
The Ethnicity of the Implied Author and the Implied Reader in Multicultural Children's Literature

Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar

Abstract

Cultural accuracy and authenticity in children's literature have long been the subject of stirred literary debates. For some, books about a specific cultural group are only considered the most accurate and authentic when written by insiders. Others believe that outsiders who become intimately familiar with the nuances of a culture might depict an accurate and authentic experience of that culture. Examining young adult novels about Persian culture authored by American writers, I have found that my interpretation as a reader and a Persian culture insider may differ from that of other scholars in the field. Within this paper, I study two historical fictions: Meghan Nuttall Sayres' *Anahita's Woven Riddle* (2006) and *Night Letter* (2012). Although Sayres is from the USA, her books authentically and accurately portray Persian literature and culture. Examining these two books with the lens of narrative theory, I argue that two concepts of the implied author and the implied reader add insights into the discussions of cultural accuracy and authenticity. This effort is to share a case study that might lead if not to consensus, then to a shift in our approach, a move toward more accurate and authentic authorship.

Keywords: implied author; implied reader; young adult historical fiction; narrative theory; insider-outsider; Persian

Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar

Taraneh Matloob is Assistant Professor at the University of Northern Iowa. She embraces teaching multicultural children's literature as a viable way to promote culturally inclusive pedagogies in teacher education. Most recently she has published articles in the *Journal of Educational Technology Systems* and *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*.

Introduction

Discussion of culture in children's literature tends to evoke controversy around questions of accuracy and authenticity (Fox & Short, 2003; Mo & Shen, 2003; Mendoza & Reese, 2001). While multicultural scholars and educators strive to provide children with accurate and authentic books, their varying perspectives of cultural accuracy and authenticity may detract from their promoting such literature. Within this paper, I seek to add nuance to the critical conversation about questions of accuracy and authenticity through analyzing two narrative elements: the implied author and the implied reader. More specifically, I examine how these two narrative elements are used to qualify a book as multicultural. In so doing, I argue that outsiders can be seen as credible authors of a culture different from their own if they can incorporate the two narrative elements of the implied author and the implied reader successfully and skillfully enough.

It is critical to acknowledge that there are controversies over implied authorship. As Lanser indicates (2001, p. 153), the dilemma is that the implied author is everywhere and at the same time nowhere. To examine the effectiveness and utility of the concept of the implied author it is important to remember that advocates and opponents analyze the notion from many different positions. For the present study, both concepts of the implied author and reader seem beneficial in exploring the multitude of potential meanings within multicultural literature.

There are many scholars, authors, and educators who would emphasize the urgency of creating diverse books only by people who share those cultural identities (Alcoff, 1991; Harris, 2003; Nodelman, 1992; #ownvoices, 2015). They are rightly concerned when a book provides an incorrect picture of another cultural group and they remain skeptical of the perspectives of people who are not from those cultures. However, in this paper, I argue that to assess the cultural authenticity of a book, it might be more helpful to examine the apparent ethnicity of the implied author and the implied reader rather than the ethnicity of the real author. This discussion could be an important contribution to the critical conversation because the concepts of the implied author and the implied reader add nuance to the debates on insider-outsider controversy, examining the implied author's and the implied reader's ability,

knowledge, and perspective to represent a culture, allowing variable degrees of membership to the continuum of insider-outsider.

Authenticity and English Language Education

In recent years, the world population has become more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. As the world becomes more diverse, it is critical that the next generation of school students can see images of themselves and others in vicarious experiences reflecting this ever-increasing diversity. Multicultural children's literature can act as the metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding doors (Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990). However, building on Bishop's metaphor, Naidoo (2010) indicates that inaccurate and inauthentic cultural representations 'serve as broken mirrors' (p. 25). Cultural accuracy refers to the truthfulness of the represented facts about a culture or cultural group and cultural authenticity refers to the trustworthiness of the represented cultural nuances. In discussing cultural authenticity, Cai (2002) maintains the idea that while accuracy generates information, authentic representation generates empowerment, which is the ultimate purpose of multicultural literature. Since multicultural literature is one of the significant ways for readers to see images of themselves and others (Yokota, 1993; Yokota, 2009), it is highly important that those images be accurate and authentic, not flawed and inauthentic.

