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Utilization of children's viewpoint by modern Persian short story writers

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ABSTRACT

With regard to the great attention paid to the narrative point of view in the second half of the 20th century, one of the most conspicuous features of childhood and youthful vision is to concretize the incidents and the events of the stories. It is evident that the innocent view of children, who are far from the personal prejudice which the adults cannot avoid, is very different from the adults' viewpoint. This same discrepancy endows the writer with the possibility to characterize his/her personages more concretely. Moreover, the disparity between the world pictured by young characters and that of the adults may reveal many social and psychological anomalies more tangibly: those facts which do not fit into the carefree and unaffected world of children like human pains such as social injustice and inequality; evils like envy and maliciousness. But instead, children in their look at their surrounding are endowed with a camera-like precision and meticulousness, which adults have lost: the credit that families deny to their children, unaware of the fact that they are under the scrutiny of their children and often imitated by them. Thus, the writer sometimes equips himself/herself with this meek and innocent view, but lets the reader judge what happens around him/her with the same maturity and sophistication of an adult on-looker. Therefore, in this study the writers have presented ten Persian contemporary writers' deliberate utilization of children's and young adults' viewpoint in their stories and the advantage of this technique in objective delineation of the major issue of children and families in their stories.

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Introduction

To begin with the discussion of point of view, it seems appropriate to consider some of the questions Edgar V. Roberts poses to throw light on the significance of point of view. Roberts encourages the reader or the critic to bear these questions in mind when dealing with the effect the fictional element of point of view may achieve: Who is the speaker? Whether s/he is a major participant or just a minor character? What is his/her background? What is his/her relationship to the addressee, if there is any? Does s/he directly address you as if you are a listener or eavesdropper? How does the speaker (or narrator) describe various situations? Is his/her method of description uniquely a function of his/her character? How reliable is s/he as an observer? How did s/he gain the information he presents? How much does he reveal? How much does he conceal? Does s/he depend on others for his/her materials? How reliable are these other witness's testimonies? Does the narrator undergo any change, which may have affected his/her presentation of the material at present moment? Does s/he notices one kind of thing and misses others? If so, what is the thing that escapes him/her? Does s/he locate the narrator in a situation, which s/he can describe, but is not able to understand (like in "Our Little Town" or "My Porcelain Doll")? Why? Is the speaker ever confused (just as the one in "My Sister and the Spider")? Is s/he close to the action or remote from it? Does s/he show any emotional involvement in any situations? Are you as a reader sympathetic to his/her concerns or are you appalled by them? If the speaker or narrator comments on the events, how valid are his/her attitudes? To what extent is the speaker as interesting as the material s/he presents? What does the writer gain by choosing this kind of point of view? (65-7)

The presence of children and adolescent characters in the fictional works of world literature is not a new issue. Whenever there has been any discussion of narrative point of view, the critics have dealt with this issue. In this study, the main intention is to emphasize the presence of children and young adult characters in some stories and with greater care to elaborate on the numerous opportunities and advantages that the utilization of childhood vision creates for the writers. In this study, however, the focus is on some examples from the short stories of some famous contemporary Persian writers of the recent half century. The choice of these writers is determined by their deliberate use of very young characters' point of view to present the events more objectively and to highlight the sensitivity and the meekness of their vision which can reinforce the significance of seemingly trivial events.

With regard to the great attention paid to the narrative point of view, after Wayne Boothe's epoch-making book (1970) in which he elaborates on different methods of narration, and in the second half of the 20th century, the method of narration receives a remarkable significance. For instance, one of the most conspicuous features of childhood and youthful vision is to concretize the incidents and the events of the stories and to avoid the writer's direct and partial interference with the story, or his/her probable value judgments about the events, which may mar the effect of the story. It is evident that the unbiased view of children who are far from personal prejudices, which the adults cannot avoid, is very different from the adults' viewpoint. This same discrepancy endows the writer with the possibility to characterize his/her personages more concretely. Moreover, the disparity between the world pictured by young characters and

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that of the adults may reveal many social and psychological anomalies more tangibly: those facts which do not fit into the carefree and unaffected world of children as social injustice and inequality, or evils like envy and maliciousness. But instead, children in their look at their surrounding are endowed with a camera-like precision and meticulousness which adults may lack. Thus, the writer sometimes equips himself/herself with this meek and innocent view, but judges what happens around him/her with the same maturity and sophistication of an adult on-looker. Robert Scholes comment on the types of point of view that may be of some help:

For convenience we may divide the subject of fictional view point into two related parts: One dealing with the nature of the story-teller in any given fiction, the other dealing with his language. Obviously the two are not really separate. Certain kinds of narration requires certain kinds of language—Huck Finn must talk like Huck Finn—but we may consider them apart for analytical purposes. The nature of the storyteller is itself far from a simple matter. It involves such things as the extent to which he is himself a character whose personality affects our understanding of his statements, and the extent to which his view of events is limited in time and space or his ability to see into the minds of various characters. (The complication of point of view can be categorized; however, categorization of such complications and refinements are less important than the reader's awareness of many possibilities they may provide. This means being attentive to any limitations in the narrator's viewpoint. If the point of view is 'partial meaning 'biased' or imperfect or defective—the reader must make up for the limitation in an appropriate way. (15) In the following stories, it has been indeed the attempt "to make up for the limitation," whenever necessary.

