathered more members from various continents and countries, we found ourselves thrown outside our familiar ground, forced to recognize the specific cultural context in which our identity had taken shape. This shift led us to organize meetings themed around cultural areas rather than by “common voices.” Our collective experiences as women of color from all over the world and the way we valued and treated the cultures we were from became one thread among many in a shifting tapestry whose patterns were only just emerging.

This multiplicity of social voices is also crucial to teaching in a classroom full of diversity. For any group to function in a classroom and for genuine learning to take place, the members must be open to hear, value, and understand the cultural histories that each member presents. Yet, wherever there is a dominant discourse, there are always already

numerous other voices, subverting, transgressing boundaries, working to understand, credit, discredit, and challenge one another. This is where writing becomes the focal point of teaching about society and culture, because it will allow each member to reflect on what the group has presented and try to understand the threads that comprise the fabric of that classroom. Some have argued that encouraging a multiplicity of voices carries the dangerous implication that they are all equally worthy, that everything is relative, that there is nothing we can recognize as better or more true. What about, for example, voices that are clearly speaking untruths or dangerous half-truths? The dialogic suggests that the way toward truth is not to try to build walls to shut out falsehood. Rather, as John Milton argued in *Areopagitica*, destructive thinking can best be demolished through dialogue in the public marketplace, since it is more likely to wither in the light of day than if it is driven underground.

This emerging play of voices in social context is, to quote Bakhtin again, “the natural orientation of any living discourse.” Bakhtin defines the conflicts of difference as exhilarating, the “unrepeatable play of colors and light” as “the word encounters an alien word in a living, tension-filled interaction” (263). The tensions of dialogic discourse involve risks, too, especially in what Minh-ha describes as a “maximal consumer society” that is “always dividing and alienating at the same time as it works at filling in blanks, holes, gaps, and cracks; rendering invisible the open wounds; evading cleverly all radical reflection upon itself” (Minh-ha 41). Those in power tend to argue that anger is “improper” precisely because they think it is to their advantage to shut up voices that question, or might make them question, their dominator role (Minh-ha 40).

Oppression is destructive for the oppressor as well as for the oppressed, as Toni Morrison points out: “The trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self” (207). The curandera in Toni Cade Bambara’s novel *The Salt Eaters* challenges us in response to this fragmentation, “Can you afford to be whole?”(180) As Mary Daly and Gloria Anzaldúa show, it is always at the boundaries, the margins, the barbed-wire fences with the “no trespassing” signs that the most exciting and transformative energies lie. And the voices that have been silenced or, speaking, have not been noticed hold the missing pieces of our understanding of human community, and of ourselves.

The monologue of the dominator can deafen us to other voices. To be heard, counter-voices must engage in a kind of aesthetic violence, finding new ways to make us hear. The language of creative transgression is an act of daring, a border crossing that is both “festively vertiginous” and dangerous (Daly 42). One learns to move alertly but without fear through the borderlands, to experience the margins both as replaced center and as cutting edge, the ground of transformation. In Minh-ha’s words, “Whether we choose to concentrate on another culture, or on our own culture, our work will always be cross-cultural because of the heterogeneous reality we all live today, in postmodern times—a reality, therefore, that is not a mere crossing from one borderline to the other or that is not merely double, but a reality that involves the crossing of an indeterminate number of borderlines” (Minh-ha 44).

These, then, are the two sides of transgression: to violate the master’s boundaries is also to affirm the possibility of crossing over. One risk lies in the very language we use in talking of difference. In this challenging and often disconcerting period in North-South

relations, when the comfortable assumptions of the dominant establishment are being called into question, the language in which these relations are discussed no longer constitutes solid ground. In many cases, we have no adequate terminology for the categories central to our conversation: old solutions have been found wanting, and new ones being proposed likewise have flaws.

The Historical Role of Culture in Persian Women's Writing

Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution struck, the quality and quantity of women writers' work have decisively changed the course of Persian literature. Poetry, after centuries of literary dominance, yielded to fiction, and men's prose writing, especially fiction, yielded to women's. The trends are related. Inheriting a great literary legacy, the Islamic regime suppressed it at once. Recovering from the first shock of the revolution took almost a decade. Then, after revolution, war, and exile, writing reappeared in a new form and with new features and revitalized itself. Post-revolutionary Persian literature, unlike what had preceded it, has two parts: one inside the country; the other, written by exiles and immigrants scattered across the world, but especially in Europe and North America. For my purposes, they are one. Westernized ideas had found their way to Persia in the 19th century, when the country was under increasing colonial pressure from Great Britain and Russia. Imperialism brought the material products of Western civilization, and also conceptions of nation and nationalism, the nation-state, political freedom, social justice, and critical thinking. These sociopolitical theories and systems were introduced to an Eastern society that for centuries had hibernated or been paralyzed under despotism. In its wake came a movement seeking parliamentary liberalism and political democracy,

resulting in the Constitutional Revolution (1906). Yet, the Constitutional movement was hindered by barriers external and internal and failed to achieve its goals until, many years later, it rose again in the form of the new anti-monarchical movement that led to the 1979 Revolution.

In our time, we cannot ignore the relationship between literature and democracy. Just as voting (or not voting) is the main tool to fulfill a citizen's democratic right, writing and publishing, as forms of public expression, is an individual right. Both democracy and literature are predicated on the idea that free speech is the right of any individual who is willing to be a free citizen of the society. It's a basic characteristic of modernity.

The 1979 Revolution, like every revolution, rejected the established values and norms of society and replaced them with new ones developed to serve it and to meet its objectives, which immediately encroached upon arts and literature. From the start, artists and writers had to redefine themselves and their arts in the newly invented Islamic order. They had to do this through their choice of discipline, the degree of its legitimacy according to the Sharia religious code, and whether artistic production could be compatible with Islam.

Apart from its interactions with modern world literature, contemporary Persian writing draws on a rich heritage of classical literature that includes such world-famous figures as Hafez, Rumi, and Khayyam. Over a millennium, this literature has been the highest manifestation of Persian language and culture, and played a striking role in uniting peoples of diverse ethnicities, who'd been constantly subjected to invasions, occupiers, and tyrants. As the cultural product of a patriarchal society, it is a masculine

literature. The legacy is enriched by traditional forms, from epic to lyric to fable. However, it is poetry, whether narrative or not, that is most valued. In its long history, classical Persian literature has seen cycles of flourishing and diminishing productivity and creativity. Once in a while, a certain style had dominated until it was replaced by a new one. Despite the presence of some prose masterpieces, poetry has always been the prevailing genre.

Indeed, classical Persian poetry has a worldwide fame. Contemporary Persian literature is still far from being recognized internationally. Even after writers were introduced to the novel about the time of Constitutional uprising, and prose writing found new importance, poetry remained as prominent as before. As happened in Europe during the Renaissance, one might have expected that with the advent of modernity, poetry, deeply bound with tradition, would yield to a prose that could better describe the aspiration of the new era. The Constitutional movement did debate about “old” and “new” things, including the roles of old and new literature as a literary discourse. But this mainly covered the conflict between traditional and new styles and trends in poetry. It led to the emergence of the style termed “Nimayee,” after Nima Youshij (1896-1959), founder of modern Persian poetry. Until the 1979 Revolution, poetry remained dominant, mainly because it managed to modernize itself through the work of poets like Nima, as well as Forugh Farrokhzad, who echoed the spirit of the era, drawing not only on social and historical consciousness but on their own individuality.

An outstanding body of novels and short stories developed during the period between the two revolutions. The Constitutional era, thanks to the advent of modernity, could free prose-writing from the exclusive possession of an elite closed attached to royal

courts and make it accessible to ordinary people. This evolution was brilliantly exemplified in the work of Ali Akbar Dehkhoda (1879–1959); especially his satirical (*Nonsense*) column published in the newspaper *Sur-e Esrafil* after 1907. Among achievements were of M.A. Jamalzadeh's collection of short stories, (*Once Upon a Time*, 1921) whose preface is considered the manifesto of modern Persian fiction, and Sadeq Hedayat's most internationally recognized novel, *Buf-e Kur* (*The Blind Owl*, 1936).

Then the golden decade of the 1960s arrived, in which prose and poetry flourished concurrently. It was then that Forugh Farrokhzad reached the peak of her achievement, and Simin Daneshvar was honored as the only major woman novelist after the release of her (*Mourners of Siyavash*, 1969). Thanks to the regime's relative tolerance for progressive ideas, as well as a wave of world literature translated into Persian, Iran's variety and richness was astounding. Nonetheless, the number of distinguished writers and poets in general, and particularly the number of women among them, was not astounding.

Iran was exposed to modernity in the 19th century, when the novel was the dominant form of Western literature. Although nationalism could be easily understood, the understanding of individualism proved to be difficult for people of an Eastern society that had long ignored the concept. The Eastern mentality historically emphasized unity rather than diversity. What motivated people in the Constitutional uprising was freedom in its social, political sense. It was mainly after the Islamic regime's total oppression that the individual's freedom became the focal point.

The intense intrusiveness of the regime left no space for people to decide about details of their lives, making them aware of what they'd been denied. The intrusion

tremendously adds to the psychological complexities of everyday life. As well, living in the Islamic Republic does not preclude simultaneously living in the totally different world offered by Western culture and technology. In the confrontation between illusion and reality, the experience of contradictions, conflicts, disintegrations, and detachments could best be expressed in fictional narratives.

Farzaneh Milani, a scholar of contemporary Persian literature, noted in 2004 that the number of women who published novels had reached 370, “13 times as many as a decade ago,” and “about equal to the number for men today” (Milani 20). In a society where unemployment and inflation is high, and social and political tensions are at their peak, what drives these men and women to write? They cannot count on royalties as a source of income — if they should be lucky enough to receive any. They know that publishers are extremely cautious, fearful not to lose their investment, either through the heavy hand of censorship or by failure in the marketplace. They also know that the publishing process is usually a very long and uncertain one, and at any time unexpected events may halt it. In many cases, they may have to self-publish if they can’t find a firm to take on their work. Yet, despite these discouraging factors, they persist. Their silent words between covers convey their own voice and story. These words also give voice to readers. The democracy that cannot be found in real life can be sought in a fictional world in which there is room for everybody, privileged or underprivileged, good and evil. Only fiction, with an infinite capacity for imagination and reality at the same time, can liberate those who feel trapped in an unwanted reality.

One salient difference between the Constitutional Revolution and the 1979 Revolution is that, in the latter, the presence and role of women were vital, both because

it was inclusive and tapped women's new capability. The 1979 Revolution brought women into full social and political life. Both the variety of social and political groups participating in and supporting it, and the contribution of women to it, were exceptional and phenomenal. The Pahlavi regime had offered the Westernization of women as a symbol of its progressive social program, but within a despotic monarchy. Moreover, some women were excluded from joining in social action. Now, for the first time in Iranian history, masses of those women, who'd been prevented from taking an active part during the Pahlavi era because of religious, cultural, and economic barriers, were now encouraged to enter the public sphere.

The limitations of a patriarchal society overwhelmingly dominated by a theocratic oligarchy impose more pressure on women than men. Paradoxically, these restraints make them more motivated, innovative, and energetic in their struggle for social equality. They have to defy legal and traditional barriers that bar their progress and deny their rights as human beings, and this cannot be done unless they prove themselves as qualified rivals in an unequal competition with their male counterparts. Writing is one of many ways Iranian women have developed to overcome obstacles. That writing is an inexpensive as well as the most accessible, and in some respects the most traditional, form of artistic communication accounts for its popularity. Under oppressive conditions, writing promises relief, if not rescue. The increasing number of blogs in general and those written by girls and women in particular, is one indication of it. The significant number of female journalists also points to this fact, despite its inherent dangers. The number of female authors, either in Iran or in exile, is ever increasing, too. Such writers

use the pen as a means not only to create a literary text but also to tell their stories to others who, like them, urgently need their stories told.

As Farzaneh Milani says, “For centuries, female narrative talent was mostly channeled away from public forms of written self-expression.” Traditional storytelling had been “a safe and domestic craft,” as “an outlet for women’s creativity,” “an artistic arena in which they found an expression for their life stories,” as well as “a strategy for survival” (Milani 56).

After Iranian women writers began to be published in the 1930s, Farzaneh Milani observes that until 1961 limitations prevented women’s creative talents from flourishing. During 1961-1970, “The statistical gap between male and female authors drops and women gradually find their special literary stance” (Milani 18). This process continues until the first decade after the revolution, marked by the disaster of the war with Iraq and repression of the regime, there are “five male authors for every one female writer” (Milani 19). Two decades later, after the Iran-Iraq ceasefire, and especially since 1997, when reformists won the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, women writers have had an unparalleled presence. Not only have there been an almost equal number of them compared to men, their books have outsold men’s.

Overall, women’s writing shares the form of development, and suffers the same restrictions, as other aspects of contemporary Persian literature. However, this doesn’t preclude women’s works from having their own particular features. Having experienced social discrimination, female writers are driven to write about their own time and place, their own surroundings, their own conditions. This gives their works an urgent feminist voice. Regardless of their different styles, talents, backgrounds, and mind-sets, and no

matter whether they live in Iran or not, their works reflect a search for an individualistic identity. It is in the process of discovering “self” and “other” that this feminist voice emerges, and articulates a self-definition.

Since the Constitutional Revolution, Iranian society has experienced a transitional stage from tradition to modernity, from living under dictatorship to practicing democracy, from a patriarchal social system to a civil society based on the equality of all citizens. Contemporary Persian literature reveals the interrelationships between the individual and a society undergoing change, including the key role of women. In the pre revolutionary era, women were considered mere subject matter for social changes, not independent agents and, despite some involvement in political protests in the late years of the Qajar dynasty, women were not generally active in public life. In a highly masculine society, they were, however, then and afterwards, a source of conflict in the controversy between tradition and modernity. Women’s rights, whether under Reza Shah, who unveiled women by force, or under his successor, Mohammad Reza Shah, who boasted that he’d given them their rights, were considered as things that could be magnanimously, offered them by male monarchs. Moreover, the liberal, Western view of gender relations in the Shah’s era excluded most women, those who belonged to traditional middle-class or lower-class families. The 1979 Revolution brought out masses of women to the streets, and what happened after kept them outside the walls of their homes. Since then, despite restrictions imposed on them by the Islamic regime, they are no longer mere subject matter but change-makers. They have become highly visible producers or consumers of cultural and literary products. Female readers significantly shape and reshape the literary market. Unlike those in the pre revolutionary era, they have a diverse social background

and demand writings and literary works able to reflect their own lives and concerns. In parallel, women writers feel compelled to write about matters that shape not only the reality of their lives but also their dreams and nightmares, to question the dictates of the world in where they live, and to identify their own self and that of the “other.” Using a feminine approach, they look for their own identity and individuality, which leads them to find the “other” within their private lives. They examine power relations from their own viewpoint and begin their quest from their own homes. In an attempt to discover their inner self, they explore the hidden corners of their private space. To define their social entity and develop their social role, they probe into the details and routines surrounded them. They’d rather move on from parts to whole, from home to world, from self to other. They appeal, not to an inaccessible heavenly world, but to an earthbound world that despite all its harshness, lets them praise life and ignore death by giving birth to others and rebirth to themselves.

In seeking a language, style, and genre that will meet their needs, they realize that narrative serves their purpose best and is their greatest source of strength. Poetry’s importance has receded. Persian poetry, despite its brilliant history, has a small readership. That poetry cannot find as many readers as the prose does is partly due to its nature. In poetry, language is used in an uncommon manner to create an aesthetic quality. As such, it is not as accessible to readers as prose. The revolutionary change that happened to Persian prose in Constitutional era, along with the introduction of the modern novel and short story, enabled ordinary people to enjoy prose narratives. The sociopolitical upheavals after the 1979 Revolution strengthened their popularity. The past decade has been marked by an emerging mass readership and of women’s writing that

makes an impact. In finding their own voices, women writers have found the right style and form to narrate their stories.

The theories of hooks, Morrison, and Daneshvar reveal an increasing potential for resistance to gender roles. Their collective voice examines the interconnected systems of social oppression and gender hierarchies that invade both Eastern and Western cultures. While the work of Daneshvar sheds light on the general Eastern social view toward the Muslim woman as passive and invisible, hooks and Morrison explore the notion of race as a social factor hindering growth. I have tried to explore a variety of authors whose work shed light on the problems of gender and its social implications for women across the globe.