Yoon, Simpson and Haag (2010) explain how they believe 'a major purpose of using multicultural texts to be implementation of authentic multicultural education that promotes cultural pluralism, rather than monoculturalism that focuses on assimilation to a dominant culture' (p. 109). They further discuss that by attempting to include authentic and accurate multicultural literature in the curriculum, teachers want to fulfill the purpose of multicultural education. Although teachers most likely have good intentions in fulfilling this attempt, they may not realize that certain multicultural books deliver the messages of underrepresented groups' assimilation into a dominant mainstream culture. As Yoon, Simpson and Haag (2010) further illustrate, it is possible that under the guise of celebrating multicultural education, books educate minority groups to conform to a dominant norm. This is because the implied author covertly imposes some norms and ideals on the reading processes of the actual readers

(Moosavinia & Khaleghpanah, 2019, p. 3). As a result, English-language learners and students of colour might have fewer opportunities to find mirrors in the books.

Learning about the ethnicity of the implied author rather than the ethnicity of the real author is one way to provide more accurate mirrors. Regardless of the real author's beliefs and practices, 'the implied author is a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of a particular text' (Phelan, 2005, p. 45). Knowing more about the implied author in multicultural books will help us to better follow the goals of multicultural education. Multicultural education aims to incorporate multicultural books into the curriculum, to use multicultural books as an educational tool, to enjoy multicultural literature as an aesthetic literary creation, and to build unshattered mirrors, windows, and sliding-glass doors for an on-going dialogue.

To explore the role of the implied author and the implied reader in multicultural books, I take the lens of narrative theory to examine two young adult historical fictions: Meghan Nuttall Sayres' *Anahita's Woven Riddle* (2006) and *Night Letter* (2012). I argue that although Sayres' books represent a world foreign to her ethnic background, the implied author depicted in the text is closer to the insider than the outsider position. *Anahita's Woven Riddle* was listed in ALA's 2007 Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults. Also, the book has been translated into Hebrew, Turkish, Persian, Italian, and Spanish (Sayres, n.d.).

Who Is the Implied Author?

In a narrative communication model, narration is conceived 'as a communicative process in which information about the story level is conveyed by a particular kind of narrator to a particular kind of narratee,' (Herman, 2009, pp. 64-65). The narrative communication model has 'three components or participants of sender, message, and receiver' (Herman, 2009, p. 65). According to Chatman (1980, p. 28), 'on the sending end are the real author, the implied author, and the narrator (if any); on the receiving end, the real audience (listener, reader, viewer), the implied audience, and the narratee' (see Figure 1).

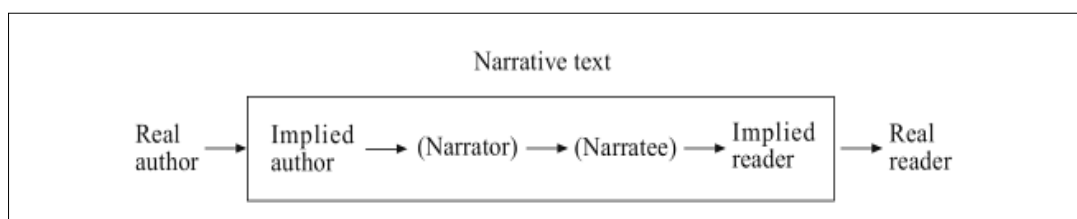


Figure 1: Model of narration (Chatman 1980, p. 151)

Chatman indicates that ‘we must distinguish between real and implied authors and audiences: only implied authors and audiences are immanent to the work, constructs of the narrative-transaction-as-text. The real author and audience of course communicate, but only through their implied counterparts’ (p. 31). The implied author is a bridge between the real author and the real reader.