There have been many informative books, like Walter Allen's *The Short Story in English*, and articles written about famous Western writers' short stories, but many of our writers' invaluable works, which can indeed rival with theirs, have remained unknown to the world literature readers. This is a pretext to introduce only few Persian stories with the focus on their utilization of children's or young adults' perception.

The selected stories which appear, not chronologically but thematically, to provide examples for these writers' utilization of children's point of view and the advantage it can serve to develop the major issues of the stories more objectively are as follow: "My Sister and the Spider" by Jalal Ale-Ahmad, "My Porcelain Doll" by Hooshang Golshiri, "With My Father's Songs" by Ali Ashraf Darvishian, "Our Little Town" by Ahmad Mahmoud, "A Block of Gold" by Shahryar Mandanipour, "Kanizoo" by Monirou Ravani Pour, "Grandmother's Stony Mirror" by Mansour Kooshan, "Brother" ("Dada") by Mohammad Kalbasi, "The Bright Bird" by Mohammad Keshavarz, "On the Way with My Son" by Ebrahim Golestan, "This Snow, This Darn Snow" by Jamal Mirsadeghi, "The Man" by Mahmoud Dolatabadi.

The Main Discussion

In the story "My Sister and the Spider" by Jalal Ale-Ahmad, the very plain and naïve language of the young narrator and his first observations are accompanied by abrupt descriptions void of unnecessary details:

It was last week that I saw it for the first time. It was in the afternoon and my brother-in-law had dropped by. When I went to bring him tea my eyes caught it. How black, huge and ugly it was and how big! One could see the wool, even far away. In the upper corner of the threshold, behind the glass, it had woven a big web which had occupied the whole triangle of the

threshold. And eight small and black balls were hanging at its sides. The poor flies. I counted the black spots when my brother-in-law was picking up some cube sugars. They were exactly eight. How come I had not seen such a big spider? I who had the number of the tiniest ant-holes...and the number of the births the mice... (163)

The abrupt beginning which does not point out to the object, gives the reader this illusion that the narrator is describing a person, but after a couple of lines, the described object, which is a spider, is specified. As Hicks and Hutchings maintain, "any description necessarily involves the describer in adopting an attitude, a stance towards the object described. This is rendered through the language, tone and structure of writing (45). Here likewise, the fragmentary statements and colloquial language endows the text with more concreteness.

The narrator's sister's cancer, which is associated with the symbol of the spider, is an unknown problem to the narrator and he has only heard the word "cancer" from the adults a few times. They are about to heal the sister traditionally and mysteriously with hot lead. They send the boy for some lead and the boy innocently looks for the affinity between his sister's illness and the lead: "Why should so much lead go to our house? I had heard that the bullets are made of lead. But we never had anything to do with rifles. Oh! Probably they wanted to have some of those weights that the heroes . . . but I burst into laughter and put the bucket down" (172). The ignorance of the child and the humor resulted from his thoughts about the lead and the real application of the lead conveys the idleness of the narrator's attempts to discover the truth. According to Sanger a "naïve, childlike view can often be used for comic effect (20). Finally, he fails to find out how the lead is supposed to be used and what is supposed to befall his sister. He only sees his weeping mother and his aunt who puts that piece of the big stuff in the corner of the kitchen. Just down the wall. It was then that I saw the shining lead...this suddenly ded me of my sister. I ran up-stairs and in the dark and light of the evening saw her lying there with the blanket under her chin, her eyes were shut and her husband had sat by her side holding his head in his hands and his back was shaking. With the noise I had made he uncovered his face and I saw that his face was wet" (178).

In the story of "My Porcelain Doll" by Hooshang Golshiri, we again witness the childish confusion and the effort of a child who tries to discover why everybody acts so secretly and mysteriously when they talk about his father and why they try to hide something from her. When Maryam fails to get anything from the scattered comments and statements of the adults, she resorts to one of her dolls and while opening her heart to the doll, mimics the adults' behavior and thus trying to visualize the confusing scenes she has seen:

Now you my midget, come forward, in front of me here so that Dad will not see me sending him kisses. Dad said. . . I do not remember what he said. Mom had taken my hand, like this. **Dad said: "My little daughter should not cry, hah. Dad is fine" (241).**

She only finds his father growing "thin" and from lines between the conversations of her mother and grandmother she finds out that his father's hair also grows thin, but she does not figure out anything about the details of her father's incurable ailment. However, she has suspected one thing from the adults' stealthy and mysterious behavior reaching the conclusion,

"I know he will not come. If he were to come, Mom would not cry. Would she? I wish you could see. No. I wish I had not seen either. Now, you imagine that you're my Mom. What shall I do that your hair is blonde? See, Mom was sitting like

this. Gather your feet. And put your hands on your forehead. No, you cannot. Her shoulders were shaking like this.” (239)