Gender roles are changing because society is changing. Given the availability of reliable birth control and the threat of overpopulation, procreation is no longer a moral imperative. The egalitarianism of modern societies has undercut male dominance in the home and at work. While Eastern societies move toward this change at a much slower pace, progress is being made. The legal marriage age for a girl in Iran has been raised from nine to fourteen due to the tireless efforts of a female judge. We hold up a mirror to society in order to understand how we as individuals have changes. And one vehicle that reflects this change beautifully is the art of film-making. Films reflect what a society is feeling, struggling with, and trying improve within itself. Understanding the role of film as yet another cultural tool allows a deeper connection to society and its boundaries. While in some cultures this boundary is fairly relaxed, I have chosen to examine it in a society where political limitations and censorship are part of daily life. The next chapter will examine the post-revolutionary Persian cinema and its contributions to the world's

understanding of social norms and limitations of a less-known culture. The classroom benefits from this examination as it sheds light on concepts unknown to the Western students, while creating a higher level of engagement and learning.

CHAPTER THREE: PERSIAN CINEMA AS A SOCIAL DOCUMENT

In any community, the purpose of social control is to encourage conformity. In previous chapters, I discussed how society along with its rules and requirements become part of the individual's personality structure. Formal social controls are all those organizations and roles specifically designed to enforce conformity in a society, including police departments, courts, prisons, juvenile facilities, mental hospitals and so forth. Sometimes the need for social control and a tendency for censorship within a given government is so high that departments are created to enforce the rules of that governments on various modes of communication for the public. Post revolutionary Iran is one of these societies. The medium of cinema has gone an extensive re-evaluation and for the past twenty four years, Iranian directors have focused on shedding light on the core of Persian culture by making films that can tell the real story of this interesting culture. Teaching through film can revolutionize the way we see the world. Films allow students to understand cultures and countries far beyond what textbooks can convey. Dewey believes that every experience is a moving force which can be channeled into learning. In *Experience and Education*, he points out that human experience is ultimately social and that it involves contact and communication. This chapter will shed light on the concept of looking further than a person's immediate surroundings, learning how other societies function and what role democracy and lack of it plays in creating social identities. Dewey claims that:

Experiences do not occur in a vacuum; there are sources outside an individual that give rise to experience. A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions but that they also recognize what social factors and surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. (40)

I will apply this theory to the medium of cinema by narrowing the lens of focus on post-revolutionary Persian cinema, which is rich on so many levels. Social consciousness can be examined through various mediums in current society; however, the Persian cinema in the recent years has contributed much to the understanding of cultural roles of children, the hardships of middle-class families, and the realities of everyday life in Iran through the lens of film-making. Since the early 1990s, contemporary Iranian cinema, with its aim of creating social consciousness, has continued to inspire lively critical discourse and popular acclaim. Recent scholarship has tended to focus on the limitations imposed upon filmmakers by the theocracy's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. The distinctive usage of allegory and symbolism is frequently read as a result of State intervention, which has inadvertently produced an oblique and encoded culture of filmmaking. While such analysis rightly recognizes the effects of censorship and the stringent overregulation of the Iranian film industry by the State, it potentially overlooks its indebtedness to Persian poetry and, in particular, the influence of medieval Sufi lyricism. This chapter seeks to examine those aspects of Iranian filmmaking which are a product of postrevolutionary material conditions and censorship protocols but also to recognize the ways in which culture has shaped the thematic and aesthetics of Iran's

contemporary cinema and in particular, the more recent work of popular directors such as Majid Majidi and Abbas Kiarostami.

Cinema as a mode of cultural expression acts as both a product and document of a society. As such it derives its immediate existence and relevance from a localized context of social institutions, events, and upheavals and, most particularly, a culture that is reflected in the lives and aspirations of all people living within a society. Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, and even Barry Levinson's *Rain Man* all have attributes that explore the role of the individual in connection to society in a specific time frame. Race, religion, gender, and the concepts of brotherly love are not new to audiences. However, film explores concepts and angles that are pivotal to our understanding of how relationships form, proceed, and dissolve within society. Film situates itself within this cultural milieu as an art form that reflects, directly or indirectly, both the components and the historical process of society. The starting point for a critical engagement with cinema in Iran must begin with an interrogation of the processes involved in the formulation and use of cultural images as elements of differing ideological struggles. This chapter examines the development of cinema in Iran since the 1979 revolution as a reflection of the social, political, and cultural development of the Islamic Republic, as illustrated through a critical case study of selected films starting with the works of Majid Majidi. To understand Iranian cinema is to understand the complex society from which it comes, the unique cultural elements from which it is derived, and the particular ideological circumstances in which it operates. To understand the cinema of the most controversial film director to emerge under the Islamic regime is to stand in the eye of a storm in which these elements collide in a body of work that is provocative,

committed, and challenging and that stands as a cultural document and testimony to one man's attempt to make sense of his society, his art, and himself.

Winner of three main prizes at the 1997 Montreal World Film Festival including the audience award for most popular feature, Majidi's *Children of Heaven* follows the adventures of eight-year-old Ali as he first attempts to recover, then win, a pair of shoes for his younger sister Zahra. Revisiting familiar Iranian cinematic terrain with considerable charm, Majid Majidi's third feature deploys the standard narrative device of putting vulnerable children on a quest more urgent than their years warrant. Majidi remains disarmingly focused on how small incidents become significant to a small child. Much humor and suspense is wrung from incidents that would be minuscule from anything but a child's point of view. The lasting effect is that of warm, simple charm. A few years ago, an Iranian film called *The White Balloon* served as a wake-up call to those who care truly for international cinema. A delicate shaggy dog tale about a little girl's quest to purchase the goldfish of her dreams, the film tweaked the most thorough kind of emotionally engaging performance out of its nonprofessional child star, Aida Mohammadkhani.

Like Jafar Panahi's *The White Balloon*, this new film by Majid Majidi coaxes the kind of performances out of its two child stars that delight the Western audience into remembering just how much a smile and a tear can count on screen. The storyline allows a new level of engagement to the core of a culture that is not visible to or deeply understood by the West. The role of family commitment, respect for parents, devotion to siblings, and a genuine sense of responsibility are the cornerstones of this film. To explain emotions as depicted in this film, it is necessary to assume that humans have

needs and emotions that are formed in specific cultural context but are supported by innate predispositions. In particular, recent scholarly writing on film has addressed the way in which human feelings have developed within a framework provided by culture. The essence of the feelings and actions portrayed in *Children of Heaven* is derived from the emotional strength and connections among the members of the family.

The two little ones are Amir Farrokh Hashemian, about nine years old, who has huge, deep brown eyes and a boyish charm that belies his kind heart and dutiful nature, plus Bahareh Sediqi, perhaps seven years old, who plays his circumspect but guilelessly manipulative younger sister. She's the one who gets the world, including her adoring and, more importantly, respectful older brother, to do her bidding by flashing a mere hint of pleasure on her mouth or disappointment in her eyes.

The film's interest is all in the integrity of the two children's performances: Hashemian's earnestness and Sediqi's enchanting but wholly instinctive feminine wit. As it follows them around their routine in working-class Teheran (and, in one sequence, into a breathtakingly privileged neighborhood), the film offers a rare, deeply humanizing view of a people who have recently been shut off by the erratic political notions from the Western world. *Children of Heaven* shares several traits with other Iranian movies (notably those by Abbas Kiarostami): a gentle, relaxed style, an almost-poetic fascination with basic images (such as fish swimming in a pool), and the use of numerous, seemingly-unimportant anecdotes to build a larger emotional picture. *Children of Heaven* isn't about Zahra's lost shoes, Dad's difficulty finding work, or Ali's placement in the race. It's about how those things define one family. The film is a production of Iran's Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young adults, so all school

scenes look beneficial and wholesome. And Ali, against all odds, determines to run a long-distance race and win the third-place prize of running shoes for Zahra. *Children of Heaven* does provide a kindly, enveloping sense of Iranian life and customs, from the way the family prepares sugar cubes to be served at a mosque to the way Zahra helps care for elderly neighbors. These moments come more easily to Majidi than his studiously bittersweet ending for what is, despite its surface bleakness, an essentially sunny story.

Born in Tehran in 1959, Majid Majidi studied drama at Tehran University before beginning his cinematic career in 1980 as an actor. He then moved behind the camera to direct several short and medium-length films: “Explosion,” “Hudaj,” “Examination Day,” “The Last Village” (1993, winner of Best Short at the Isfahan Children’s Festival), and “God Will Come” (1994). Prior to *The Children of Heaven*, Majidi directed two other features, *Baduk* (1991) and *The Father* (1996), both of which were shown at the Montreal World Film Festival.

Children of Heaven is a story about simple people living simple (yet fulfilling) lives. There are no explosions, no guns, no fight scenes, no car chases, and no eye-popping special effects. None of these things has a place in writer/director Majid Majidi’s story about how a poor Iranian family copes with the financial difficulties of its day-to-day existence, and, despite the apparent obstacles, remains a happy and loving group. The characters are vivid and sympathetic, and because Majidi’s keen view of the human condition is universal, not confined and restricted.

Children of Heaven opens in the poor quarter of Tehran, the Iranian capital. There we meet Ali a nine-year-old boy going home with his sister’s worn, pink shoes, which he has just taken to a cobbler for repairs. On the way he stops at a fruit and vegetable stand

to buy some potatoes. He puts the shoes down, and while he's sorting through a bin, a rag picker mistakenly takes the shoes, thinking they're part of the stand owner's refuse. When Ali arrives home empty-handed, his seven-year-old sister, Zahra is in tears. What will she wear to school? Ali has a solution. She goes to school in the morning; he attends in the afternoon. They can share a pair of sneakers. Once her day is done, she can rush home and give the sneakers to him. Unfortunately, there's not enough time for the swap, and Ali arrives late to his first class. Meanwhile, on a day off, he accompanies his father to the city's wealthy section in search of work as a gardener--work that will pay enough to give the family a little extra money. And at school Ali discovers a possible solution to the shoe dilemma. Third place in a foot race is a pair of new sneakers (first and second prizes are more lucrative, but Ali has no interest in these). All Ali has to do is beat out several hundred children and lose to only two, and his sister will be happy.

There are a number of scenes where the role of cultural identity is illuminated in the story. Unlike many Western movie kids, Ali and Zahra truly care for one another. Ali is deeply upset about losing the shoes, and the two siblings work together to find a solution without placing an additional financial burden upon their beleaguered parents. The film offers the fascination of looking through a window at a different culture and recognizing that it's fundamentally on the same pursuit of improving the human condition and the dream of a better life. The dream, as voiced by Ali's father, is certainly the same: "We're gonna have a better life. We're gonna buy everything." The climactic foot race contains more genuine suspense engaging the audience to the core of this young boy's goodwill toward his sister and family. In Persian families older brothers have a distinct role when it comes to younger sisters. They are forever protecting, helping,

guiding, and shielding their sisters from the harms of society. This cultural role and value allows a close look into a society that is otherwise unknown to many American students. While the West conforms to sibling rivalry as one of the core feelings that exists between brothers and sisters, the film provides a lens from which a different type of relationship can be explored.

Children of Heaven represents the Persian cultural view toward childhood: a gentle, relaxed style, an almost-poetic fascination with basic images (such as fish swimming in a pool), and the use of numerous, seemingly unimportant anecdotes to build a larger emotional picture. *Children of Heaven* isn't about Zahra's lost shoes, Dad's difficulty finding work, or Ali's placement in the race. It's about how those things define one family. While there may not be an epic story in Majidi's narrative, *Children of Heaven* is an inconsequential and intimate story that can provide a window into the life of children across the globe through the lens of childhood innocence.

The Role of Political Climate

Author Sharifa Zuhur acknowledges that Persian films have child protagonists for a different reason: to avoid the mine field of Islamic restrictions on the portrayal of adult male-female relationships by cloaking grownup themes in the metaphorical shelter and protection of children's stories. Actors portraying a married couple, for instance, cannot touch each other on screen in theocratic Iran unless they are also married in real life because it is a violation of Islam for unrelated men and women to touch. And actresses, like all Iranian females over the age of nine, must cover all the hair and curves of the body, even in scenes depicting private moments at home where, in real life, every woman sheds her Islamic coverings. In addition, there cannot be any extended close-up of an

attractive actress, because such a shot might be construed as an exploitation of female beauty; indeed, Iranian actresses deemed too seductively beautiful are forbidden to appear on screen at all. With female children, of course, none of these restrictions are an issue. What is an issue in the censorship-bound Iranian cinema, however, even in films featuring children as emblems of innocence, is the internal as well as external sociopolitical criticism.

According to Richard Tapper, the author of *Islamizing Film Culture in Iran*, each film must be approved both in screenplay form and in the final cut by the autocratic Islamic government, which generously funds domestic cinema but severely restricts foreign imports, especially those that contain sex and gratuitous violence; furthermore, the government did not allow Iranian films to appear at international festivals, until 1988 with the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Furthermore, casts and crews themselves are subject to evaluation for political and religious correctness. Still, just as Italian neorealist cinema treated pressing postwar problems such as unemployment, poverty, and social injustice by focusing on stories of recognizable characters taken from daily life, Iranian films for their part manage to be cautiously or obliquely critical of government failure, social ills, and clerical excess in a nation whose ordinary (not necessarily extremist) people, above all its average boys and girls, have been ravaged by a forced religious revolution, economic recession, and international isolation precipitated by their nation's hostile dealings with the West.

Majidi's previous film, *The Father* (1996), was also about a child, in this case a fourteen-year-old boy and his troubled relationship with his stepfather. Its plot bears some similarities to that of Panahi's *White Balloon*, which dealt with a seven-year-old

girl's attempts to retrieve money she lost so that she can purchase a prized goldfish. Goldfish appear in Majidi's picture as well, swimming in a courtyard pool, but the object of its hero's quest is something more pedestrian: a pair of shoes. For the sad-eyed, nine-year-old Ali Mandegar has lost the recently mended shoes of his younger sister, Zahra, and the children are afraid to tell their father about the loss because their impoverished family cannot afford to buy a new pair. Majidi sheds light on the role of society here by examining the financial troubles of a family whose main focus is to serve God. Residents of Tehran's run-down southern section, the Mandegars consist of five members: a new baby in addition to Ali and Zahra and a mother who is disabled by a serious back condition that may require surgery. The father, Karim, has no trade to speak of, though he does occasional work as a handyman and gardener; he is not lazy or irresponsible, just devoted to Allah, whom he serves, without pay, in various capacities at the local mosque. Perhaps it is in this sense that his youngsters may be regarded, without irony, as "children of heaven." And Islam, like Christianity in the West, seems to serve Near-Eastern capitalism by keeping the Karims of the region—plus the homeless beggars one social rung lower—in their place as gouging shopkeepers and uncharitable landlords profit off them.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution transformed the Iranian film industry to such an extent that it effectively suspended much of the technical, commercial, and creative progress that had been tentatively achieved during the late 1960s and early 1970s. With the end of the monarchial reign and the installment of a totalitarian theocracy, the film industry was forced to integrate the new values and beliefs of the clerical governance. This was not the first time that the Iranian film industry had been subject to state scrutiny,

nor constrained by arbitrary censorship regulation. In fact, since its inception in 1900, the film industry has been continuously shaped and influenced by monarchical partiality, religious opposition, and colonial occupation.

According to *Islamizing Film Culture in Iran*, the political instability of domestic investment after the 1979 revolution rendered the Iranian film industry practically obsolete. It remained relatively paralyzed for the next four years with only thirteen films on average being produced each year between 1979 and 1983. It wasn't until the formation of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) in 1982-83 that cinema was formally granted a place within the new cultural schema of the Islamic Republic. The death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 signaled the end of the "radical" revolutionary program and in many ways the clerical program of propagandist cinema. Certainly the presence of Iranian films in the international foreign-film circuit reflects such a thesis, with only two postrevolutionary films being circulated in foreign film festivals in 1986 and 230 in 1990. A large number of these were shown as part of the Pesaro Festival in 1990, which dedicated a significant part of its program to contemporary Iranian cinema.