The Bloomsbury Dictionary of English Literature (‘Implied author’, 1997) defines the implied author as ‘the notional possessor of the set of attitudes and beliefs implied by the totality of a text.’ The implied author contributes to character development, carries the plot, progresses the narrative, and chooses which events must happen and which only imply. ‘The implied author, [or] the second self [,] created in the work’ (Booth, 1983, p. 137), has the authority to represent a narrative based on certain ideologies. Nikolajeva (2003, p. 4) suggests: ‘the implied author is responsible for the ideology of the text – that is the views and opinions expressed in it explicitly or implicitly’. The constructed world in the narrative may reflect the true traits, ideas, values, and opinions of the flesh-and-blood author. Sometimes, the authorial intent is to create a world very different from the true self of the author. It is also possible for authors to attempt to play a neutral role and make the implied author disappear as much as possible. As Booth (1983) indicates, ‘a great artist can create an implied author who is either detached or involved, depending on the needs of the work in hand’ (p. 83).

As Nelles (1993) states, ‘the historical author writes, the historical reader reads; the implied author means, the implied reader interprets; the narrator speaks, [and] the narratee hears’ (p. 22). The implied author is ‘not the narrator but rather, the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images’ (Chatman, 1980,

p. 148). Real authors write with different purposes and varying degrees of precision and complexity. Their different books may represent a range of contrasting ideas and values, with varying different aesthetic choices and different implied authors. The concept of the implied author opens another level of authorship; it is not created to disguise the real author's voice but to develop the sets of values, ideas, and norms implied in the text, functioning through and facilitating other narrative elements. As Cai (2002) states: 'Authors' experiences (direct and indirect) and imagination may help them surmount cultural barriers and create an implied author acceptable to the reader from a specific culture, but the gaps are not as easy to cross as one might imagine' (p. 62).

Who Is the Implied Reader?

The implied reader is 'the presumed communicative partner' (Ryan, 2011, p. 36) of the implied author who is reconstructed from the text by a real reader. 'The idea of the implied reader derives from the understanding that it takes two to say a thing', as Chambers has indicated (1978, p. 2). The implied reader is different from the real reader since it is 'a textual construct rather than a flesh-and-blood human being' (Ryan, 2011, p. 36). Also, the implied reader 'differs from the narratee in that it is not a member of the fictional world' (Ryan, 2011, p. 36). Chambers (1978) notes that as an author writes, not necessarily in his mind's eye, he has a particular reader. According to Langman, 'an author may write for a single person or a large public, for himself or for nobody. But the work itself implies the kind of reader to whom it is addressed, and this may not coincide with the author's private view of his audience' (as cited in Chambers, 1978, p. 1).

The Bloomsbury Dictionary of English Literature ('Implied reader', 1997) refers to the implied reader as 'a structurally analogous position to the implied author, by functioning as a mediating presence between a narratee or listener in a story and the real, individual reader of a text.' As Nikolajeva (2003) suggests, the implied reader is 'the real authors' idea of their audience as inscribed in the texts' (p. 6). The real author's concept of the real readers can be formulated in numerous ways but there is no doubt that a text cannot be tailored to every individual reader, so among an author's readers, there is one imaginary ideal individual

implied by the text – and that is the implied reader. As Iser (2006) indicates, ‘the possible reader must be visualized as playing a particular role with particular characteristics, which may vary according to circumstances’ (p. 772). In other words, ‘instead of adapting to each reader, assumptions about who the reader is are latent in most texts’ (Castleman, 2011, p. 22). Therefore, the goal of having a concept such as implied reader is not to understand what the real reader might have been like but to identify the perspective from which the narrative might be interpreted.

The Ethnicity of the Implied Author and the Implied Reader

The notion of ethnicity refers to a sense of membership in a cultural group that shares certain common values, language, traits, traditions, interests and experiences. This membership can be based on ‘common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background’ (Blakemore, 2020). In the context of this paper, the ethnicity of the implied author and the implied reader refers to the extent these narrative constructs are linked with fictional characters’ cultural expression and identification. The implied author who shares an ethnicity with fictional characters may speak the same language, have the same interests and traditions as them, with the same homeland, or share a common belief.