Maryam, who has only experienced death through the death of her grandfather, associates the breaking of her porcelain doll by her cousin with the death of her grandfather and with her grandmother's inability to stand on her feet the same way that her doll's legs were broken. But evidently, she has no concept of politics and political “crimes” for which her father is in jail now. She only sees that when they go to visit her father, the mother and uncle tell her to tell that “guy,” “I want my daddy;” or she overhears her father asking her mother to wipe her tears in front of Maryam; or the father insists on the mother's controlling herself not to cry in front of these people or not to entreat them (241). The security authorities apparently mean to persuade the father to express his remorse through the influence of his family, but the father does not yield and thus has to put up with a long imprisonment. But why the family is so anxious and why everybody cries and why in the time of visit they go through physical inspection, is what Maryam does not “understand.” She only parrot-like repeats their words for her midget doll, which is supposed to play the role of different people simultaneously, and thus the reader can put the pieces together and complete the plot of the story. Later Maryam also likens her father's visage to her porcelain doll which is indicative of the sudden change of the father due to his probable tortures and pains he has gone through: “. . . Dad was not like Dad, he was like the porcelain doll, when silly Mehri broke it. His face was somehow weird” (249). The above case verifies Michael Toolan's comment about the utilization of point of view. The rendering of character-oriented perceptions in SP (substitutionary perceptions) passages often amount to a specific sub-variety of free indirect discourse, in which the character's sense impressions are registered, prior to any elaborate interpretational processing by that character. SP passages with functional progressive forms are a major mean of effecting temporary narratorial alignment with a character in which that character's viewpoint is promoted while the narrator's viewpoint is muted. As one commentator has put it:

By locating descriptive details within the perceptual apparatus of a character, the reader makes them serve no longer simply as residual signs of the ‘real’, but as marks and measures of human consciousness. The notion of ‘substitutionary perceptions,’ in other words, is a principal strategy for organizing a text according to limited points of view. (Mc Hale 278) [Toolan12]

Thus, Golshiri, without marring the plausibility of the story, narrates the bitter story of the father's death from the standpoint of a child-narrator Maryam. Through the same seemingly inadequate view, the reader may penetrate the very intricate relationship between other characters more concretely and tangibly. In fact, the nature of the story persuades the reader to deal with the story with a higher precision in relation to the very same inadequate details and to fill up the pauses and the gaps of the story.

The same point can be detected in the story “With My Father's Songs” written by Ali Ashraf Darvishian. The story is imbued with the pain and suffering of a poor family that is supported by the father who works in a casting workshop. But the combustion of the furnace kills Eissa, the young friend of the narrator, and blinds his father too. Although the child-narrator describes the characters with his childish meekness and cannot analyze them the way a mature narrator would, the reader can penetrate the truth of the characters through the same simple sentences, which tend to give information rather than to analyze,

through the same simple sentences, which tend to give information rather than analysis. The narrator describes the owner of the workshop thus:

All of us work for Agha Ghasem. They call him Chavkar Ghasem because under his eye is black and this is his name from the time he was a hooligan and a rogue. Once the town is on a riot and he and a few other hooligans stab a teacher and writer. After that he becomes rich and well-to-do. The casting workshop belongs to him. He has two diesels and a truck. He owns a big coffee-house and a gambling house too. The Straw uncle says, “Ghasem Chavkar goes on a pilgrimage to Mecca, but it is not worth a straw.” (526) Of course, the narrator does not understand why his pilgrimage “is not worth a straw,” but when he himself is faced with his vice and evil, he comes to abhor Ghasem too. After the death of Eissa and the blindness of his father due to the combustion of the furnace, the narrator tells us “Ghasem Chavkar had stood there, had put his hands on his hips, gazed at the ruined furnace and cursed. He cursed Eissa and my father and that disgusted me more than ever” (530).

However, nowhere in the story do we find the narrator complain about his plight or his family's poverty, the indifference of the passers by and the horrible gap between the poor and the wealthy as if these very circumstances seem very natural to him. Only from his expression of his childish desires, the reader comes to touch his misery poignantly: “One day we eat bread and cucumbers. One day we have bread and dates and I pray to God that Dad could buy a mouthful of kebab. When we have kebab, we are all happy” (527).

In the short story “Our Little Town” by Ahmad Mahmoud, we are confronted with the social problems and human suffering in a different way: the clash between industrial, mechanical and urban life, on the one hand, and simple, native, and pastoral life, on the other, which is exposed to the destruction by the industrialized life. In this story, we observe the destructive effect of industrial “developments” at the price of the destruction of the environment and the virgin landscape of the countryside, which is the source of living for its native inhabitants in the South of Iran. In this story, the writer shows the influence of this destruction on his mind in his childhood when he actually experienced it without engaging his present mature perspective; in this way, he stands aside and leaves the judgment to the audience. It is evident that the mental maturity of the writer is reflected in his mature style and we come across statements which cannot emanate from the mind of a child. But the writer concretizes the events through this method and through the reflection of the immediate impressions of his childhood. The yesterday childish view and the today mature tone of the writer can beautifully handle the representation of the contrast posed at the beginning of this discussion. The very unfortunate changes that oil industry brings and the subsequent impacts imposed on the ecology are more acutely visualized when we go through the descriptions of the child-narrator with no logical reasoning or even any partial effort on his part to seek the causes of such changes:

One warm summer morning, they came with axes to cut the tall palm trees. When the sun rose, we came out of our houses and sat in the shade of the clay walls and watched them. Every time that a tall tree with spear-like entangled and dusty leaves was rooted out and sawed the air with its rustling crush and sprawled on the ground, we shouted a hurrah and ran until the dust of the boughs and leaves was settled. We used to pillage the unripe dates and the shaking chicks of the sparrows whose nests had fallen into pieces; then when we did so a few times, the foreman took off his mat cap and chased us with a rod. That was

why we would sit next to the elderly people in the shade of the clay walls and squeezed the trembling chicks in our fists and looked at them broodingly when the palm grove behind our house was emptied of its shade and the trunks of palms were piled over and when it was evening from the back of the clay walls of our house to the dark and damp sands of the beach of the ver, was converted to a field which was just fit for riding and I wished I could unfasten Sheikh Shoaib's horse, which was fastened there last night, and gallop to the bank of the river. (307)