Simplicity and Children in Persian Films

According to Issa Rose and Sheila Whitaker, the authors of *Veiled Visions/Powerful Presences*, it is clear how the Iranian cinema that emerged during the late 1980s and 1990s can be theorized as a response to the economic imperatives and censorship restraints of the time. The on-site filming, the employment of children and nonprofessional actors in feature roles, and the absence of artificial lighting and elaborate

sets all bear some relationship to the material conditions of filmmaking in post revolutionary Iran. The reliance on exterior locations was in large part due to budgeting constrictions and lack of available studio space. The trend of shooting outdoors and on-site in Iran had the added requirement of adhering to censorship regulations with regard to the representation of women on screen. The censorship protocols that came into effect from 1982 were somewhat abstract in their reference to the role of women in postrevolutionary film, but they did stipulate that women should be depicted as “chaste” and that their involvement should not “arouse sexual desire.” As Hamid Naficy comments, “modesty in its most general sense was encoded into the regulations,” necessitating an often-restrictive Islamic dress code” (6). The censorship regulations applicable from 1996 were even more detailed and prohibitive in their interpretation of acceptable dress and make-up and inferred that even if depicted in familial, domestic settings, Iranian women must be shown wearing the veil. Thus, in order to maintain the suspended disbelief of dramatic “reality,” many filmmakers chose to depict women in outdoor settings, where it was more conceivable that they would adopt the *hejab* or *chador*.

The frequent employment of children as actors is twofold in its significance as Persian filmmakers examine the dramatic potential of children by portraying them as burdened by impoverishment and oppressive regulations. However, the use of children is also a device that allows directors to avoid those censorship prohibitions that relate specifically to the portrayal of men and women on screen. In the case of Majid Majidi’s *Children of Heaven* and *The Color of Paradise*, the relationships featured are often of a familial kind; pairs of young brothers and sisters together must overcome the rigid

dictates of their parents. Thus, the function of children in Iranian cinema is paradoxical: they are used in one respect because they are afforded the freedom and rights often denied to adults, yet, equally, they are portrayed as bound by those same structural forces. Like the external locations that are sometimes understood as a device to dramatize internal and psychic experiences of protagonists, so children can be interpreted as allegorical figures whose struggles are representative of more macro sociopolitical concerns. For example, in *Children of Heaven*, the main character Ali, single-handedly tells the story of the hardships of his family with the sad and concerned look in his eyes. The employment of nonprofessional actors, a key feature of Iranian cinema, can also be related to economic constraints and the scarcity of institutes specializing in the performing arts. Jafar Panahi's decision to cast *Dayereh (The Circle, 2000)* with nonprofessionals was a purely pragmatic one, as he was unable to find professional actors who fitted his physical criteria for the roles. Yet the commonality of this form of casting amongst prominent Iranian directors demonstrates its acceptability as a production practice. In *Sib (The Apple, 1998)*, Samira Makhmalbaf goes even further and has her subjects play themselves in their own homes with very little scripted dialogue. In Abbas Kiarostami's *Dah (Ten, 2000)*, all performances are executed by nonprofessionals, who essentially tell their own stories with minimal scripting. While nonprofessionals may enhance the drama with their "artlessness" or authenticity, they also work outside or even occasionally against the imagination or prescription of the director. Thus films that feature or document the lives of non actors demonstrate to a greater degree the elements of spontaneity, improvisation, and flexibility.

The 1990s was to be a period of dramatic growth in the local Iranian film

industry, both in terms of the sheer number of domestic productions as well as the increase in international exhibition and acclaim according to Grotenhius. The “New Iranian Cinema,” as it was then identified, was in fact continuing the tradition of realist cinema initiated by Daryush Mehrjui in *Gav (The Cow, 1968)*, but interrupted by the political and economic instability of 1970s. Perhaps the first filmmaker to revisit and thus augment some of Mehrjui’s experimental conventions was Abbas Kiarostami in 1987 with the first of his trilogy of films, *Khaneh-ye Dust Kojast (Where is My Friend’s House?)*. His film has received much critical attention for its distinctive realism, including its preoccupation with the child protagonist, its long, meditative takes, and indirect narrative structure. In an interview in 1993, Abbas Kiarostami comments:

I believe that the people living around us, and indeed we ourselves, are full of stories. “Life is a film” people say and they are right. For me, reality transcends cinema: even when I am making a film, the events that take place around it are more fascinating. *Close-up*, for example, is a completely true story, yet a completely baffling one. (9)

This emphasis on “reality” is a point of continuity for many Iranian directors when discussing their national cinema; that is, the sense that a contrived narrative or ideological angle must always be subordinated by capturing *life as is* in all its “baffling” and “fascinating” actuality. It seems the initial financial and legislative constraints in the new Islamic Republic at first may have necessitated a cinematic approach that produced this documentary or reality effect. However, the conception of “reality” cinema is further examined when coupled with the notion of lyricism, and the

term *poetic realism* has become a popular idiom to describe recent Iranian productions. David Bailey asserts that the poeticism of Persian cinema is frequently understood as a strategy to circumvent the directives of the MCIG, a form of encoding that allows the director to articulate meanings or ideas that may otherwise be prohibited. Yet an alternative reading of these symbolic gestures looks not only to the inhibiting material conditions or censorship restrictions but also at the centrality and influence of Persian and Sufi Poetry in Iranian culture. The deep-seated influence of poetry on both the creative and daily life of Persians cannot be underestimated according to Kiarostami:

In Iran, in conversation, the use of poetry is not limited to intellectuals, or poets, or even poetry lovers. Illiterate people, during the day, recite a couple of verses in order to relate to one another and express their viewpoints. Poetry in Iran pours down on us, like falling rain, and everyone takes part in it. Your grandmother, when she wanted to complain about the world —she complained in poetry. Or if she wanted to express her love for your grandfather, she expressed it with poetry. (10)

The pervasive influence of lyricism not only affects the tenor of personal expression in Iran but, by extension, the way in which Persian filmmakers treat their social subjects. Jafar Panahi in an interview once emphasized the importance of the “poetic mode” to Iranian cinema where “humanitarian events” are “interpreted in a poetic and artistic way” (11). This notion of Persian “poeticism,” which is a recurring theme in discussions of Iran’s cinema by both its filmmakers and critics, is still in many ways

bound to its long history of association with Islamic mysticism and the Sufi canon of poetry where the notion of *worldly pleasures* is mentioned and examined repeatedly.

However, the allusions to “worldly pleasures” seem to operate both literally and metaphorically, making it the simultaneous mystic in the realms of Islamic spirituality. But even in the traditional Sufi *ghazal*, the mystic poet relies heavily on the ambiguity of the metaphor. Central to this poetic genre and the Sufi program in general is the intense yearning to be united with the “Beloved”— the “Beloved” being the divine *Khoda* (God) of Islam. The Sufi poet, however, often adopts an earthly figure or a series of nature similes in order to connote the Deity. The emphasis is thus in the realm of the experiential and the affective—the fluctuation between the suffering of separation and the ecstasy of union. Both the court and Sufi poet used a series of motifs or symbols in their *ghazals* that became analogous with the Beloved, the Lover poet, or the experience of love itself. The season of spring, a garden in full bloom, the cypress, and the rose were all used as emblems of the “Beloved,” usually described in a hyperbolic, excessive, or idealized fashion. The *ghazal* poet also uses a series of metaphors to represent themselves as the Lover, most commonly the nightingale, the wine-cup, and the mirror figure, which also denote the human heart. Intoxication or the drinking of wine meanwhile signals the mystical state of devotion and ecstasy (15). This kind of encoding is particularly evident in the work of Hafiz, where allusions to taverns, wine-drinking, and intemperance are coupled with references to the divinity of *God*. Sufi resonances can be found in the work of Iran’s most prominent directors but perhaps most strikingly in Majid Majidi’s *The Color of Paradise* (1999) and, more recently *The Willow Tree* (2005). Both films figure blind protagonists whose spiritual desires seem curbed by their physical disability. *Rang-*

e Khoda details a blind boy's journey back to his family residence in rural Iran during the school break.

We soon learn that the contact Mohammad (Mohsen Ramezani) makes with the natural phenomena around him has far more mystical implications than mere physical orientation. For as Mohammed very gently handles the bud of wheat or stone from the river bank, he murmurs the sounds of the Persian alphabet, as if the letters are literally inscribed into the earth and legible to the finger tips. The Braille of the school lesson on which the film opens and the indentations of the wheat bud are not differentiated by Mohammed, who comprehends both as instruments of learning or, more pointedly, a message to be decoded. The reasoning behind Mohammad's "language" of the natural world soon becomes clear when he is sent by his father (Hossein Mahjoub), who is deeply uneasy with his son's disability, to become the protégé of a blind wood-cutter. The displacement from his home and from his grandmother inspires great distress in Mohammad. When he is questioned by the woodcutter as to the reason for his suffering, his answers recall the sentiments common to the Sufi tradition and in particular the *ghazals* of Hafiz.

Mohammad is, of course, pained by the fact that, unlike his sisters, he cannot attend the local school and must live much of the year many miles from his family in Tehran. But the source of his anguish also evokes the torment of the Sufi poets when describing their separation from God. As Hafiz wrote: "We are like lutes once held by God/Being away from his warm body/Fully explains this constant yearning" (16). Mohammad expresses a similar feeling of division from God, and his intense longing to "reach out," "touch God," and "tell him everything, even the secrets in [his] heart"

alludes to the affective “yearning” so characteristic of the Sufi poet’s condition.

Other elements of the film support the notion that Majidi infuses a mystical element to Mohammad’s experience of blindness. The farm on which his father, grandmother, and sisters reside is in the full bloom of spring when Mohammad arrives home from school. The camera dwells on the fields full of richly colored flora, and it appears more like the idealized paradise of the *ghazal* garden than a functioning farm. The image of “the rose,” the archetypal motif of the *ghazal* used to represent to the Beloved, appears on a card that Mohammed has carefully reserved as a present for one of his sisters. While shaving, the father breaks the small hand mirror he is using and peering into the fragmented glass, his reflection is distorted. Possibly in this moment Majidi is inviting a comparison between the literal blindness of Mohammed and the emotional lack of foresight on the part of his father. The fragmented mirror certainly seems to indicate the broken and damaged subjectivity of the patriarch and foreshadows the greater ills to come both in terms of his failure to remarry and his attempt to appropriately support his son. The nature of the film’s conclusion again locates it in the realm of Islamic spirituality. Being escorted back home by his father from the woodcutter’s workshop, Mohammed falls into the rapids of a river and is washed up, seemingly dead, on the beach. His father, who is also on the shore having attempted to save him, embraces Mohammad and cries over his son’s lifeless body. The camera focuses in on Mohammad’s hand, which is gradually illuminated, and moves ever so subtly as if he were again reading Braille. While the possibility of his having survived the rapids is unlikely but not implausible, this final gesture of the film more clearly recalls Mohammad’s earlier attempts to “reach out everywhere for God,” and the viewer is left

wondering whether, in death, Mohammad finally achieves the union that has painfully eluded him in life. Like the *ghazal*, which simultaneously alludes to romantic and mystical love with its use of open metaphors, the final moments of Majidi's *Rang-e Khoda* accommodate both a literal and spiritualized reading.

The theme of blindness as a state of separation from God is also central to the story of *Beed-e Majnoon (The Willow Tree)*. Here, the character of Yousef regains his sight after an operation in Paris. The experience of "seeing," at first so ecstatically overwhelming, soon becomes destructive as Yousef find himself rejecting his family, his profession, and previous intellectual interests in pursuit of physical beauty, sensuality, and delusional fantasy. *Beed-e Majnoon* could easily be interpreted as a moral fable that heavy-handedly illustrates the dangers of shallow pleasures and profane desires. According to Kindem, Majidi complicates the allegory by the lyrical allusions he threads through the narrative. Pari, the object of Yousef's desire, is a student of the arts and her thesis, which she gives to Yousef to read, focuses on Sufi poetry and the links between sight and the experience of mystical awakening. Yousef even places a rose between the pages of her manuscript when he attempts to visit her at the university. Just as a beautiful human figure or a natural entity operate in the Sufi *ghazals* as symbols of *Khoda*, so too Pari may be interpreted as an ambiguous figure who simultaneously conveys mystical journey and irrational devotion. Pari's unavailability as a romantic or sexual partner inspires in Yousef the excruciating yearning that Mohammed expresses in *Rang-e Khoda* and again recalls the longing of the great Sufi lyricists. When asked whether the "humanitarianism" of his films is attributable to the influence of religion, Majidi answers by referencing the tradition of the Sufi poets:

Our literature is very rich with poets such as Hafiz, Saadi, Rumi. In their writings, these poets have always given a great importance to the human being. Contemporary cultural themes stem from this tradition as well as the rituals associated with them. The manner these themes are dealt with is influenced by the particular beliefs of the Iranians that existed and continue to exist nowadays. (17)

Majidi's response confirms that the process of reading his films through the lens of Persian poeticism, and in particular Medieval Sufism, illuminates motifs and metaphors that may otherwise remain oblique or overlooked. Majidi, like Kiarostami, thus encourages viewers not only to understand the human experience in poetic terms but also to see it as bound to the "cultural themes" that have permeated Persian lyricism. From this and other interviews conducted with Iran's directors, it appears that one of the undisputed principles and doctrines of contemporary Iranian cinema is the relevance of medieval court and Sufi poetry in informing both the structural, thematic, and metaphorical layers of filmmaking.

Readings that emphasize the poetic humanism and Sufi-influenced spirituality of Iran's recent cinema should not diffuse the potential for a more politicized or subversive reading of their symbolic content. Instead, such analyses enrich the spectator's experience of the film and broaden cultural understanding. The new-found understanding of an unknown culture can ease some of the tensions that exist among individuals fueled by the fear of the unknown. When discussing the poetic quality of his films, Abbas Kiarostami often emphasizes the importance of the "open metaphor" and the flexibility of meaning that it facilitates. Just as the *ghazal* has continued to be central to both popular

and mystical culture, so are the symbols and themes of contemporary Iranian cinema. Iranian filmmakers have been both adaptive and creative with their response to censorship protocols, but the “poetic” nature of their recent cinema shouldn’t be read entirely as a by-product of resistant filmmaking. Perhaps Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi puts it most concisely when he described Iranian cinema as being “caught between poetry and censorship” (18). While the poetic nature of recent Persian cinema tries to tell the true stories of the struggles and ups and downs of the people, censorship stands guard in not allowing the whole story to be told. If any part of a film is remotely criticizing the regime, it has to be deleted and rewritten. So the main endeavor of the mentioned directors is to collectively shed light on the conditions of life in post revolutionary Iran, without saying too much and by allowing the audiences to read between the lines.

According to Pomerance the media and, more particularly, cinema, have been the central cultural elements to have adopted a rebellious stance to the “objectively” created realities of nation and society that emerged after the 1979 revolution. In many respects cinema, like the country itself, returned to year zero, being remolded to fit and reflect the changed ideological requirements of the new regime. The cinema came to play a vital role, arising from what was essentially a media-influenced cultural revolution, in operating under a system of government in the Islamic Republic that has shown itself high on rhetoric and more interested in changing cultural and educational institutions than in overthrowing the modes of production and distribution that existed under the shah where a different series of rules and guidelines were enforced. As such, cinema has at times found itself used as an ideological weapon in the struggle to maintain power in response to shifting sociopolitical contexts. The result has been the operation of what

might be termed a dual revolutionary cinema. The first is defined as that employed by the government, serving the goals of the revolution and acting as a form of Islamic propaganda, specifically, the concept of an “Islamic cinema.” According to Mohsen Tabatabai, director of the government department for Islamic film production, “The best definition of Islamic cinema is that the cinema must play its role in propagating Islam, just like the mosque” (14).