For the purpose of this discussion, the notion of ethnicity is not synonymous with the concept of nation, and Persian identity does not refer to current Iran. The expansion of Persia reached its peak during the Achaemenid period (between 6th and 4th BC) ruling over Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Over the centuries, many of these parts were separated from Persia and therefore modern-day Iran is significantly smaller than the nation in the Achaemenid period. However, as de Planhol (2012) notes, ‘Persian culture is inseparable from the geographical space within which it was formed and crystallized, and from which, during the Achaemenid period, it expanded considerably to bordering regions’.

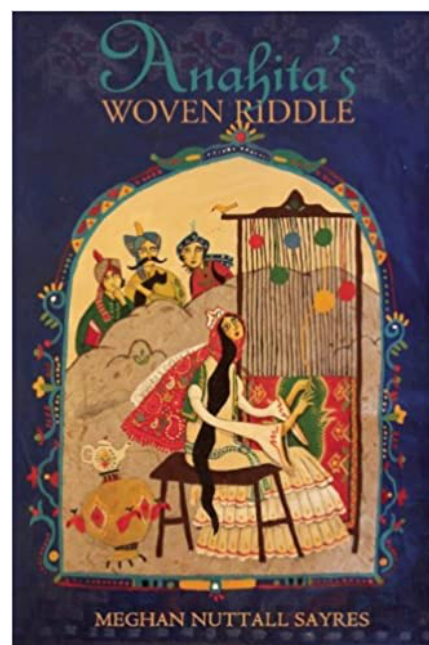
Different criteria can be used to define Persian ethnicity. Defining Persian authenticity, like defining any cultural authenticity, is plausible to some extent but not with absolute certainty, as there are many nuances that might be reflected. I only include those that are most

identifiable from my point of view as a cultural insider. Therefore, the criteria used within the present study as Persian authenticity might be different from other research or cultural insiders attempting to define what authentic Persian literature is. My concern about cultural authenticity derives from the urgent necessity of examining and validating those books that are written by outsider authors about Persian culture and in particular the books that transcend cultural boundaries. Without doubt, one person's idea does not reflect the whole culture.

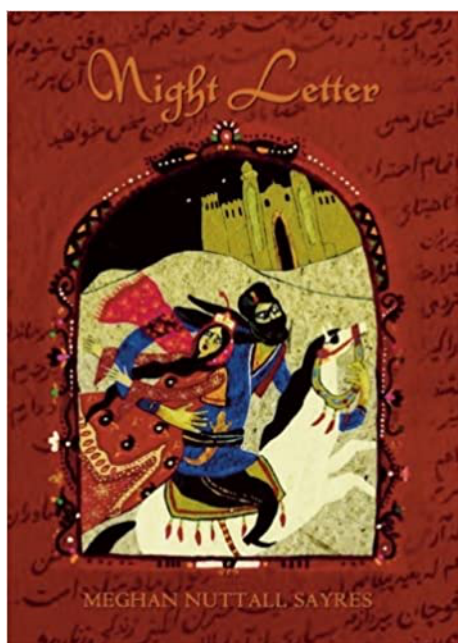
Meghan Nuttall Sayres' *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*

Meghan Nuttall Sayres is an author and tapestry weaver living in Eastern Washington (Sayres, n.d.). *Anahita*, the protagonist in her books *Anahita's Woven Riddle* (first published in 2006) and *The Night Letter* (2012) is from the Afshar tribe. This is 'one of the twenty-four original Guz Turkic tribes' (Oberling, 2011) who gradually moved into the Middle East between 5th and 11th century. According to the *World Heritage Encyclopaedia* (2002), the Afshar nomadic tribe settled in the Iranian Azerbaijan region. Nowadays the Afshars remain a largely nomadic tribe with populations widely scattered in the countries of Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, northern Iran, and Turkey. However, the focus of the books for this study is on the Afshar tribe in Iran, not the Afshars around the world.