Naturally, the reader can recognize the difference between this style and a childish language. The lexicon, the descriptions and imagery cannot belong to a rural child-narrator, but the tone of the narrator, who carefree and unconcerned with the consequences of these changes, is thrilled by the pursuit and escape of the foreman and the children and wishes to ride frenzily in this destitute place, which reminds one of a battlefield, all and all represent a childish perspective and ecstasy. Moreover, between the lines, the reader can doubly feel the catastrophic destruction of palm trees which score the sky—the trees whose unripe fruit is the main source of living of the native people—, the annihilation of the nests of the birds which precedes the complete destruction of natural environment, and the children's brooding over their neighborhood being "emptied" of the shades of these eloquently tall trees.

Yet the tragedy does not end here. The penetration of the oil into the soil and the sand of the area and the pollution of the soil with the smell of oil and the water with spots of oil smears the face of the virgin village: "The fresh oil shimmered under the hot sun and evaporated" and "everywhere smelt of oil. . . now the sand had sucked the oil and the earth was dry and when the wind blew, it blew around the yellow dust in the air; down the clay walls, brownish dust had gathered and in the time of ebb and flow of the river, water flew into the branches of the palm grove; then the surface of the water just like rainbow, turned violet, yellow and red and. . ." (309).

Thus in the atmosphere of the village "the bitter aroma of the palm grove did not fuse the scent of humidity" and instead of the tall palm trees, "the shadow of the tall rig which had pierced the blue pattern of the sky" vexed one's eyes and "the strings of wire is what attract your eyes and make your eyes water as if the cold bodkin of kohl [the black powder that anoints the eyes] has touched your eye" (309-10). The child-narrator startlingly leaps from his sleep with the "rending roar of the trucks" and sits in the shade of the wall to watch "the blue-suited workers with white iron caskets which reflect the sun" (312):

Now a sugar-color brick wall had cut us off from the river and the yellow wound of the oil field behind our house had oozed into the lanes and the asphalt covered pipes, just like a pair of male and female snakes, had crawled from the far-off palms into our area. . . I imagined that the field was starved and has opened its oily mouth to swallow the whole town gradually" (312).

In this way tranquility deserts the village and people's protestation cannot do any good to stop this sudden aggression. The very vivid images and comparison of the oil-sucking earth to a "yellow wound" and the oil pipes to two male and female snakes cannot emanate from a child's imagination; this is the tone with which the writer-narrator has endowed the text of the story. But Ahmad Mahmoud reflects the feeling of the child-narrator and the inhabitants of this area who believe "they mean to ruin the houses. . . they say they want more land for the office" (312). He also reflects people's sympathy with fellows like Norouz who has been arrested because of his protestation

against the destruction of people's houses. Yet the story still preserves its natural state which is the child-narrator's confusion with and ignorance of the depth of the tragedy which has befallen their life and their natural environment.

Shahryar Mandani Pour also in his story "A Block of Gold" benefits from this childhood perspective skillfully in order to reveal the childish world imbued with illusions, fear, hope and innocence. The narrator starts with his description of the superstitious illusion and apprehension of the "kidnapper" and transfers this fear to others like the neighboring girl to the extent that she is also worried about her little doll which she considers her child in her childish world. The narrator's father is apparently the gardener of a wealthy family who lives in the very humble house in the corner of their magnificent mansion. The narrator hides the doll in the greenhouse to protect it from the "kidnapper." Throughout the story, the narrator mixes his aspirations with the tales he has heard from the adults. The story of Solomon's ring, that can materialize the wishes of whoever owns it, and the story of a man who found access to this ring and could possess a beautiful palace, whose walls were made of one gold block and one silver one, link with the narrator's wish that when the master's daughters grow up, he can own their bicycles. However, he is not aware of the fact that when the girls grow up, he will also grow up and the bicycles will be no more enchanting him as they do now.

Poverty causes the father to count a few balloons and send the narrator to the parks to earn a few more pennies; in the park he becomes involved with some other sellers who consider that area their own "realm"; they harass him for intruding on their territory. Yet the narrator does not abandon daydreaming despite experiencing too much trouble and his observing the gorgeous and extravagant life of the twin daughters of the master Shabnam and Shabbou. He never speculates the cause of his poverty and such a deep gap between himself and these two girls. The childish meekness with the childhood embellishments occupy him so much that he overlooks the shortcomings indifferently with the same very childish generosity and dignity. His sensuous descriptions of the very good smell of the master's various foods and the brilliance of the various colors he watches from afar endows the story with concreteness and the child's extreme innocence which does not allow him to envy so much affluence. He describes one of the scenes of the feasts held at their master's magnificent mansion: A lot of people went and sat on the lawn where [the servants] had spread a long tablecloth (sofreh); how big, I cannot tell. In the middle, there were barbecued lambs, chickens, rice and various kinds of dish and colorful sherbets in beautiful jugs. (89)

We see the same contrast between the innocent view of children, on the one hand, and the adults' sophistication, on the other, has been a pretext or device for the alert writers not only to represent the social-class distinctions, but also to sincerely visualize the complex and undistorted imaginative world of children and their susceptibility to their surroundings, like family and society, with the minimum distortion or partial interference.