In contrast, and as a type of reaction to this format, there has emerged a socially committed cinema comprised of “non-believing” directors who act as the “anxious eyes of the revolution,” creating a cinema that politically and philosophically reflect the complexities of Iran and its society. In this regard it is inevitable that cinema has become a key element in highlighting and intervening in these problems that, as Majidi has noted, have “their roots in history and were of a cultural rather than a political nature” (10). Majidi, having been at one time a zealous supporter of the Islamic regime before becoming one of its most vocal criticisms, is perhaps unique in the sense that he has created examples of a revolutionary cinema both for and against the rhetoric of official ideology. This use of cinema in articulating contrasting ideological positions sees Iranian cinema in one sense being defined as a cinema of reaction. The Islamic Republic has reacted against the “prostitution cinema” of the shah’s era by redefining it for its own ends as an “Islamic cinema.” Likewise, the uneasy development toward a “quality cinema” (with the reemergence of a number of pre-Revolutionary and so-called nonbelieving directors) could be read as a reaction against the failure of a superficially Islamic cinema and an attempt by artists to regain and maintain control of the cultural landscape. Defining it as such allows for an explanation of the oft-cited simplicity of

Iranian cinema as it has constantly had to remake itself to present a cultural form that due to institutional pressures has had, in appearance at least, to erase all forms of ambiguity. In the case of many Iranian directors, this led to a superficially simple form and narrative style to which layers have been constantly added in order to achieve as much density as possible. This helps to explain the universal significance of a cinema located in and addressed to the local. The importance of the national is emphasized within Iranian cinema as it attempts to question the complex nature of Iran, its people, and their problems while simultaneously engaged in an exploration of the transformation of the project of cinema.

Dewey's Take: the Social Medium as Educative

According to Dewey, political, cultural, and social environments form the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen certain impulses that have certain purposes and entail certain consequences. A child growing up in a family of musicians will inevitably have whatever capacities he has in music stimulated, and, relatively, stimulated more than other impulses which might have been awakened in another environment. Some kinds of participation in the life of those with whom the individual is connected are inevitable; with respect to them, the social environment exercises an educative or formative influence unconsciously and apart from any set purpose. In *Democracy and Education* Dewey reminds us that "In the olden times, the diversity of groups was largely a geographical matter. There were many societies, but each, within its own territory, was comparatively homogeneous. But with the development of commerce, transportation,

intercommunication, and emigration, countries like the United States are composed of a combination of different groups with different traditional customs. It is this situation which has, perhaps more than any other one cause, forced the demand for an educational institution which shall provide something like a homogeneous and balanced environment for the young. Only in this way can the centrifugal forces set up by juxtaposition of different groups within one and the same political unit be counteracted. The intermingling in the school of youth of different races, differing religions, and unlike customs creates for all a new and broader environment. Common subject matter accustoms all to a unity of outlook upon a broader horizon than is visible to the members of any group while it is isolated” (97).

This angle of Dewey’s philosophy is the core reason behind my endeavor to bridge the gap between east and west by creating an atmosphere of learning in the classroom that not only teaches writing, but allows the students to engage on a much deeper level with a society that is not fully known to them. Throughout its twenty-five year history, the Islamic Republic has constantly sought to create a society devoted to the service of Islam and the perpetuation of the revolution. Under such ideological conditions, culture has become the main sphere of social transformation as the clerical rulers have sought to *Islamicize* all aspects of society. In such a context, culture and, in particular, the media have become the main method and means of disseminating the new regime’s message to the populace and instructing them of their expected role in the new society. Such an undertaking, which sees the Islamic state defined on the basis of a universal religious allegiance, has in effect abolished the mediation of culture. Under this highly centralized and repressive system, culture and politics are intimately linked in a

volatile and unstable relationship, holding a mirror up to official discourse. In this respect, the development of the Islamic state in Iran over the past two decades has been reflected in, documented by and developed in conjunction with cultural modes of representation, which have, intentionally or not, functioned in the realm of the political. Because the new regime has sought to remove all traces of political opposition and abolish the notion of a civil society by enforcing its own all-pervasive notion of a religious society, it has paradoxically succeeded in creating a situation where, having attempted to control or abolish all forms of oppositional discourses, according to Nafici, merely built a social environment in which every field of cultural production has become “a potential site for the expression of dissent” (19). Nowhere is this more relevant than in the cinema, given its popularity and universal appeal, and nowhere has its volatility and dissent been more evident than in the work of Majid Majidi, Abbas Kiarostami, and Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

Despite the lack of artistry in many of the films made during the first decade of Islamic rule, this period did succeed in establishing an industrial and economic base capable of supporting and sustaining a production capacity that rose from seventeen features in 1981 to a high of sixty-six in 1992 and that currently averages around fifty productions per year. Of equal importance was the emergence of an atmosphere of increased artistic freedom, which obtained as part of a larger drive to create a more liberal society following the war, allowing artists to explore a greater range of sensitive, controversial, and hitherto taboo subjects. Furthermore, the regime, wishing to open up to the outside world and to present a more humane façade, saw the cinema, through the film festival and art cinema circuits of the West, as a means of counteracting negative

stereotypical images of the country at the time. However, given the multitude of meanings that a film generates and the friction that arises from a government intent on strictly controlling the medium—against the filmmakers’ desire to surmount these restrictions in an attempt to meaningfully engage with their art form—such developments only serve to highlight the fact that in Iran cinema is a cultural form at the vanguard of Iran’s unique social, political, and cultural milieu. In this regard one of the main unifying themes of the films made in Iran since the revolution has been the restless journey of constant discovery, curiosity, and search intimately connected to the immediate world. This notion of search is a prevalent preoccupation of much of Iranian cinema, and it illustrates the films’ ardent social engagement. The first decade under the new regime could be seen as a belief in and a search for the utopia promised by the revolution, followed in turn by disillusionment, a reappraisal of its broken promises and failures, and another search for a better social and economic life. This search continues following the post-1989 changes and is focused more on political issues—calls for a more liberal and tolerant society, a desire to open up to the outside world and an attempt to understand the role and position of the individual within a changing society. Following the election of President Khatami in 1997, a new phase began in which culture, cinema in particular, formed the main factor in the search for greater freedom, liberalism, and the establishment of a civil society. The notion of search is a crucial aspect of Iranian cinema’s active intervention in social and cultural discussions, for it allows the possibility of opening up a space of engaged debate that acts as a “guide to action rather than a specific or easily achieved solution” (18). Instructive in attempting to articulate such a space and standing as a manifestation, both personally and artistically, of the

development of the Islamic state are the three mentioned directors whose critical view and drive for excellence not only in film-making but in shedding light on the truth of life in Iran, have embraced this endeavor of attempting to see the real Iran through cinema. Placed within the social and political developments of the past twenty-five years, Majidi's films provide cultural documents with which to understand, evaluate, and critically assess the development of the Islamic Republic and the significance of Iranian cinema in the classroom.

In this chapter I have explored the postrevolutionary Persian cinema in order to create a platform for Dewey's theory that society is one of, if not the most, important tools available to students to learn about themselves and the world around them. The reason I have chosen Persian cinema is that spending the first twenty years of my life in Iran gives me a solid understanding of the cultural norms and taboos, and I can discuss how these issues are reflected or omitted in postrevolutionary Persian cinema. My endeavor is to create an understanding of the medium of cinema for students with a deep focus on the Persian culture where the political arena is not always favorable to film-making and the presentation of truth. This chapter will not only create a bridge for students to a land previously unknown, but it will also allow a clear examination of the concepts of culture, censorship, and political atmosphere as they lend themselves to the creation of identity. This chapter can validate the fact that Dewey's theory on society is universal since even across the globe, in a completely different atmosphere, personal identity is simply a result of the rules and mandates of the society. John Dewey believes that for students the development of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of

beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment. The environment consists of the sum total of conditions which are concerned in the execution of the activity characteristic of a living being. The social environment consists of all the activities of fellow beings that are bound up in the carrying on of the activities of any one of its members. It is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit. The deeper and more intimate educative formation of disposition comes, without conscious intent, as the students gradually partake of the activities of the various groups to which they may belong.

The next stepping stone in my goal of establishing the importance of society, culture, and identity in the life of the individual will take us to the world of Theodore Dreiser and his masterpiece *Sister Carrie*. Chapter four will explore the journey of a simple country girl, her transformation in the Chicago high society, and the role of desire in creating her new identity.

CHAPTER FOUR: IDENTITY AND DESIRE IN DREISER'S SISTER CARRIE

Literature has always been concerned with questions about identity, and literary works sketch answers, implicitly or explicitly, to those questions. Narrative literature especially has followed the fortunes of characters as they define themselves and are defined by various combinations of their past, the choices they make, and the social forces that act upon them. Literary works offer a range of implicit models of how identity is formed. There are narratives where identity is essentially determined by birth: the son of a king raised by shepherds is fundamentally a king and rightfully becomes king when his identity is discovered. In other narratives characters change according to the changes in their fortunes, or else identity is based on personal qualities that are revealed during the tribulations of a life. Much recent theory such as Susan Field's article *Lost and Found in America* indicates the attempt to sort out the paradoxes that often inform the treatment of identity in literature. Literary works characteristically represent individuals, so struggles about identity are struggles within the individual and between the individual and the society. Eventually the character will struggle against or comply with social norms and expectations. This chapter will examine how individuals are driven into various social struggles due to their desires in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*.

Plot Overview

Leaving her rural Wisconsin home, eighteen-year-old Caroline Meeber heads for Chicago, Illinois, to live with her older sister's family. Soon, however, Carrie discovers that working in a sweatshop and living in a squalid and overcrowded apartment is not

what she wants. When she meets a man named Drouet, a traveling salesman whose acquaintance she already made on the train to Chicago, she readily leaves behind her family—they never see “Sister Carrie” again—when he offers to look after her. Drouet installs her in a much larger apartment in return for her favors. Through Drouet, Carrie meets Hurstwood, the manager of a respectable bar. From the moment he sets eyes on her, Hurstwood is infatuated with the young girl, whereas for Carrie, Hurstwood is just a wealthy man past the prime of his life. Before long they start an affair, communicating and meeting secretly in the expanding, anonymous city. Although Hurstwood has a family and Carrie might conclude that he does, the lovers never talk about it, and it never seems to occur to Carrie to ask.

One night, at his job, Hurstwood is presented with the opportunity to steal a large sum of money. He succumbs to the temptation and decides on the spur of the moment to leave everything behind and start a new life with Carrie. Under a pretext he lures Carrie onto a northbound train and escapes with her to Canada. After a while, his guilty conscience makes him pay back most of the money, but there is no way he could return to his former life, so the couple eventually decides to move to the East Coast.

The second part of the book is set in New York City. Hurstwood and Carrie rent a flat where they live as man and wife under an assumed name. Gradually, Hurstwood realizes that finding a new job is not easy at all. As his money is slowly running out, the couple have to start economizing, which Carrie does not like at all. She starts looking for a job herself and finds employment at one of the many theatres. Her rise to stardom is sharply contrasted with Hurstwood’s downfall: she leaves him, and the rapidly aging Hurstwood, overwhelmed by apathy, is left all alone, without a job and without any money. At one

point, during a strike, he even works driving a Brooklyn streetcar. He joins the homeless of New York and finally, in a cheap hotel, puts an end to his life. Carrie's reflection in the following section examines how she sees *the world outside* and *the state inside* in relation to her own life:

Carrie listened to this with mingled feelings. Her mind was shaken loose from the little mooring of logic that it had. She was stirred by this thought, angered by that—her own injustice, Hurstwood's, Drouet's, their respective qualities of kindness and favor, the threat of the world outside in which she had failed once before, the impossibility of this state inside, where the chambers were no longer justly hers—the effect of the argument upon her nerves, all combined to make her a mass of jangling fibers—an anchorless, storm-beaten little craft which could do absolutely nothing but drift. (367)

Desire as a Driving Force

Desire constitutes the real subject of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, indeed of all his other major novels. In "Desire as Hero," Randolph Bourne concludes: "The insistent theme of Mr. Dreiser's work is desire, perennial, unquenchable. . . . His hero is really not Sister Carrie, or the Titan or the Genius, but that desire within us that pounds in manifold guise against the iron walls of experience" (12). Irving Howe in "Dreiser: The Springs of Desire" observes that the central characters in the early novels are "harried by a desire for personal affirmation, a desire they can neither articulate nor suppress" (3). Donald Pizer is more specific about what Sister Carrie wants: "Of the major forces in her life, it is primarily her desire for objects that furnish a sense of physical and mental well-being—for fine clothing and furniture and attractive apartments and satisfactory food—

which determines much of her life” (4). Walter Benn Michaels, for his part, notes that in Dreiser’s novel “What you are is what you want, in other words, what you aren’t” (15). Finally, Michaels’ study of Dreiser’s work begins the section on *Sister Carrie* thus: “Desire is the protagonist of *Sister Carrie*. The principal supporting players include a young small-town girl drawn by undefined dreams to the great city and the men she meets during her search for fulfillment” (16).

These various readings underline the importance of desire in Dreiser’s work, particularly in *Sister Carrie*, where desire is perceived as an unfathomable and irrepressible force. The characters seem so helpless that desire, according to Lawrence Hussman, Jr., has become the novel’s new protagonist. This subordination of character to desire is also what Richard Poirier suggests when, describing what he thinks characterizes most American novelists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he points out that “their vision often moves panoramically across the massed phenomena of social and economic structures, and it is only within these that they can see the hero at all” (27). The link that I am hoping to create here is between desire as an individual driving force fueled by the powers of society as an external phenomenon, and how the combination of these factors makes a character function in the novel. The actions of the novel are witness once again to how important society is and how by arriving and falling for the mesmerizing glitters of Chicago, Carrie changes from a simple country girl to a manipulative woman.

While the centrality of desire to Dreiser’s thought is undeniable, the phenomenon of powers of society in *Sister Carrie* is not as unfathomable as it seems, not some mysterious and overpowering force that hurls Carrie toward the objects she desires.

Within the “massed phenomena of social and economic structures,” we can clearly perceive the prominent place occupied by the human mediator. Don Quixote, for instance, believes that true chivalric existence can be experienced only through a careful imitation of Amadis of Gaul, who seems to him to personify ideal knightly behavior. Don Quixote’s desires are thus “mediated”: the subject pursues objects determined by the mediator of desire. In this respect, the directions taken and influences exerted by snobbery, vanity, jealousy, envy, rivalry, resentment, hatred, renunciation, and sacrifice form the center of Girard’s critical thinking. “This triangle of subject, objects and mediator,” Bruce Bassoff notes, “is similar to Thorstein Veblen’s model of conspicuous consumption, where keeping up with the Joneses’ means desiring what they possess regardless of the real value of the object” (8). For Girard, however, it is not merely a question of desiring what the Joneses possess, but of desiring what they appear to be; Girard calls this desire “metaphysical” because it is aimed at the mediator’s being. Veblen describes the phenomenon only in its economic manifestations, but through an extensive analysis of major works by Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoevsky, Girard unravels the complicated strategies of mimetic desire, explores the depths and ways in which it operates, and provides numerous examples of its powerful effects on human relationships (8). The role of desire is of extreme importance here since it is the driving force behind the characters’ actions.