James H. Norton holds the notion that in the selection of a child's viewpoint like that of Huckleberry Finn, the reader comes to see the difference between the author and the hero (Huck). The writer can see the narrator's limitation, but he can also see the sense in what (the narrator) is saying. The result is that the author's point of view is more subtle than the child-narrator.

This is the chief source of emotion (sympathy) . . . (292).

This device contributes to the aggrandization of the prominent problems ruling the adult world and to the revelation of their explicit and implicit relations based on vice, depravity, injustice, envy and jealousy. The adults' nonchalant reaction to the children's pure feelings and curiosity and its negative impact on the children's psyche is one of those themes which endows the children's sensitivity and responsibility a double credit and ironically makes the adults seem petty and mean indeed.

Monirou Ravani Pour in her thought-provoking story "Kanizoo" deals with the sharp contrast between innocence and sin to the point that at the end of the story one wonders if s/he should redefine these two terms so that his/her judgment will fit into and harmonize with the experience of the story. The story is about the relationship between the very young narrator and a woman named Kanizoo who is appalled by the neighboring residents since they consider her "unchaste" and dishonorable. But Maryam, from whose eyes the events are presented to us, has not yet experienced anything other than love and "goodness" from her. On the contrary, she witnesses the vicious treatment of wanton men and the horrible judgment of her own mother about Kanizoo. She has been many times punished for visiting and speaking to Kanizoo; Maryam is also willing to pay Kanizoo the very humble sum of money she has saved so that she will not be forced to yield to prostitution just for a "couple tomans."

The shocking event occurs when one day Maryam witnesses a few drunkards dragging Kanizoo's corpse here and there and uttering some obscene statements whose meaning Maryam does not understand; even after her death they continue to humiliate and flout Kanizoo. Kanizoo has committed suicide. Maryam who cannot bear this savage treatment showers them with curses. The scene of Kanizoo's corpse being dragged brutally reveals the savagery of the society in which Kanizoo has been driven to corruption; she was abused when she was alive and is abused now that she is dead. The innocent view of the narrator can be related to the symbolic affinity between Kanizoo's eyes and those of a deer which Maryam owned before they migrated to the city from their village. Ravani Pour seems to bitterly criticize those who create Kanizoo's and then crush them: those who consider themselves "saints" and people like Kanizoo "devils." Only a pure nature like that of Maryam can discover innocence in the apparently "vicious" being of Kanizoo's.

Similarly, Mansoor Kooshan in the story "Grandmother's Stony Mirror" intricately employs the viewpoint and the language of a child-narrator representing hostility and envy of a mother-in-law toward her daughter-in-law, the narrator's mother. This hostile relationship never appears as enmity to the narrator, because she is far from such sentiments and it never crosses her mind that her grandmother so maliciously abhors her daughter-in-law; she cannot find any reason for hostility at all. Therefore, all the findings of the reader are achieved through the child-narrator who has no slightest suspicion of her grandmother's sinister feelings toward her mother. The grandmother, who is jealous of her son's extreme love for his young beautiful wife, derives her daughter-in-law toward suicide by constantly trying to manipulate her son and torturing his wife. What makes the narrative technique truly appealing is the revelation of the obnoxious character of the grandmother and her sickly relation with her son and daughter-in-law through the viewpoint quite alien with such evil. Yet the reader manages to elicit the truth through the girl's parrot-like account of her observations: the child's innocence magnifies the appalling nature of the grandmother. At the end, the narrator mourns for her mother's death in absolute ignorance of the reason of her

death. This arouses the reader's feelings as Norton earlier commented (292).

Mohammad Kalbasi in the story "Brother" ("Dada" in local dialect) pictures a similarly sick relationship between the elderly brother Mashallah, the narrator's father, and the smaller brother, the narrator's uncle, who is called "Dada" by everyone. Here too the writer narrates the memories of his childhood and his father's violent treatment of his handicapped uncle; but the reader witnesses the events the way they occurred in his childhood. The language is a simple and report-like language with short sentences. Except for the first paragraph, the rest of the story is narrated through the tone of a five-year-old child: "Mashallah and Talaat had gone to the desert. Granny and Belgheis were shaking the big goat-skin bag. It was hard. It was heavy. The wind was blowing. There was dust outside. But granny and Belgheis felt warm. Drops of sweat were trickling down the few hairs hanging from the granny's chin. . . Belgheis gazed at me with my red whistled-dummy hanging from my neck. I did not suck the dummy too often. But I did not leave it either" (234). From the scattered sentences of the narrator, the reader can discover the relations. Mashallah, the narrator's father, has two wives Talaat and Belgheis; Talaat is the narrator's mother who seeks pretext to fight with her rival and goads her husband into punishing Belgheis. She also constantly provokes her husband against Dada and Mashallah does not hesitate to beat his brother who can only walk by dragging his leg on the ground. The father believes that Dada is a hanger-on and intentionally malingers and pretends that he is lame in order not to work and just spend his time idly. Mashallah reproaches Dada that "this big bear eats more than [he] does" and after the death of his donkey, he wishes that Dada had died instead (238). Eventually Dada comes to this conclusion that he is "an extra member here" and is badly unwanted (239). One day, just right in front of the eyes of his nephew, the narrator, who thinks that Dada imitates his dummy's string always hanging his neck, Dada fastens a rope around his neck and hangs himself. Since Dada is given to epilepsy and often faints, especially when he is beaten by the brother, the narrator takes his hanging scene and his wriggling and trembling body as a usual habit. The narrator's description of this horrible scene still reminds us of the brutality of the brother: His feet were trembling exactly the same way he was beaten by Mashallah and white foam trickled down his mouth. Just like the foam of soap which hangs in the air. The white line of soap . . . ; it grew dark and Dada was still hanging in the air swinging. It rotated . . . ; it grew crowded. They brought lanterns with them" (240).

Contrary to the narrator's tone in the above passage, the last statements convert to the mature tone of the adult narrator: "the buttons of the leaves had sprouted on the wood of the tree" (240). Keith Sanger tells us about the way an author chooses a child's viewpoint and as the story proceeds and the main character 'grows up', so does the writing mature: "The early passages try to recreate the language of a very young child and by the close we get a sense of an adult point of view" (1998, 19). Now after these years, the narrator comes to see his father's very unfair treatment of his uncle. He eternalizes Dada's innocence in his story, but for concretizing the events and keeping himself aloof from probable judgments, the writer-narrator prefers to preserve the same childlike look towards the event which has been as if sealed on his consciousness and is still baffling him—an event which he was not able to assimilate when he was too little and immature. Cleanth Brooks et al have confirmed the effect that such a point of view achieves when "the story is written with a full range of sophisticated literary

effects, presumably long after the event, when the narrator has grown up, become a writer of achievement, and has passed through experiences of adult manhood. In such cases, the reader has to consider the significance that the childhood event now has for the man" (127).

Another story which is indicative of human suffering is the story of "the Bright Bird" by Mohammad Keshavarz. The protagonist of this story, contrary to other characters dealt with so far is not ignorant, but he is much more aware of the impending events. In fact, the reader is amazed and awakened into some deep insight into the deep problem of an adolescent character who has to bear a heavy burden precociously—a burden under which even the adults will be bent and broken, let alone a young boy.

The narrator's very same awareness of the on-going events causes him not to present any additional explanation about what is in perspective; this device doubles the shock of the final blow that the reader receives. This is verified by Jamal Mirsadeghi, who believes the choice of point of view has a bearing on other elements of the story, namely characterization, plot development, style and the texture of speech, radical changes of the story or of the characters, the setting and particularly the focus of the story (240). Throughout the narration, we come to discover that the narrator's mother, who is dearly loved by his father, has lost her children in the air-raids of Iraqi forces and has lost her wits. Despite the very care of the father and the narrator, the mother sneaks out of the house, wanders in the streets to seek her lost children, and is thus mocked by the street kids; this baffles the father obsessively. He cannot bear this disgrace and humiliation of gathering his suffering mad wife from the streets. He tries to seek a way out. These details are what we get from the boy's narration, but what solution the father seeks and what his final decision is remains a mystery for the reader.

Thus the story starts with the mother's escape and the father's attempt to tame her. The father asks the narrator to entertain her with her favorite bird which is fastened to a piece of string. The horror that the reader finally receives is the result of this truth that the only solution left to the father is to murder his wife and cease to undergo the pain of her being ridiculed; he also means to end her eternal search for her children. The young son has indispensably to participate in this strange and torturous operation. Therefore, at night, they take the woman to the desert and a deep well so that the father with a very sharp knife he has recently bought can rid her from this disastrous life and throw her in the well. Of course, what makes this scene poignantly painful is that according to the limited understanding of the father, this action is done paradoxically not out of hatred and impatience but out of extreme love and sense of honor. But in the absolute darkness and the breath-taking struggle of the father and son to tame and distract the mother, due to too much darkness and the father's own negligence, the father is ironically assaulted by the mother and he falls into the deep well. In the end, the boy not only loses his only support, but also remains alone with an insane and sick mother. The discovery of this truth occurs in the last moments of the story which intensifies the sense of suspension and the unexpected; the sudden resolution makes the story shocking and the pain of the boy-narrator tenfolded tangible.

The story "On the Way with My Son" by Ebrahim Golestan is one of the most representative in this present collection which juxtaposes two opposite consciousnesses of a father and his son. However, the narrator is the father and the writer entrusts the narration to him who is "not only limited and prejudiced but

pretends to neither omniscience nor omni-communicativeness" (Kermode, 141). The rewarding effect for the author is that this device highlights the child's standpoint and emotional responses.

The story is seemingly far from any physical or exciting incident: A father and his son take a trip, due to a flat tire they have to walk a couple of miles, they have lunch together and wait for a truck to go to the parking place and repair the tire. Meanwhile, they reach an arena-like place with a man performing interesting activities to display his physical power, a "marekehgir." The coming show preoccupies the mind of the nine-year-old boy so much that he prefers to stay and watch the show instead of accompanying his father. First the father severely opposes the boy, but finally consents to his staying there until he repairs the car and takes the son with him. He also gives him a few pennies to donate to the marekehgir. Then he goes to the parking place with the truck driver, changes the tire, and returns to take his son home.

The most attractive aspect of the story in this simple process of the events is the dialogues of the son and father. The father from the beginning responds to his son's questions sarcastically, gives him answers which do not convince the son and only adds to his confusion. The father narrates the story:

"What has got into it?"