Despite its title, *Sister Carrie* is not a study of a family; indeed, the story opens as Carrie Meeber is leaving home to seek her fortune in Chicago, thus severing “the threads which bound her so lightly to girlhood and home” (3). In the absence of any subsequent references to Carrie’s past, it seems doubtful that one can speak of her ever having been

rooted. While the freedom and mobility enable Carrie to create her self, they also render her susceptible to the influences that life in Chicago and New York will bring:

The city has its cunning wiles. . . . There are large forces which allure, with all the soulfulness of expression possible in the most cultured human. . . . Half the undoing of the unsophisticated and natural mind is accomplished by forces wholly superhuman. . . . Without a counselor at hand to whisper cautious interpretations, what falsehoods may not these things breathe into the unguarded ear! (4)

As the narrator suggests, Carrie, “possessed of a mind rudimentary in its power of observation and analysis” (4), needs a model to guide her through the seemingly bewildering wonders of Chicago. The first words whispered literally in Carrie’s ear as her train is approaching Chicago come from a flashy salesman, who quickly finds out that she is on her first visit to the city. The initial meeting captures Charles Drouet’s habit of asserting his importance through boasting: “You want to see Lincoln Park,” he said, “and Michigan Avenue. They are putting up great buildings there. It’s a second New York, great. So much to see” (7). Drouet wishes to impress on Carrie his association with the “great” world of the city and to intimate that he regularly partakes of the pleasures of Chicago—a city, he suggests, busy imitating New York. The glamorous account makes the attractions seem desirable; as the narrator observes, “There was a little ache in her fancy of all [Drouet] described. Her insignificance in the presence of so much magnificence faintly affected her” (7). The seeds of desire are so firmly planted in her imagination that Carrie grows suddenly conscious of her appearance: “Her own plain blue dress with its black cotton tape trimmings realized itself to her imagination as

shabby” (7). Carrie’s new perception springs from dissatisfaction: in contrast to Drouet’s showiness, the simplicity of her apparel is amplified into shabbiness; the jump from “plain” to “shabby” charts Carrie’s sudden movement toward self-consciousness; as Girard points out, “it is the mediator who makes the imagination fertile”(9). At this point, Carrie does not yet realize that Drouet is a *poseur*, one whose “dress or manners are such as to impress strongly the fancy, or elicit the admiration of susceptible young women” (5). Just as Carrie will try to measure up to his standards of dress by imitating his presumed elegance, Drouet himself behaves so as to conform to the expectations of young women like Carrie; both are thus caught in the process of mutual mediation. Before they enter Chicago, Drouet has one more card to play:

He reached down in his hip pocket and took out a fat purse. It was filled with slips of paper, some mileage books, and a roll of green-backs and so on. It impressed her deeply. Such a purse had never been carried by any man who had ever been attentive to her before. Indeed a man who traveled, who was brisk and experienced and of the world, had never come within such close range before. The purse, the shiny tan shoes, the smart new suit and the *air* with which he did things built up for her a dim world of fortune around him of which he was the centre. (8-9)

Although Drouet’s appeal is simple, even crude—the purse looks “fat,” the “roll of green-backs” is visible, the new suit is “smart,” and the tan shoes are “shiny”—this first meeting ends in his favor because he knows how to arouse Carrie’s interest; as the narrator, who is perfectly aware of the workings of mimetic desire, notes, “She could not

realize that she was drifting, until [Drouet] secured her address. Now she felt that she had yielded something—he, that he had gained a victory. . . . Already he took control in directing the conversation” (9). Although the association cannot be considered a master-slave relationship, Carrie has lost what Girard calls the “struggle of consciousness” when she has succumbed to Drouet’s strategies, to what the narrator calls the “cunning wiles’ of the city, the “wholly superhuman” and the “large forces which allure” the unsophisticated mind. Thus, when Drouet takes his leave, Carrie “felt something lost to her. . . . When he disappeared she felt his absence thoroughly. With her sister she was much alone” (12). The void left by the mediator’s departure can hardly be filled by “dull and commonplace” Minnie (13).

From now on, Carrie will rely on Drouet’s standards to judge people and places. Individual standards are direct results of societal expectations. His approval or disapproval will determine what she thinks, even what she does. When she reaches Minnie’s flat, “Something about the place irritated her, she did not know what,” a reaction that the narrator attributes to Carrie’s “sixth sense” and to her vague sense of harmony: “Too ignorant to understand anything about the theory of harmony, Carrie yet felt the lack of it” (13). Obviously, Carrie’s reaction stems from her encounter with Drouet: She is ashamed to let Drouet see where she resides. Although she has already given him Minnie’s address, she suddenly thinks, “he could not come here. . . . my sister’s place is so small” (14). This feeling of shame, indicative of mediated desire, informs Carrie’s job-seeking experience in Chicago as well, since she is more concerned with her public image than with finding a job; with her eyes on the mediators, she loses sight of what she is after: “As she contemplated the wide windows and imposing signs,

she became conscious of being gazed upon and understood for what she was—a wage-seeker” (18). It is critical to point out that the mentioned concepts, job-seeking, public image, losing sight of one’s self and desiring what is accepted by the society are all societal elements that contribute to the construct of identity in the individual. Carrie is fully absorbed in the Chicago society and is seeking a lifestyle previously unknown to her. Her inner desires for change become public displays of a drive for self-improvement. In the world of internal mediation in which virtually anyone can become someone’s mediator, Carrie has made the “mistake” of openly revealing her desires, of showing others that she needs a job. Thus, “To avoid conspicuity and a certain indefinable shame she felt at being caught spying about for some place where she might apply for a position, she quickened her steps and assumed an air of indifference supposedly common to one upon an errand” (18). The quick steps and the air of indifference (itself imitated) cannot hide Carrie’ preoccupation, and, under the circumstances, her conduct becomes unprofitable, for “she passed many manufacturing and wholesale houses without once glancing in” (18). Looking for a job has turned into a flight from the mediators, and the object of desire itself has been pushed aside.

Because Carrie is under the societal sway of desire for change, she considers herself insignificant whenever she encounters people who seem to her to be superior models, comparing herself to them and repeatedly concluding that they enjoy a self-sufficiency of which she remains deprived. When her job-hunting adventures take her into a fashionable store, “she noticed, with a touch at the heart, the fine ladies who elbowed and ignored her, brushing past in utter disregard of her presence, themselves eagerly enlisted in the materials which the store contained” (23). The experience

heightens Carrie's self-awareness, particularly her sense of her insignificance. Irving Howe's notion that the characters in Dreiser's novels suffer from a "desire for personal affirmation" describes Carrie's situation well but overlooks the role of human mediation, the mechanism apparent in the women's haughtiness and in Carrie's envy. For Carrie, personal affirmation can be attained only when she is no longer treated as if she did not exist. Her desire is for recognition, and not, as Donald Pizer argues, merely for clothes and material comfort. In this respect, the episode with the shop girls in the same store is telling:

Carrie was not familiar with the appearance of her more fortunate sisters of the city. Neither had she before known the nature and appearance of the shop girls, with whom she now compared poorly. They were pretty in the main, some even handsome, with a certain independence and toss of indifference which added . . . a certain piquancy. . . . [W]herever she encountered the eye of one, it was only to recognize in it a keen analysis of her own position—her individual shortcomings of dress and that shadow of *manner* which she thought must hang about her and make clear to all who and what she was. A flame of envy lighted in her heart. (23)

Desire and Ambition Based on Girard's Theory

To be conscious of one's appearance is to be in the grip of society, to engage in constant mental comparisons between one's self and others. Unlike the "fine" ladies and the shop girls, Carrie feels that she lacks "being" and that her identity seems transparent. At the source of Carrie's subjectivity, we see the significance and power of society in

taking a person who was formerly simple in all aspects of her life into uncharted territory. Her flame of envy is understandable. She wants to acquire what makes those girls superior: independence, indifference, and sharp taste. Carrie's low self-image colors even her understanding of other people's behavior. When Drouet, who had promised to call on her, has apparently forgotten to keep his word, she jumps to the conclusion that "Drouet was not coming and somehow she felt a little resentful, a little as if she had been forsaken—was not good enough" (52); Drouet's neglect reinforces Carrie's low opinion of herself, but her reading of Drouet's action is absurd when we recall that she had earlier written to him expressly asking him not to call at Minnie's small flat.

At other times, however, Carrie's mere connection to Drouet makes her feel superior to other women and also to their men. At the shoe factory where she eventually gets her first job, Carrie has to work alongside girls who "had young men of the kind whom she, since her experience with Drouet, felt above. . . . She [also] came to thoroughly dislike the light-headed young fellows of the shop" (56) "who beside Drouet seemed uncouth and ridiculous" (40). Once Drouet has pointed out what seems desirable, Carrie will settle for nothing less. But what is the nature of the superiority Carrie persists in attributing to Drouet? Is he as "great" and self-sufficient as she believes him to be?

Here is why Drouet spends his free evenings at a famous Chicago restaurant:

Rector's, with its reputation as a resort for actors and professional men, seemed to him the proper place for a successful man to go. He loved fine clothes, good eating, and particularly the company and acquaintanceship of successful men.
(42)

There is no doubt as to what attracts Drouet to Rector's: like Carrie, like all the characters who have helped to give Rector's its reputation, Drouet loves the company of the successful and haunts the restaurant because his mediators' prestige seems imparted to the place. The only difference between Carrie and Drouet is that she thinks he is successful, but as she gains experience, the difference between them dissolves, and with it goes her desire for his company. Seeking social acceptance through the right type of friends and company is another pivotal aspect of society that is beautifully highlighted in the novel. The fact that Drouet craves the atmosphere of places like Rector's to feel himself alive is made clear in several other episodes. When he dines out, "it was a source of keen satisfaction to him to know that Joseph Jefferson was to come to this same place at some time or another, or that Henry E. Dixey, quite a well-known performer of the day, was there only a few tables off" (42). Drouet is a *vaniteux*, one who, according to Girard, "will desire any object so long as he is convinced that it is already desired by another person whom he admires" (11). Drouet's satisfaction derives not from the quality of the food but from his conviction that his temporal or spatial proximity to his mediators bestows upon him some of their prestige. Because his desire is so mediated, some of Drouet's actions become comic: at Rector's, he would sometimes overhear someone mention the presence of some popular figure, and "When these things would fall upon Drouet's ears, he would straighten himself a little more stiffly and eat with solid comfort. If he had any vanity, this augmented it, and if he had any ambition, this stirred it" (42). The mechanical reaction to the mediators' presence recalls Carrie's quick steps when she realized other people were watching her as she was looking for a job. The passage also shows how the narrator can sometimes intuitively comprehend and unambiguously

portray the laws governing social desire: Drouet, the subject of desire, appears as a puppet whose actions are precipitated by the mediators' presence. In a perfect spirit of emulation, Drouet "would be able to flash a roll of greenbacks too someday. As it was, he could eat where *they* did" (42). Drouet also frequents Hannah and Hogg's, "a gorgeous saloon from a Chicago standpoint" (42). The reasons for the place's popularity with Drouet point once again to the mediators' role: "The fact that here men gather, here chatter, here love to pass and rub elbows, and must be explained upon some grounds. It must be that a strange bundle of passions and vague desires gives rise to such a curious social institution or it would not be" (47). The saloon owes its existence to a human environment made up of what the narrator loosely designates as "a bundle of passions and vague desires," but Drouet's example indicates that desire for social recognition represents an essential element in the creation of Hannah and Hogg's. The motive for the gathering and the rubbing of elbows is to impress others and to prove oneself worthy of their attention. What has been said about Drouet applies equally to the other people drawn to the saloon:

The many friends [Drouet] met here dropped in because they craved, without perhaps consciously analyzing it, the company, the glow, the atmosphere, which they found. . . . The worst effect such a thing could have would be perhaps to stir up in the material-minded an ambition to arrange their lives upon a similarly splendid basis. In the last analysis, that would scarcely be called the fault of the decorations, but rather of the innate trend of the mind. That such a scene might stir the less expensively dressed to emulate the more expensively dressed could

scarcely be laid at the door of anything save the false ambition of the minds of those so affected. (47)

The narrator's view of emulation seems ambivalent in this passage, for though he describes the tendency to imitate others as an inborn quality of the human mind, he also suggests that emulation remains the false ambition of a particular mind, the kind permanently affected by desire. Indeed, Drouet's mind is forever at work. When he takes Carrie out to dinner, he "selected a table close by the window. . . . He loved the changing panorama of the street—to see and be seen as he dined" (58). Mixed with Drouet's love of the varied street spectacle is his desire to be noticed, to draw attention to himself; and Drouet is more than just gregarious: the preceding example indicates how his self-esteem increases when he knows that other people, Carrie included, associate him with the city's fashionable places. Drouet's power over Carrie depends on his ability to make her feel the elegance of his manners and the superiority of his taste; unable to perceive his limitations, Carrie leads a major part of her life in Chicago according to his expectations. One of the most telling examples of this influence occurs in chapter eleven, as Carrie and Drouet, who are now living together, are taking a walk:

Drouet had a habit . . . of looking after stylishly dressed or pretty women on the street and remarking upon them. . . . He saw how they set their little feet, how they carried their chins, with what grace and sinuosity they swayed their bodies. . . . He loved the thing that women love in themselves, grace. At this, their own shrine, he knelt with them, an ardent devotee. "Did you see that woman who went by just now?" he said to Carrie, on the very first day they took a walk together. It

was a very average type of woman they had encountered, young, pretty, very satisfactorily dressed so far as appearances went, though not in style. Drouet had never seen the perfectly groomed ladies of the New York social set, or he would have been conscious of her defects. "Fine stepper, wasn't she?" Carrie looked again and observed the grace commended. "Yes, she is," she returned cheerfully, a little suggestion of possible defect in herself awakening in her mind. If that was so fine she must look at it more closely. Instinctively she felt a desire to imitate it. . . . When one of her mind sees many things emphasized and re-emphasized and admired, she gathers the logic of it and applies accordingly. Drouet was not shrewd enough to see that this was not tactful. He could not see that it would be better to make her feel that she was competing with herself, not with others better than herself. (99-100)

The "fine stepper" incident represents one of the best illustrations of Dewey's concept of power of society in creating a sense of self in the individual. Dewey claims that individuals are products of not only families and personal histories, but also the society where they live and the culture in which they are born. The social aspects of life are the determining factors in how an individual is shaped from early on. The desires for power, advancement, success, and acceptance and so on are all seeds planted in the psyche of the individual early on by society and fostered by culture and societal expectations. Carrie, who suddenly finds the other woman's style desirable because Drouet has commended it, yearns to appropriate the sort of admiration the "fine stepper" enjoys in the eyes of men like Drouet. But Carrie's struggle is not with the other woman, but with the mediator, who unwittingly suggests her shortcomings by praising other

women in her presence. Instead of “whispering cautious interpretations,” the self-appointed counselor incites her to more emulation (4). In addition to being a bad counselor, Drouet is unable to restrain his admiration for women; he reveals his desires too much, a habit indicative of a crude and tactless nature. Because Drouet cares to judge and be judged by appearances, his understanding of “grace” and “style” remains shallow. This superficiality makes it hard for Carrie to engage his attention for very long, because “Drouet was a man whom it was impossible to bind to any one object for long. He had but one idol—the perfect woman” (105). Eager to meet Drouet’s standards of what constitutes the desirable, Carrie frequently finds herself copying whatever Drouet recommends. The “fine stepper” is not an isolated episode; chapter eleven provides an equally telling instance:

What Drouet said about the girl’s grace . . . caused Carrie to perceive the nature and value of those little modish ways which women adopt when they would presume to be something. She looked in her mirror and pursed up her lips, accompanying it with a little toss of the head as she had seen the railroad treasurer’s daughter do. She caught up her skirts with an easy swing, for had not Drouet remarked that in her and several others, and Carrie was naturally imitative. She began to get the hang of those little things which the pretty woman who has vanity invariably adopts. . . . She used her feet less heavily, a thing that was brought about by her attempting to imitate the treasurer’s daughter. (104)

Drouet’s influence over Carrie leads her into a world of artifice in which her gestures are conscious imitations of one person or another. However, she soon begins to

see his limitations, particularly the crudity of his desires. Even if Drouet had earlier impressed her with his apparent sophistication and his knowledge of the world, the narrator has stressed that “In reality Carrie had more imagination than [Drouet] did, more taste” (69). Drouet’s temporary power can be traced to Carrie’s inexperience:

In a dim way she was beginning to see where he lacked. If it had not been for this, if she had not been able to measure and judge him in a way, she would have been worse off than she was. She would have adored him. She would have been utterly wretched in her fear of not gaining his affection, of losing his interest, of being swept away and left without an anchorage. (92-93)

Carrie is experiencing what Girard describes as “metaphysical disappointment,” (13) common among the subjects of social desire. Her familiarity with Drouet gradually helps to diminish his qualities. When she was subject to his mediation, Carrie was unable to see things clearly, but the relationship between subject and mediator changes when the former’s admiration for the latter begins to wane. The narrator even suggests that social desire would have enslaved Carrie and that Drouet would have become her idol, a prediction that confirms Girard’s observation that “This movement [of social desire] toward slavery is one of the basic principles of novelistic structure” (14). The arrival of a superior mediator contributes significantly to the change in Carrie’s attitude: “When Hurstwood called she met a man who was cleverer than Drouet in a hundred ways” (93). Hurstwood emerges as Drouet’s opposite: far from wounding Carrie’s sensibilities or suggesting her limitations, Hurstwood makes her feel special, convincing Carrie of his difference from Drouet:

He was never dull for a minute and seemed to make her clever. At least she brightened under his influence until all her best side was exhibited. She felt she was cleverer with him than with others. At least he seemed to find so much in her to applaud. There was not the slightest touch of patronage. Drouet was full of it.