I said: "Donkey's hoof. How do I know?"

He said: "Where is a donkey in the desert?"

I said: "There is one whose hoof will stick to our tire."

Then I turned to the tire. It was deflated on the ground. My son came to me

and slightly hit the tire with his small foot.

He said: "It is punctured."

I said: "You've progressed a lot." (189)

This unkind tone accompanied with the up-in-the-air answers of the father like "When you grow up, you will find out what it means" or "when you grow up" do this or that disappoint the son further to the point that the child loses his patience and retorts, "Oh! Whatever I want is delayed to when I grow up. I want it now." Even when the father brings up a point (like the reason for the presence of a hill in the middle of a destitute desert), his replies are so irrational and indifferent that the boy is left in confusion and curiosity and is accused of "chattering like a bird." Even later, the father describes his son as a "chatterbox" for the truck driver, who has no child and envies such an intelligent and lively son. This game drags on and leads to the son's impatience; he again complains angrily that "You are constantly teasing me, Dad" (193).

Thus, the father does not feel any responsibility toward his son's sensibilities and natural demands. Even when they walk together, the boy suddenly shows an interest to have a running contest with him; the father first thinks about losing to him, but then he harbors at this conclusion "to renounce the natural outcome of this contest will have unpleasant consequences" (194). Whereas, we find out from the boy's talks that the mother in similar cases loses to her son: "But I overrun my Mom" (195). Moreover, instead of encouraging the son, the father who does not understand the need of the son for being a "hero," with a waywardly obstinacy leaves the son more disappointed than ever. He declares that he wants to be the champion of truck-and-field races and when he feels the father's scrupulousness, while he is throwing stones here and there, answers with the same stubbornness, "I want to be a champion. You are not Dad, But I want to be one" (195). In the next scene, when the boy is eager to follow the performance of the marekehgir in front of the inn, the father disagrees with him and the boy again achieves what

he wants with persistence. The father calls him a “half-way comrade,” an expression whose meaning remains equivocal for the boy due to the father’s carelessness to clarify his points for his son.

But in this opposition, the clever boy displays an extraordinary acquisition and sometimes the reader gets the feeling that the boy displays much more maturity than the father does. Consequently, psychologically, the boy absorbs and imitates the father’s own method and model of behavior; at the end of the story, in the long dialogues of the son and father, this is the son who with equivocal answers disappoints the father and leaves the father thirsty with curiosity and deprives him of a clear answer. The father is curious to know what has happened in his absence and what the *marekehgir* has performed, but the son responds to the father the same way he responded to him at the beginning of the story and “teases” the father:

I said: “Gaborgeh”

He answered: “Ha?”

I said: “Gaborgeh—that iron rod which is like a bow.”

He said: “Well?”

I asked: “Did he take it?”

He asked: “From whom?”

I said: “It seems you don’t feel like answering?”

He said: “It is as if you seek a quarrel?” (206)

The story, besides dealing with the conflict between the father and son, focuses on the conflict between the child and the adult world. In the story, we witness that it is not just the father who is inattentive to his son’s needs and demands, but the boy has a similar experience in his confrontation with the *marekehgir*. It was mentioned before that the father gives some money to the boy to donate it as a tip to the *marekehgir* after his performance. When at the end the boy wishes that he had bought some chewing gum, the father asks him the reason why he did not do so. The boy tells him what happened:

He said: “I did not have any money.”

I said: “I had given you some money.”

He said: “I threw whatever I had on the man’s rug.”

I said: “Didn’t I tell you? When you saw that they do not do anything, why did you pay them?”

He said: “He was running. They were also playing their drum and trumpet.

I thought this is what the show means.” (207)

The boy’s report shows that when the boy is disappointed with the man’s “extraordinary” activities and the man just keeps running, the boy throws all his money to encourage him to do something attractive, but he declares to the trumpeter, “Enough, I am exhausted” (207). He takes the boy’s money and ends the “show.” The boy, who has been gazing at him amazingly, confronts the rude reaction of the man: “What do you want? Get out of here!” The boy says “It seemed as if he were seeking a quarrel. He sought trouble. I went aside and sat there till you came” (207). The boy’s interpretation of the man’s reaction is not unlike his reaction to his father’s response. All that curiosity and eagerness towards the man’s “artistic show” is terribly disappointed the same way that he is crestfallen when he experiences his father’s treatment.

Even more interesting is that the father, despite his confrontation with the truck-driver, who desires to have a son like the boy, does not undergo any change. In the scene following this confrontation, the boy wishes to have had some money to buy some chewing gum, but the father remains indifferent to his wish; he even complains of thirst and the father, instead of buying him some drink, immediately interrupts

him “We are going to get home soon”(208). This thirst may even symbolize the boy’s thirst for attention which is never satiated. Therefore, the experience of going on a trip with the father seems to be more of frustration than of pleasure. The father also unwittingly transfers his own insensitivity to his son who may apply the same behavioral pattern for his own children in the future.

Hence, it is evident that contemporary writers like Mahmoud Dolatabadi in “The Man” and Jamal Mirsadeghi in “This Snow, This Darn Snow,” employ the theme of growth and maturity of the adolescent characters in their stories.