(117)

Even without the repetition of the verb “seemed,” we know that Hurstwood is too attentive to Drouet’s mistress, a fact neither she nor Drouet suspects. Hurstwood’s strategy to gain her is part of the “cunning wiles” of the city; he knows both how to excite Carrie’s interest and how to flatter her self-importance. But first, the manager’s desire has some obstacles to overcome. For one thing, Drouet now becomes Hurstwood’s rival; in fact, in the overall structure of the novel, the interaction between the two men is dominated by their rivalry over the heroine. For Hurstwood, Carrie is even more desirable because she belongs to another: “He envied the drummer his conquest as he had never envied any man in all the course of his experience” (122). The intense envy reflects not only the strength of his desire but also his awareness of his rival and his determination to triumph over him. Hurstwood finally persuades Drouet to bring Carrie to a show:

[A]s he looked at the well-dressed, jolly salesman whom he so much liked, the cold gleam of the rival glowed in his eye. He began to size up Drouet from the standpoints of wit and fascination. He began to look to see where he was weak. . . . Drouet felt nothing. . . . while his friend examined him with the eye of a hawk.

(108)

Hurstwood's mediated desire makes him unscrupulous, and the animal imagery used to depict him reflects the extent to which his desires have mastered him. As Girard writes, "The secret of success, in business as well as in love, is dissimulation. One must hide the desire one feels and pretend a desire one does not feel" (15). Hurstwood will win Carrie because he, unlike Drouet, is careful not to reveal his desires too quickly. At the show to which he has invited Drouet and Carrie, he feigns indifference; when Drouet steps outside to get the evening's program, Hurstwood and Carrie are alone:

Several times their eyes accidentally met and then there poured into hers such a flood of feeling as she had never before experienced. She could not for the moment explain it, for in the next glance or the next move of the hand there was seeming indifference mingled only with the kindest attention. (110)

Hurstwood arouses Carrie's interest because his assumed indifference perplexes her, seeing it as a sign of his superiority and an indication that perhaps she does not matter to him. When Drouet comes back,

[he] was almost dull in comparison. Hurstwood entertained them both and now it was driven into Carrie's mind that here was the superior man. She instinctively felt that he was stronger and higher and yet withal so simple. . . . Drouet was only a kindly soul but otherwise defective. (110)

One model supplants another: when she first met Drouet, Carrie found her own sister dull; now, Drouet himself appears dull. Carrie's new perception is "driven" into her mind, mediated through what she takes to be Hurstwood's superiority. Far from being

superior, Hurstwood is himself a victim of mimetic desire. Like Drouet, the manager worries about the kind of impression he makes on people; but unlike Drouet, Hurstwood's tactics are subtle. The narrator describes him as "shrewd and clever in many little things and capable of creating a good impression" (43). His attributes are socially oriented, calculated to elicit a particular response among his acquaintances; in other words, Hurstwood can be seen as one of the novel's many actors, and only in this light can the conduct of "this starched and conventional poser among men" be fully understood:

If Hurstwood had one leaning, it was toward notabilities. He considered that, if anywhere, he belonged among them. . . . In situations like the present—where he could shine as a gentleman and be received without equivocation as a friend and equal among men of known ability, he was most delighted. It was on such occasions, if ever, that he would "take something." When the social flavor was strong enough, he would even unbend to the extent of drinking glass for glass with his associates, punctiliously observing his turn to pay as if he were an outsider like the others. (266)

The unspoken but mild rivalry pervading the circle brings out the members' mediated actions: no one lets himself be outdone in the ability to drink or to spend money. For Hurstwood, to be a celebrity, to be in the public eye and enjoy the admiration and envy of many, seems the ultimate form of recognition. As the narrator states, "individuals love more to bask in the sunshine of popularity than they do to improve in some obscure intellectual shade. Merit is no object, conspicuity all. No one realized this

better than Hurstwood” (173). The cultivation of the mind, conspicuously lacking in the lives of the novel’s characters, remains an imagined possibility to be partially realized in Robert Ames. For every other character, social conspicuousness seems to be the pinnacle of greatness, something that Hurstwood achieves on the night of Carrie’s first stage experience:

The little theatre resounded to a babble of successful voices . . . all largely because of this man’s bidding . . . he was a member of an eminent group—a rounded company of five or more, whose stout figures, large white bosoms and shining pins bespoke the character of their success. . . . He was evidently a light among them, reflecting in his personality the ambitions of those who greeted him. He was acknowledged, fawned upon, in a way lionized. Through it all one could see the standing of the man. It was greatness in a way, small as it was. (180)

In an atmosphere of glamour and finery, Hurstwood’s desires seem fully gratified: he is the center of attention and king of the occasion; he becomes everybody’s mediator, symbolizing the ambitions of many people present. Even the narrator’s qualification of Hurstwood’s greatness “small as it was” does not detract from his approval of this kind of public eminence.

Carrie’s stage experience proves significant for another reason. Her public acclaim, though mild, increases her desirability in Hurstwood’s eyes, so much so that he proposes that they live together in another part of Chicago. But Carrie, who is living with Drouet and who does not know that Hurstwood is married, will agree only if the manager is ready to marry her and move with her to another city, a condition that redoubles

Hurstwood's desire: "She was something to struggle for, and that was everything. How different from the women who yielded willingly" (149). The more insurmountable the obstacle, the more intense Hurstwood's feelings, and the more desperate he is to sacrifice everything for her (16).

Drouet's desire for Carrie rekindles too when he becomes aware of the manager's desire. When Hurstwood pays him a visit, "Drouet felt really closer to him than ever before. It gave him more respect for Carrie. Her appearance came into a new light, under Hurstwood's appreciation" (94-95). To understand Drouet's new perception, we need to remember that, before meeting Carrie, Drouet had often thought of Hurstwood as a model, one whose attention he sought whenever he went to Rector's: when the manager had "been pointed out as a very successful and well-known man about town, Drouet immediately conceived a notion of him as being someone worth knowing and was glad not only to meet him but to visit the Adams Street bar thereafter whenever he wanted a drink or a cigar" (43). The manager's appreciation of Carrie amounts to an approving nod from the model. But, following Carrie's stage triumph, the triangular relationship assumes a new shape. Toward the end of the performance,

[t]he two men . . . scarcely heard the few remaining words with which the scene concluded. They only saw their idol, moving about with appealing grace, continuing a power which to them was a revelation. Hurstwood resolved a thousand things—Drouet as well. (192-93)

The applause intensifies the two men's love for Carrie: Hurstwood decides that "He would act at once. . . . The Drummer would not have her" (193). So when he sees

Drouet approaching Carrie, “[j]ealousy leaped alight in his bosom . . . he hated him as an intruder. . . . grudging Drouet every moment of his presence” (186). The audience’s admiration has a similar effect on Drouet, pushing him to act at once: “He was resolving that he would be to Carrie what he had never been before. He would marry her, by George. She was worth it” (192). In short, Hurstwood and Drouet desire Carrie not for herself but for the recognition given her by the public at large. Although his own feelings toward Carrie intensify because another man finds her desirable, Drouet is initially unable to sense the change in her perception of him, now that her stage successes are bringing her more and more public recognition. However, with the apparent self-assurance Carrie derives from all the applause, she begins to feel no longer bound by Drouet’s standards: “She was realizing now what it was to be petted. For once she was the admired, the sought-for” (193). The most desirable state the characters can imagine and the ultimate symbol of their social ambitions is what the novel calls “the kingdom of greatness,” where the “great money kings” rule as the ultimate mediators of desire (304). Because wealth is viewed as essentially honorable and as conferring prestige and superiority on its owners, it mediates between ordinary individuals and the desired ideal of behavior, a process often referred simply to as the “social atmosphere” of the city:

The great create an atmosphere which reacts badly upon the small. This atmosphere is easily and quickly felt. Walk among the magnificent residences, the splendid equipages, the gilded shops, restaurants, resorts of all kinds. Scent the flowers, the silks, the wines; drink of the laughter springing from the soul of the luxurious content, of the glances which gleam like light from defiant spears; feel the quality of smiles which cut like glistening swords and of strides born of place

and power, and you shall know of what is the atmosphere of the high and the mighty. Little need to argue that of such is not the kingdom of greatness, but so long as the world is attracted by this and the human heart views this as the one desirable value which it must attain, as long, to that heart, will this remain the realm of greatness. So long, also, will the atmosphere of this realm work its desperate results in the soul of man. It is like a chemical reagent. One day of it, like one drop of the other, will so affect and discolor the views, the aims, the desires of the mind, that it will thereafter remain forever dyed. (305)

Dreiser's narrator is fascinated by the atmosphere surrounding the wealthy, and the elaborate descriptions make the kingdom of greatness appear as the object to end all desires, its inhabitants having nothing else left to desire. Their power is so formidable that mere glances and smiles are as effective as deadly weapons. However, to talk about the aggressive and belligerent nature of those smiles and glances is to suggest a deficiency in "the soul of the luxurious content." The narrator also describes the atmosphere as compelling, even contagious, part of the "large forces which allure" and contribute to the undoing of the unsophisticated mind. As Walter Benn Michaels notes:

We are . . . so accustomed to identifying capitalism with some form of rugged individualism that it is extraordinarily difficult for us to see . . . what *Sister Carrie* exemplified—that the capitalism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries acted more to subvert the ideology of the autonomous self than to enforce it. (17)

The description of the kingdom of greatness suggests that the gradual disintegration of the self is based on the social principle. Richard Poirier is right when he

observes that Dreiser's creative energy derives from "a kind of fascinated surrender to the mysterious forces of the city," for we get the impression that Dreiser's narrator surrenders to the luring powers of the kingdom of greatness—only death, as he admits, can deliver one from such a grip. It is as if Dreiser's paradoxical thinking cannot imagine an alternative to the sway of desire, a failure that might help explain why many readers find unconvincing the portrayal of Ames, whose function is supposedly to criticize the ethos of material success.

In New York, Carrie makes the acquaintance of Mrs. Vance, "a typical New Yorker in many things," the narrator says, "some of which were dressiness, jollity, love of metropolitan life, crowds, theatres" (320). But Mrs. Vance's first invitation to Carrie proves unsettling: "She . . . saw that she was not well-dressed—not really as well-dressed as Mrs. Vance. . . . She felt that her life was becoming stale. . . . The old helpful, urging melancholy was restored. The desirous Carrie was whispered to concerning her possibilities," and when the two women go for a walk, Carrie feels once again the sense of her own insignificance because "this woman pained her by contrast. Carrie felt that anyone looking at the two would pick Mrs. Vance for her raiment alone" (321-22). The new friend is both a model and a rival, but Mrs. Vance herself is in the grip of mimetic desire:

[The parade] was a familiar thing to Mrs. Vance, who not only knew of it as an entity, but had often been in it, going purposely to see and be seen, to create a stir with her beauty and dispel any tendency to fall short in dressiness by contrasting herself with the beauty and fashion of the town. (323)

Mrs. Vance lives for the sake of the institutionalized showy parade. Like Carrie, Drouet, and Hurstwood, she often betrays her mimetic conduct in the presence of her mediators; during their excursion down Broadway, Carrie “noticed of a sudden that Mrs. Vance’s manner had rather stiffened under the gaze of handsome men and elegantly dressed ladies” (323). Still, Carrie remains envious of her friend’s self-assurance: “The whole street bore the flavor of riches and show and Carrie felt that she was not of it. . . . It cut her to the quick, and she resolved that she would not come here again until she looked better” (324). Carrie feels excluded from the apparent bliss enjoyed by her friend; acquiring Mrs. Vance’s assurance will presumably give her a place in the street parade. But “Broadway taught her a sharper lesson. . . . It clinched her convictions concerning her state. She had not lived, could not lay claim to having lived, until something of this had come into her life. . . . That night the pretty little flat seemed a commonplace thing” (325-26); as the narrator puts it, “The great awakening blow had been delivered” (327). I emphasize the role of Mrs. Vance in Carrie’s life because such an influence, ignored in most readings of the novel, is part of the city’s atmosphere, part of the human interaction that shapes character. When she cannot keep up with her friend’s standards, Carrie prefers not to see Mrs. Vance any longer.

This sense of her insignificance is brought home to her again when all she, a popular Chicago actress, can get is the role of chorus girl in New York: “she had her first sight of those high and mighty—the leading ladies and gentlemen. . . . She saw that they were privileged and deferred to. She was nothing—absolutely nothing at all” (391). But through diligent imitation of the more successful actors and a careful heeding of the critics’ comments, Carrie eventually enters the “walled city”:

Gradually the deference and congratulations gave her a mental appreciation of her state. She was no longer ordered but requested, and that politely. The other members of the cast looked at her enviously. (449)

Even though Carrie has become one of the “high and mighty” she once envied, her perception of her own success is still determined by the public regard for her. As if to expose the fluctuating dynamics of desire and to explain the nature of Carrie’s rise, Dreiser reintroduces Mrs. Vance, who now comes to pay homage to a rising star: “But aren’t you a success. Dear, oh! All the papers talking about you. . . . I was almost afraid to come back here this afternoon” (454). Mrs. Vance’s fear might perhaps sound comic, but it reflects the change through which Carrie now becomes Mrs. Vance’s mediator of desire.

Because Carrie has become a model for the public at large, the manager of a New York hotel even offers her a suite in his establishment at a special rate because “ ‘Every hotel depends upon the repute of its patrons. A well-known actress like yourself . . . draws attention to the hotel, and, although you may not believe it, patrons. Now we must have repute. It is what we live on. The common run of individuals will go where celebrities are’ ” (451). The implications of Mr. Withers’ theory can be understood when we recall Drouet’s inclination to go to Rector’s because some celebrity was dining a few tables off, Hurstwood’s leaning toward notabilities, Mrs. Hurstwood and her daughter’s frantic pursuit of Chicago Society, and Carrie’s desire to feel equal to the better-dressed women of Chicago and New York. Just as Hannah and Hogg’s in Chicago exist because of “a strange bundle of passions and vague desires,” the Wellington in New York relies for its success on the mimetic principle.

Carrie Meeber of Columbia City has finally entered New York's "kingdom of greatness" as "the doors of fine places seemed to open quite without the asking. These palatial chambers—how marvelously they came to her. The elegant apartments of Mrs. Vance in the Chelsea—these were hers. Men sent flowers, love notes, offers of fortune" (456). But now that his heroine has attained what she has often desired, Dreiser is confronted with resolving the problem of desire. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard argues that a great novel is fundamentally an extended theory of human interaction that reveals a pattern of mediated desire and that concludes with its characters undergoing a radical transformation for the better when they finally grasp the contagious and self-destructive power of mimesis. The closest Dreiser comes to solving this structural and thematic problem and to offering an alternative to the "kingdom of greatness" is in his introduction of Ames (19) at the height of Carrie's material success in the last pages of the book. He is described as "an original thinker" who is "wholly free of affectation" (329), and Carrie is attracted to him because "he liked better books than she read, better people than she associated with. His ideal burned in her heart" (405). His presence helps her see that "Flattery in its most palpable form had lost its force with her. It required superiority—kindly superiority, to move her" (432). If Carrie's view of experience begins to change, it is because she has at last met what the narrator earlier said she needed most: a good counselor. Challenging Carrie's notion that success in love and fortune is everything, Ames argues that "if a man doesn't make knowledge his object, he's likely to fail" (482). Experience has taught Ames a great deal about the relationship between happiness and desire:

When I was quite young I felt as if I were ill-used because other boys were dressed better than I was, were more sprightly with the girls than I, and I grieved and grieved, but now I'm over that. I have found out that everyone is more or less dissatisfied. No one has exactly what his heart wishes. (482-83)

Ames accepts desire as part of the human condition; however, he also realizes that desire needs limits, because, as he tells Carrie, "the world is full of desirable situations" (482). Therefore, the only way out of the labyrinth of social desire is to accept that "happiness is within yourself wholly if you will only believe it" (482). But although we are told that, when Ames is gone, his ideal remains with Carrie, especially his suggestion that "riches were not everything" (346), our last glimpse of Carrie undermines any expectations that she has fully grasped the import of his words: in her comfortable chambers at the Waldorf, Carrie was reading, at this time, "Père Goriot," which Ames had recommended to her. It was so strong, and Ames's mere recommendation had so aroused her interest, that she caught nearly the full sympathetic significance of it. For the first time it was being borne in upon her how silly and worthless had been her earlier reading, as a whole (495).

Dewey's Take: the Implications of Experience

Dewey claims that it is the nature of an experience to have implications which go far beyond what is at first consciously noted in it. Bringing these connections or implications to consciousness enhances the meaning of the experience. Any experience, however trivial in its first appearance, is capable of assuming an indefinite richness of significance by extending its range of perceived connections. Normal communication

with others is the readiest way of effecting this development, for it links up the net results of the experience of the group and even the race with the immediate experience of an individual. By normal communication is meant that in which there is a joint interest, a common interest, so that one is eager to give and the other to take. It contrasts with telling or stating things simply for the sake of impressing them upon another, merely in order to test him to see how much he has retained and can literally reproduce.

The predictable irony in Carrie's willingness to sympathize with suffering in books while she remains unaware that Hurstwood is dying not very far from her comfortable hotel chambers seems at odds with the implications of Ames's advice. Therefore, if the conclusion of the novel does not constitute a fresh beginning, if we are not left with a novelistic truth, it is because Dreiser's heroine has not triumphed over social desire; she has not achieved the clarity of vision necessary to contradict the ideas and transcend the obsessions that have driven and shaped her actions throughout the story. The conclusion is a clear representation of what I have tried to present in this chapter based on the theory for John Dewey that humans are products of their social environment and we as educators cannot teach students unless we allow this social history to be represented in their work. Society is one of the most powerful mediums in creating the identity of the individual. Here we can reexamine Dewey's claim in *Experience and Education* on the role of society that "Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for its influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. Failure to take the moving force of an experience into account is disloyalty to the principle of experience itself (38-39). Dewey continues his argument by claiming that *interaction* and *situation* are inseparable from one another. Carrie Meeber's situation

as I have carefully described, is a clear result of the interactions she has had with her social surroundings.

What makes the problem of identity crucial and unavoidable are the tensions and conflicts it encapsulates. We define identities as the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past. The process of identity-formation not only foregrounds some differences and neglects others, it takes an internal difference or division and projects it as a difference between individual and society. There may be a general lesson here. While identity formation in the narrative supports a rise to harmonious solutions in what the meaning is, it will contribute to a sum that includes factors of intention, text, reader, and context. The identity of the character colors the novel and allows for the reader to engage with the world that the novel presents. We read *Sister Carrie* to go on a journey with a young woman who is mesmerized by a life she did not think she could have. And while identity of a character may not define them fully, for the reader it allows a deeper connection to a society otherwise partially unknown. In closing, I would like to revisit the words of my primary theoretical focus, John Dewey as he wrote them in a chapter titled “Criteria of Education” in *Experience and Education*:

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from

them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile. (40)

In this chapter, I have examined the need for social stratification in the life of a female character in Theodore Dreiser's novel. Social stratification has many dimensions. Power, property, prestige are all part of this concept. Carrie's journey is a representation of the need to belong to a class and to be acknowledged in a given society. Even a simple country girl with different values and agendas is not immune from the influences of social power and rank. Society as one of the most powerful contributors to the individual's identity continues to shape, change, corrupt and ultimately destroy the individual.

The following chapter will be a series of classroom activities and lesson plans to demonstrate the connection between society and the individual and allow writing to be a medium to contrast a deeper understanding about how we function as individuals and how our being is forever intertwined with the societies we call home. Reading and writing can create a dialogue between the world and the student, between familiarity and difference and provide a platform for conscious reflection. To allow the classroom to be a space for students not only to learn how to write, but to examine social and cultural discrepancies of the world will encourage critical thinking as well as a path to reflection and debate. We may not be able to make the students understand every aspect of society and culture, but we can help them examine the world around them with eyes wide open. After all, what kind of writing are we teaching if it is not ultimately writing to grow?

Writing and especially writing well is a critical component of communication among us. By teaching students to include the society and its various circumstances in the writing, we as teachers empower our students to look at life through a more global lens. Being in college is about more than earning a degree. It's about finding the correct path for one's life journey. And by introducing various social components into this equation, we can help create well-informed individuals. After all. Education replaces an empty mind, with an open one.

CHAPTER FIVE: DEWEY IN THE CLASSROOM
LESSON PLANS ON REFLECTION, CULTURE, FILM AND THE NOVEL

Experience and Reflective Thinking

The starting place in Dewey's philosophy and educational theory is the world of everyday life. Unlike many philosophers, Dewey did not search beyond the realm of ordinary experience to find some more fundamental and enduring reality. For Dewey, the everyday world of common experience was all the reality that humans had access to or needed. Dewey was greatly impressed with the success of the physical sciences in solving practical problems and in explaining, predicting, and controlling humans' environment. He considered the scientific mode of inquiry and the scientific systematization of human experience the highest attainment in the evolution of the mind of humans, and this way of thinking and approaching the world became a major feature of his philosophy. In fact, he defined the educational process as a "continual reorganization, reconstruction and transformation of experience" (Democracy and Education 50), for he believed that it is only through experience that humans learn about the world and only by the use of his experience that a human can maintain and better himself in the world.

Dewey was careful in his writings to make clear what kinds of experiences were most valuable and useful. Some experiences are merely passive affairs, pleasant or painful but not educative. An educative experience, according to Dewey, is an experience in which we make a connection between what we do to things and what happens to them or us in consequence; the value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities among events. Thus, if a child reaches for a candle flame and burns his hand,

he experiences pain, but this is not an educative experience unless he realizes that touching the flame resulted in a burn and, moreover, formulates the general expectation that flames will produce burns if touched. In just this way, before we are formally instructed, we learn much about the world, ourselves, and others. It is this natural form of learning from experience, by doing and then reflecting on what happened, which Dewey made central in his approach to schooling.

Reflective thinking and the perception of relationships arise only in problematical situations. As long as our interaction with our environment is a fairly smooth affair we may think of nothing or merely daydream, but when this untroubled state of affairs is disrupted we have a problem which must be solved before the untroubled state can be restored. For example, a person walking in a forest is suddenly stopped short by a stream which blocks his path, and his desire to continue walking in the same direction is interrupted. He or she considers possible solutions to his problem—finding or producing a set of stepping-stones, finding and jumping across a narrow part, using something to bridge the stream, and so forth—and looks for materials or conditions to fit one of the proposed solutions. He or she finds an abundance of stones in the area and decides that the first suggestion is most worth testing. Then he or she places the stones in the water, steps across to the other side, and is off again on his hike. Such an example illustrates all the elements of Dewey's theoretical description of reflective thinking: A real problem arises out of present experiences, suggestions for a solution come to mind, relevant data are observed, and a hypothesis is formed, acted upon, and finally tested. The following sections puts Dewey's theory to the test by examining a series of lesson plans that validate the concept of individuality, writing, and reflection.

Reflective Essays and Lesson Plans

1-How does the notion of the province and geographical settings that you are from color your identity and form the foundation of your life?

In a short reflective essay, examine how your roots are partially responsible for who you are today.

Objective: By examining the past reluctant students will be presented with the opportunity to examine a specific time in their past and link that experience to their current life. Writing becomes more palatable for reluctant students if they feel they genuinely have something to write about. Since personal history is a very specific area of each person's past, students will feel in charge of telling their story as no other person can be a better narrator than they are.

2-Choose a social topic that you feel strongly about. Write a short essay examining how you became interested in the topic, what steps have been taken on the issue, and what do you hope can be achieved in the future.

Objective: Students tend to be more interested in topics that actually relate to their daily lives. This essay option will present an opportunity for them to examine some important factors in their society such as the need for higher education, the issues of race and gender in their places of work, some social concepts such as busing and lack of open enrollment options in their neighborhood and give an expert eyewitness account of the situation since they are the ones most touched by it.

3- What is the best book you have ever read? Write a book review and explain the concepts that make this text a great one in your mind. Examine the role of authorship and autonomy in your choice.

Objective: This writing assignment can lend itself to a class activity called Exchange of Ideas where students will stand up and read sections of their essay to the class and at the end we will end up with a list of twenty five books that are interesting for the class to read at a later time.

4-What is the best quality you look for in others? Do you possess that same quality?

Write a short essay explaining your take on this question.

Objective: This essay is used as a tool to self discovery and can become the gateway to daily journal writing. The students will learn to look beyond appearances and outfits into their inner selves and become more engaged with who they are instead of what they own.

5- Daily one word prompt writing. This exercise will allow the students to experience the joys of free-writing and over the span of the semester will create a special record of how the students writing has changed and evolved.

Objective: to create goodwill toward writing.

Connections

Connections among these lesson plans are based on the fact that in lesson one we allow the student to examine the concept of province and how a place from one's early life can be the foundation for future identity. Then the lesson moves on to the examination of concepts in one's daily life. Habits and routines are also an important component of the students' identity formation. The second lesson plan examines the relevance of this concept. The third lesson plan allows the student to examine how society becomes a factor in how one thinks based on the material a person reads. Book reports therefore become tools in connecting the students by allowing them to write their own and share their pieces in class in the activity titled "Exchange of Ideas." Once we move beyond our

self, our province, our society, and our modes of inquiry, we can pause to look at others and examine how our lives are influenced by other human beings. The lesson plan that asks to identify the best quality in others will allow the students to pause and look around them; not in a sarcastic way but rather in a positive manner. The last lesson plan creates a general goodwill toward writing by asking students to log their thoughts in a journal. The journal is an interesting tool in measuring progress in writing over the span of a semester.

Education and Life

Ideas and experiences which are not woven into the fabric of growing experience and knowledge but remain isolated seemed to Dewey a waste of precious natural resources. The dichotomy of in-school and out-of-school experiences he considered especially wasteful, as he indicated as early as 1899 in *The School and Society*:

From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school—its isolation from life. When the child gets into the schoolroom he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood. So the school being unable to utilize this everyday experience, sets painfully to work on another tack and by a variety of [artificial] means, to arouse in the child an interest in school studies [Thus there remains a] gap existing between the everyday experiences of

the child and the isolated material supplied in such large measure
in the school. (75–76)

To bridge this chasm between school and life, Dewey advocated a method of teaching which began with the everyday experience of the child. Dewey maintained that unless the initial connection was made between school activities and the life experiences of the child, genuine learning and growth would be impossible. Nevertheless, he was careful to point out that while the familiar was the natural and meaningful place to begin learning, it was more importantly the “intellectual starting point for moving out into the unknown and not an end in itself” (Democracy and Education 212).

To further reduce the distance between school and life, Dewey urged that the school be made into an emerging social community which simplified but resembled the social life of the community at large. A society, he reasoned, is a number of people held together because they are working along common lines, in a common spirit, and with reference to common aims. The common needs and aims demand a growing interchange of thought and growing unity of sympathetic feeling. The tragic weakness of the schools of his time was that they were endeavoring “to prepare future members of the social order in a medium in which the conditions of the social spirit [were] eminently wanting” (Democracy and Education 14–15).

Consequently, Dewey affirmed his fundamental belief in the two-sidedness of the educational process. Neither the psychological nor the sociological purpose of education could be neglected if erroneous results were not to follow. To isolate the school from life was to cut students off from the psychological ties which make learning meaningful; not to provide a school environment which prepared students for life in society was to waste

the resources of the school as a socializing institution. Film functions as one of the best reflective mirrors of society therefore to integrate film into the fabric of learning in a classroom is essential in order to bridge the gap between the theories that are being taught, and the realities that are being lived. The following lesson plan examines the use of selected films in a composition classroom in order to create a better understanding of the role of society for the students.

Analyzing and Evaluating Films

Judging by the number of top ten lists you can find and the range of film critics consider exceptional, the criteria for what makes a great movie must be somewhat subjective. Some critics favor art films or foreign cinema, while others champion blockbuster epics. Still, there must be something about a film that allows it to stand the test of time and take its place among the best. In general, films may excel in three ways: First, it may be a technical masterpiece, incorporating innovative effects or cinematography that sets it apart. Second, it might stand out for the story it tells, offering a narrative that compels and grabs the audiences' attention more than others. Third, it may stand out for the acting and emotional intensity delivered by the cast.

Sample Assignment: The students are asked to consider the films they have seen in the past year, and select the movie that they feel deserves to be counted as one of the best. They will write the first essay analyzing their choice, offering concrete reasoning as to why their selection is one of the best. The second part of the assignment will ask the students to choose a film from the list provided by the instructor, watch the film, and write a paper comparing their original choice to the second film in great details. This

assignment will bank on the contextual analysis, as one topic is compared, analyzed and linked to the next to create a foundation for a solid argument and analysis.

The following is an example of films that meet the cultural criteria:

Foreign: *Children of Heaven (Iran)*, *The Color of God (Iran)*, *Life is Beautiful (Italy)*, *Cesar and Rosalie (France)*.

American: *Schindler's List*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *The Searchers*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Love Story*, *Awakenings*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Ordinary People*, *Out of Africa*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Rain Man*, *Dead Poet Society*, *Philadelphia*.

Mapping Unknown Territories: Gender and Stories

For Dewey, learning was primarily an activity which arises from the personal experience of grappling with a problem. This concept of learning implied a theory of education far different from the dominant school practice of his day, when students passively received information that had been packaged and predigested by teachers and textbooks. Thus, Dewey argued, the schools did not provide genuine learning experiences but only an endless amassing of facts, which were fed to the students, who gave them back and soon forgot them. Dewey distinguished between the psychological and the logical organization of subject matter by comparing the learner to an explorer who maps an unknown territory. The explorer, like the learner, does not know what terrain and adventures his journey holds in store for him. He has yet to discover mountains, deserts, and water holes and to suffer fever, starvation, and other hardships. Finally, when the explorer returns from his journey, he will have a hard-won knowledge of the country he has traversed. Then, and only then, can he produce a map of the region. The map, like a textbook, is an abstraction which omits his thirst, his courage, his despairs and

triumphs—the experiences which made his journey personally meaningful. The map records only the relationships between landmarks and terrain, the logic of the features without the psychological revelations of the journey itself.

To give the map to others (as a teacher might) is to give the results of an experience, not the experience by which the map was produced and became personally meaningful to the producer. Although the logical organization of subject matter is the proper goal of learning, the logic of the subject cannot be truly meaningful to the learner without his psychological and personal involvement in exploration. Only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at hand, “seeking and finding his own way out, does he think If he cannot devise his own solution (not, of course, in isolation but in correspondence with the teacher and other pupils) and find his own way out he will not learn, not even if he can recite some correct answer with one hundred percent accuracy” (Democracy and Education 116).

Although learning experiences may be described in isolation, education for Dewey consisted in the cumulative and unending acquisition, combination, and reordering of such experiences. Just as a tree does not grow by having new branches and leaves wired to it each spring, so educational growth does not consist in mechanically adding information, skills, or even educative experiences to students in grade after grade. Rather, educational growth consists in combining past experiences with present experiences in order to receive and understand future experiences. To grow, the individual must continually reorganize and reformulate past experiences in the light of new experiences in a cohesive fashion.

Writing Projects based on Gender Identity

Arguments about the role women should play in American society have changed dramatically over the years. Until women finally gained the right to vote in 1920, feminist arguments focused mainly on gaining the right to vote. In the 1960s, a second wave of feminism was launched. Many credit this second wave to arguments voiced by feminists who claimed that in the late 1950s and 1960s women suffered heavily from a “a problem that has no name” but was ultimately derived from a cultural attitude that dictated that personal fulfillment for woman was to be found almost exclusively in the roles of dutiful housewife and mother. The following selections will expose dominant attitudes that limited what women could expect to accomplish in their lives, both here and abroad. The extent and the implications of that change are still open to debate.

Odd Girl Out: the students will select a character from the following reading list and examine how social restrictions on gender are responsible for creating, damaging, and corrupting the female protagonist in the novel.

Approved reading list: *The Edible Woman* by Margaret Atwood, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton, *Instead of You* by Constance Schraft, *The Train Home* by Susan Richards Shreve, and *Bonjour Tristesse* by Françoise Sagan.

Guidelines for teaching *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser as a lens to examine the connection between society and the individual

1- The Superficiality of Consumer Culture

So much of this novel focuses on the shallow and superficial needs of characters, major and minor, to constantly acquire more material goods and as a result, a higher representation of class. In fact, it can be easily argued that materialism, capitalism, and consumerism are the main driving forces behind the action in the novel. For example, Carrie's fascination with Chicago is not the opportunity to be close to her sister or to appreciate the arts; it is to have the opportunity to buy things. Her desire for material goods and the status that these things represent is the reason for her choice of all the men in her life (with the exception of Ames, who when Carrie interacts with she changes significantly and has deeper, less materialistic ambitions) and in terms of all the characters, is the driving force of the action. For this argumentative essay, pick one of the three related topics (materialism, capitalism, and consumerism) and discuss how they are not only major themes in "Sister Carrie," but are the driving force behind character development, action, and overall meaning.