The adolescent character of the story “The Man” is Zolghadr whose father, in extreme poverty, has been addicted to drugs and whose mother has an affair with a butcher. The parents have abandoned their children, Mahroo, Jamal and Zolghadr carelessly. First he innocently pities his mother and father and means to help them somehow to get back into the bosom of the family, but he finally overcomes his feeling since he can see that the mother does not deserve their motherhood: “Her eyes are not pure anymore, nor her hands; her breath is not clean, her tears are not pure . . . she should not caress Mahroo’s cheeks. She should not brush aside Jamal’s hair from his forehead” (813-14). This is the way that Zolghadr gradually comes to realize their irresponsibility and recognizes that he should not invest any hope in their support and affection; he realizes that he should somehow collect his brother and sister, support them and rid them of this miserable life. At the end of the story, we see him wearing his father’s vest and thus taking upon himself the responsibility the father has abandoned. Thus, Zolghadr, who is himself still a very young man and thirsty for love and attention, has to bear a heavy burden before his time. After wearing his father’s vest, he feels like a man: “How big he seemed! He felt his shoulders had widened, he had grown taller and some hair had grown above his lips . . . he did not imagine. This was not his fancy at all. It should not be his fancy! He looked around. His brother and sister looked smaller than ever. Much smaller. As if they were his kids” (818). Then he reminds his sister that she should only think about school; he passes by his father, wandering in the street, just like a stranger because he is quite determined to stand on his feet. He takes strides “longer than before” with this decision to wipe out this disgrace of such irresponsible parents from the family.

In the story “This snow, This Darn Snow” by Jamal Mirsadeghi, the protagonist, a fourteen-year-old teenager, achieves an epiphany which is so deeply imprinted on his mind that when even now he remembers those days, he is disgusted with himself. He is involved in a mean job which requires “boldness” and “lewdness.” He works at a butcher’s shop and is encouraged by his master to follow the creditors, who for some reason have not been able to pay their debts, and by making a disgraceful scene obliges them to pay their debts. He has learnt from his master that people do not pay their money because they are “hangers-on”; therefore wherever the boy has an access to these “parasitic creditors,” he does not hesitate to disgrace them; he pursues them just as a hunter follows his victims and does not leave them alone till he makes them bend to his will.

In one of such cases, the victim is a young charming woman who manages to get rid of the boy. His master accuses him of “clumsiness” and the boy is terribly offended by such an accusation; thus he decides to catch the woman and force her to pay her debt. All throughout his struggle with the woman, the master’s voice echoes in his ears that “You clumsy boy, how did you let her run away. . .” and this makes him more determined to defeat the woman. In this struggle, the woman who is very

much concerned with her reputation and honor in the district, starts to fight with the boy with teeth and claws and the boy by making a disgraceful scene gathers people around them. This exasperates the woman highly who exactly meant to avoid such a scene and the consequent scandal. In the struggle, the bundle which the woman carries with her is unfastened and scattered around. The boy with an unbelievable wonder finds out that the bundle contains the leftover bones which his master had thrown away for the dogs. The boy says, "I could see how the woman bent like a candle, how she bowed and finally knelt in front of the bones while tears washed her face" (339). All of a sudden, the boy, as if awakened from a long sleep, experiences a case which contradicts all of his master's claims. This woman is not a parasite or "hanger-on," but an honorable yet desperate woman who could not indeed afford to pay her debt.

Contrary to the previous cases where he never showed any mercy, this time that he actually discovers the nature of poverty, his youthful innocence and leniency—which had turned defunct in him in his association with a blood-sucker like his master—take over his passion. The mean job which requires "boldness" and vice cannot overshadow his innocence; he feels unaccountably ashamed of his behavior with the woman. He is first acquainted with the woman's modesty and with her desperation and gets a new and different picture of those miserable creditors who owe his master money. This causes him to be "disgusted" with that job and with himself after so many years. The character reaches the point of epiphany which, Reid quoting Theodore Stroud's definition, is the moment "at which the character undergoes some decisive change in attitude or understanding" (56).

At the beginning of the story, the narrator who narrates the story for an unidentified addressee, declares his judgment: "It was a disgusting job; it required boldness, lewdness, obstinacy. It was a dirty job. Now that I think about it, it makes me feel disgusted. But it was the only job whose ups and downs and tricks I had learnt well and had tested all its ways. That was why my master was really fond of me" (329). After this experience, he finds out the reason for the master's interest. He ashamedly tries to compensate for the past and to put his conscience at ease somehow: "I ran forward. I stopped groaning. I ran and started to collect the bones. Each piece was thrown at a corner. How I abhorred the crowd who had gathered around us and how I loathed myself . . . I did not understand what happened; suddenly I found myself running under the snow and crying. This darn snow. . . (339). For the first time, he understands the meaning of poverty and abomination is replaced by the pleasure he gained from his previous false "smartness and cunningness" encouraged by his master, who is a vile model for him.

Conclusion

To sum up, the above instances are only a few examples of unlimited possibilities which the childhood and young adulthood visions provide for our contemporary writers, each of whom has deliberately benefited from the wide scope of implementation of such a point of view. This technique has enabled modern Persian writers to present the characters more concretely and to reveal the social and psychological anomalies associated with the adult and experienced world. Thus they have created admirable and praiseworthy stories which can indeed rival with many short stories of the great world fiction writers. Moreover, their concern with the pure and uncontaminated world of children conveys their nostalgia for the loss of childhood and their preoccupation with the young characters' neglected susceptibility, concerns and demands.*

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