2- The Narrator as Social Commentator

Unlike many other more traditional novels, particularly from a slightly earlier period, the narrator of *Sister Carrie* is not one to be ignored or perceived simply as the "teller" of the tale. In *Sister Carrie*, the narrator plays an important role in helping readers understanding the complexities (and innate shallowness, in many cases) of the characters. Instead of making many small statements about individual characters and their actions or mere thoughts, this narrator makes bold, sweeping statements about the culture of the novel, about the society in *Sister Carrie*, and about life in general. This is a very active

and engaging narrator—one who is prone to analyzing rather than simply relating information. For this essay, examine the role of the narrator by looking for key passages during which he (or she, for that matter) succinctly brings together the main ideas of the novel in broad statements about the society he witnesses. This might make a good comparison or compare/contrast essay with another novel of this time period in which the narrator is the “silent” teller of the tale. For this essay, you would look at the ways and differences in which the themes are relayed.

3- The Development of Carrie

When Carrie first comes to Chicago, she is a wide-eyed innocent and has little understanding of the urban landscape she encounters. Enthralled by it, she plunges headfirst into this exciting new culture and finds herself in many situations, most of them negative. Throughout all the events of the novel, one might expect that she has learned something deeper than the lessons taught by her series of life events but by the end of *Sister Carrie*, it can be easily argued that Carrie has not grown—only had experiences. For this argumentative essay on *Sister Carrie*, use the last quarter or so of the book to make the claim that Carrie, although more enriched in terms of her experiences in life is not a significantly changed character. For this character analysis essay, consider the ways her wisdom on more practical matters has grown (especially in terms of her understanding of men) while her fundamental nature has not. In your conclusion to essay, speculate on what this shallowness of character suggests, not only about Carrie herself, but about the society presented in the novel.

4- Choose one of the following quotes from the novel and analyze the connection between individual and society in-depth:

“We see man far removed from the lairs of the jungles, his innate instincts dulled by too near an approach to freewill, his freewill not sufficiently developed to replace his instincts and afford him perfect guidance. He is becoming too wise to hearken always to instincts and desires; he is still too weak to always prevail against them” (61).

“A man’s fortune or material progress is very much the same as his bodily growth. Either he is growing stronger, healthier, wiser, as the youth approaching manhood, or he is growing weaker, older, less incisive mentally, as the man approaching old age. There are no other states” (259).

“Men and women hurried by in long, shifting lines. She felt the flow of the tide of effort and interest—felt her own helplessness without quite realizing the wisp on the tide she was” (21).

“Whatever a man like Hurstwood had been in Chicago, it is very evident that he would be but an inconspicuous drop in an ocean like New York. In Chicago, whose population still ranged about 500,000, millionaires were not numerous” (232).

“In the view of a certain stratum of society of society, Carrie was comfortably established—in the eyes of a starveling, beaten by every wind and gusty sheet of rain she was safe in a halcyon harbor” (74).

“Carrie passed along the busy aisles, much affected by the remarkable displays of trinkets, dress goods, stationery, and jewelry. Each separate counter was a show place of

dazzling interest and attraction. She could not help feeling the claim of each trinket personally, and yet she did not stop” (18).

“Minnie was no companion for her sister—she was too old. Her thoughts were staid and solemnly adapted to a condition” (41).

“A man’s fortune or material progress is very much the same as his bodily growth” (259).

“She did not grow in knowledge so much as she awakened in the matter of desire” (92).

Short Sample Texts

The following section is a small collection of short texts aimed at engaging the students and creating interest in other cultures. Some of the texts are fictional and some are expository. I have created comprehension questions to for the fictional texts but the expository texts are used as starting point for analytical essays and students will write responses to the information presented and analyze their findings. Each text is followed by a series of comprehension questions which will help create a deeper understanding of textual evidence.

Fiction: The Socks

After my mom died, I felt responsible to take care of my little sister. She was cute and chubby and loved the color pink. Our dad would leave for work early in the morning and we had to get ready for school ourselves. Those were hard years for us. I always worried about my sister. She was only five so she needed my help in everything. I was a big girl then, ten years old already. Every morning, I would find my sister’s chubby feet under

the covers, and put her socks on for her. I didn't want her to get up barefoot and walk to the cold bathroom. We didn't have any carpet. The house was cold and our feet always felt chilly. We each had one pair of socks. Mine were old and ripped. Each night, dad would wash our clothes and get them ready for the next day. My sister's socks were gray and ugly. I wanted to ask dad to buy her some pink socks but he never had any money left over.

My sister was sad during those months. She missed my mother terribly and nothing I did seemed to help her. I was so busy cheering her up that I would forget to do my homework and clean our bedroom. Every night, we would eat toast with peanut butter and sometimes rice and go to bed. Dad was busy and I was tired. My sister was always sad and if anyone talked to her at school in a mean voice, she would always cry. So one day, I decided I would cheer my little sister up by giving her a present. I found a few coins under my bed, but that was not enough to buy her anything. I remembered I had saved my birthday money for a long time. When I found my little money jar, I noticed that I had eight dollars in it. I was thrilled.

The next day, after the bell rang and we left school to come home, I told her I had a surprise for her. We went to the small thrift store near our school. I told her to pick anything she wanted as long as it was not over eight dollars. She looked and looked, and paused a few times. She passed all the dolls, the plastic planes, and red fire engine toys. She passed the gum and candy section, and kept on walking. I stopped following her to give her a chance to shop in peace. A few minutes later, she walked toward me hiding something behind her, with a cute smile on her face. "Did you choose your gift?" I asked. "Yup!" she giggled. She lifted her arm and showed me the item she had carefully chosen.

She was holding a pair of pink socks, in my size. When she saw the shock on my face she said, “I don’t want your toes to be cold anymore either.” I held her and kissed her head. We ended up buying two pairs of pink socks and some cotton candy. That night in bed, our pink socks kept our feet warm while I held my little sister’s hand and thought to myself, “Thank Goodness for my little sis.”

Fiction: The Summer

The summer was long and my days were colored with heat and boredom. The village kids were either younger or older and I had no friends. I would walk around aimlessly all day and look for anthills to observe or stray dogs to pet. My sisters were all married and gone and I was the last lonely child of my older parents. Since my dad had lost his job as a roofer, we were down to eating bread and drinking water with no hopes for a better life in sight. I wished I was rich and could eat steak and cheesecake and candy. I wished we had a refrigerator full of goodies. I didn’t understand when other kids complained about their mother’s cooking when there was nothing for my mother to cook with. The taste of bread was all I could recall. Life was dark.

One day, I wandered into a garden north of our village where the entrance was unbolted and the pathway was delightful. I passed rose bushes and jasmine vines where the scent was intoxicating and the sight was breath taking. Before long, I found a substantial pool stretched out before me full of clear blue water. And floating in that pool was a large, red, ripe, delicious-looking peach. My mouth watered as I kneeled down to splash and guide the lovely fruit to a corner where I could reach it. But it moved further from me. I ran to the other side of the pool and kept on splashing, hoping the peach would float my way. But it kept on floating to the center of the large pool as if it were

taunting me; I grew tired. I laid down in the shade, at the edge of the pool and with my hand in the water fell fast asleep. I dreamed of mangos and pineapples, cream puffs and chocolate mousse cake, and full refrigerators.

When I woke up, the sun was about to set, the garden was tranquil and peaceful and the birds were resting on the branches of the oak and maple trees, watching me. I looked to the center of the pool, but my peach was gone. And suddenly, I saw right by my hand, still in the water, the ripe delicious peach tickling me. I picked it up, looked around me, and bit into its golden flesh. It was the best peach I have ever tasted in my life. I heard a cough. I looked back and behind me was an old man with a cane looking puzzled.

“What are you doing here son?” asked the old man. “I was just eating this peach I found in the pool, Sir.” I replied. “Did it taste good?” he continued. “Yes Sir, it sure did.” “Well then come and let me give you some for your family. The orchard has done well this year.” I followed him and around the corner from the large pool, I saw an enchanting peach orchard with hundreds of ripe peaches ready to be eaten. He allowed me to fill a basket for my parents and I ran all the way home to surprise them. He was a retired army colonel named Ali. He had decided to grow peaches during his retirement years, which was a childhood dream of his father. I began a friendship with him and he continued to send me home with baskets of peaches for my family. My family’s anguish ended. Mother started making peach jam, peach cobbler, peach pie and selling them to the neighbors. Each day, I would visit the thoughtful and sympathetic old man, listen to his war stories, eat lunch, and return home with a giant basket full of peaches.

The peach orchard became my playground, the old man my friend, and peaches my daily snack. His generosity allowed my parents to deal with hard times until my father found another job. Life improved drastically for my family and I found myself grateful to the kind old man who made it all possible. However, I will never forget the one peach from the pool, after my late summer nap, which tasted better than honey.

Fiction: The Last Door

Long ago, in a small Persian village, lived a family with nothing but a large house and a young daughter. The parents tended to their daughter well but they were poor and did not always have food to eat. The daughter's name was Namake. The house Namake and her family lived in was very large and they had inherited it from Namake's grandparents. But the one feature that set the house apart from all the others was the fact that the house contained eight doors. Every day at dusk, Namake had one duty: to shut each door so that no stranger could enter. Namake was very careful and took her duties very seriously. One day Namake did some extra work to help her mother and by the time the day was over, she was very tired. At dusk, her mother reminded her to go and lock all the doors and get ready for bed. Namake locked the first door, then the second, and then the third. She reluctantly continued and locked four more doors, and believed that she was done. She then went up to her bedroom and got ready for bed. She had completely forgotten to lock the eighth door. In the middle of the night, there was a loud noise in the kitchen. Namake and her parents ran downstairs to check it out. In the middle of their kitchen a giant was standing with an angry look on his face. They were all surprised. Namake thought back to that evening. She was sure she had locked all the doors. But obviously she had not. The giant said:

“When you have a guest in your house, don't you offer him anything to eat?”

“You locked seven doors and forgot the eighth Namake, go make him some food to eat.”

Namake made the giant a plate of food.

“When you have a guest in your house, don’t you offer him anything to drink?”

Mother looked at Namake and once again she got up and poured the giant a glass of milk.

“When you have a guest in your house, don’t you offer him any dessert?”

Namake couldn’t believe how demanding this giant was. But he was too huge for her to argue with him. So she got up and baked him some cookies. The giant finally looked content and full. Then he asked for a bed to sleep in. Namake knew that her parents were old and they needed their bed to sleep in. So she offered her own bed to the giant and decided to take the couch. The giant stumped upstairs and fell right to sleep. The next morning, as Namake and her parents sat down to breakfast, the giant came down. He quietly sat down at the table. Namake and her parents were wondering what kind of demand he will make now. But the giant softly said, “You people have been so good to me. You have shared your food and have given me a comfortable place to sleep. People usually run away from me because I am a giant. I am touched by your kindness. I will give you enough fortune so will never have to worry about your family. This is my way of thanking you, kind people.” Then the giant stood up reached in his large pant pocket and took out a velvet bag. He gently put the bag in front of Namake and left the house. Namake was shocked. She handed the bag to her father. He opened it and inside found twenty golden coins. The family lived happily ever after and they always remembered that they owed this good fortune to the eighth door of their house.

Expository: The Bridal Ceremony

A young bride-to-be in Iran will take part in many ceremonies before her wedding. One of the most important one which will mark the transition of the girl into a bride-to-be is the “Eyebrow” ceremony. Once a girl is engaged to be married her mother will host a large party at her house. She will invite only women to this party. All the females from the groom’s family and many female relatives from the bride’s family will participate. From a few days prior to the party, the mother with the help of her sisters and other relatives will begin food preparations. Many dishes will be cooked and a variety of pastries will be baked. On the day of the party, which is usually a lunch party, the mother will invite a professional beautician to the house. Once all the guests arrive, and the tea and fruit and pastries are served, the beautician will ask the bride to sit before a large mirror and relax. Then she will get out her tweezers and for the first time, will pluck the bride’s eyebrows. Plucking one’s eyebrow is considered a major step toward womanhood and only after a girl becomes engaged to be married, will she be given permission by her father to get her eyebrows plucked. Once her brows are beautifully shaped by the beauticians, the other guests will get up and kiss her face and congratulate her on this important milestone in her life. Lunch will be served next. Later, the guests will rest while drinking tea and enjoying some more pastries. The elder women might bring gifts and fabric for the bride-to-be. The bride will thank everyone for attending her ceremony and the party will end around 5pm. Once this ceremony is completed, the bride is one step closer to her wedding. Marriage is a very important milestone in the lives of the individuals in Iran and various ceremonies and customs are observed before a couple can get married.

Expository: The Spring Celebration

The Persians celebrate the New Year on the 20th of March each year. Their celebration is based on the start of the spring season. The tradition dates back hundred of years. Three weeks before the New Year, Persians will begin a complete spring-cleaning in their homes. Their intention is to rid their homes of any old dirt and clean everything to start a fresh new year. Two weeks prior to the New Year, Persians soak one cup of barley or lentil in water for two nights. Once the seeds begin to sprout, they are removed from the water and spread in a plate evenly. Then they are covered with a wet cloth for another two days. Once the growth is visible enough, the cloth is no longer needed.

In order to celebrate the Persian New Year, a table must be set and seven items must be placed on it. Each of the seven items represents a specific tradition and purpose for the family. The items are the plate of seeds, a flower, a clove of garlic, a cup of vinegar, a specific spice, a paste made with flour and sugar, and a few mulberries. These items are gathered on the table to bring health, prosperity, and happiness to the family. Each year, at the exact moment when the spring solstice begins, the family gathers around the table and wishes each other a happy new year. Children will receive money and toys from their parents and other family members.

Starting with the first day, and continuing for the next thirteen days, families will pay each other visits and many meals will be cooked and shared. Children must wear new clothes and shoes and will be enjoying all the activities. This a time for putting the past behind them and look into the future for opportunity and success. All schools are closed for two weeks during the time of these celebrations.

The main meal to be consumed on the first day of the New Year is rice and fish. The fish is battered and fried and is served with lemon. The rice is steamed with dill and parsley and will be served with butter. Children find this meal delicious and will enjoy many helpings. In addition, many pastries will be baked and served at various gathering. Most pastries include pistachios, honey, brown sugar and other nuts and spices. Neighbors will give and receive plates of pastries and other sweet treats. Streets will be decorated with twinkling lights and children will recite many beautiful poems to their families. The Persian New Year is joyous time for the Persian people and by celebrating it to the fullest they welcome not only the New Year, but also a new season of birth and re-growth.

Expository: Baking Bread

Bread is the main daily meal for million of people around the world. However, the manner in which bread is baked differs from one country to the next. In Iran, bread is a very important and respected food. People will never throw bread away or waste it. Children are given bread as a snack and with their daily meals. Bread is the main component of breakfast, lunch and dinner. The popular after-school snack for children is a piece of bread spread with butter and sprinkled with sugar.

The baking takes place at various local bakeries around town. A large hole is dug in the ground and cemented. In some bakeries the hole is in a specific brick wall. The hole contains fire from burning wood and coal. To prepare the dough, wheat flour is mixed with water and a pinch of salt. The dough is then rolled on large round wooden platters and placed inside the sizzling wall oven. The extreme heat and the short baking time allow the bread to be soft and fluffy on the inside and crusty on the outside. The

baking takes place three times per day at each bakery. The first batch of breads is baked at dawn each day. The second batch is baked at noontime and the last batch is baked at dusk. People line up at bakeries at these specific times to buy and enjoy the delicious fresh taste of the breads. Bread is extremely affordable to buy and families with various incomes can easily afford it. If a person finds a piece of bread on the sidewalk, they will pick it up and place it on a short wall and in the corner of the sidewalk, out of respect. No one steps on bread or discards it. Old bread is dried in the sun and made into breadcrumbs for cooking. Dried bread is dipped into sweet tea and eaten and the center dough is mixed with milk to make baby food. Bread is the core food of daily life in Iran and many other countries across the globe.

Through teaching various texts, films, cultures, and social settings, we can create a platform of learning in our courses that goes above and beyond teaching writing. We can teach our students to look carefully at the world around them and it's only then that their writing becomes a tool of understanding. They will be writing to grow.

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