Anahita is an Iranian Afshar nomad teenager who is 'named for a goddess! Of water, fertility, and war' (Sayres, 2006, p. 67). Anahita is a master weaver, moving 'more beautifully than a willow' (p. 48), with cheeks 'the color of pomegranates' (p. 239). She has a 'riddle-solving mind' (p. 324) and very 'mature thoughts for a girl of her age' (p. 4). Anahita knows that her father is planning to wed her to the khan, the old, rich, and very influential man of their tribe. Since she gets no help from her mother and grandmother in changing her father's decision, Anahita designs her own



plan and decides to weave a riddle into her wedding carpet. She will only marry the man who solves the riddle and not anyone else. Her unusual request causes controversy and unrest among their tribe and in return, the enraged khan takes away their water rights. The khan's cruel action convinces Anahita's father that he is not a proper suitor for his daughter, so he agrees to hold a contest for her wedding riddle. In the midst of all this, Anahita meets Arash, a stranger in Mashhad's bazaar and feels immediately attracted to him, although she has no idea who he is. They both know that their mutual feeling is love at first sight.



Sayres' *Night Letter* (2012), is a companion to her debut novel *Anahita's Woven Riddle*. In this book, Anahita is 'a master weaver and dyer' (p. 161) and she knows how to recite 'the names of the twenty constellations' (p. 10). She likes reading 'Mowlana Rumi' (p. 1) poetry and she advocates for other girls in the emir's harem, for Anahita has been kidnapped by three unknown men for ransom. Set in Iran during the early 1900s, the story reveals Anahita's strong and determined personality through the tension and conflict between Anahita and her abductors. Anahita's relatives, friends, and in particular Arash are searching for her desperately, and she is smart enough to

leave meaningful clues behind for them to find her. After being sold to the emir's harem for a temporary marriage, she manages to send secret night messages out of the harem to the Shah of Iran, requesting his attention and assistance for all female victims imprisoned in the harem. Her harsh time in the harem teaches her that she can indeed make a difference for other innocent people in many ways. Upon her freedom, she meets with a group of dervishes and learns about their spiritual practices. Afterward, reunited with her beloved, she experiences a greater love, 'invisible to the eye, like an image of the heart' (p. 227).

Discussion

To examine the role of the implied author and the implied reader in *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*, I focus on the ideas, ideologies, values, attitudes, and assumptions about Persian culture expressed in the texts.

The Implied Author

Three of the most significant patterns reinforcing the role of the implied author in these books are: 1) the protagonist's fascination with Persian poetry, storytelling, and music, 2) the protagonist's celebration of the Persian carpet, and 3) the protagonist's curiosity for Sufism. Certainly, there are many other Persian identifiers that are present in *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*, however, these three consistent patterns are interwoven throughout the texts and are illustrative of cultural ideas featured as the implied author.

Meghan Nuttall Sayres, as an author and 'nomad textile enthusiast' (Sayres, n.d.), is influenced by 'the richness of Persian history and culture, which reflects a long-held tradition of peace and hospitality' (Sayres, 2013b). She travelled to Iran in March 2005, when she was invited to speak at the country's book festival. Through her research on writing about Persian culture she developed a profound appreciation of the culture and created an abundance of stories about the friendships and the generosity of Iranians. She explains, 'on our journeys we found another Iran, one that lies in stark contrast to the ominous picture of their culture painted by the American and other Western mainstream media, which has repeatedly tainted our collective perspective on Iran' (Sayres, 2013b). Consequently, her anthology, *Love and Pomegranates: Artists and Wayfarers on Iran* (2013a) was published to 'counter an insufficient understanding of a nation and Iranian people'. In her books, Sayres has included voices of Iranians, including 'botanists, a Persian *dafs* musician, a radio show host, professors of Persian history and literature, filmmakers, grandmothers, teachers, carpet dealers, adult and children's book writers' (Sayres, 2013b).

Through the process of researching and writing, Sayres learned about Persian hospitality, 'Persian cooking, art, classical literature, music and traditions' (Sayres, 2013b).

Before writing *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*, the author took the time to observe the lifestyle, rules, values, tastes, and preferences in the Middle Easterners' practices; for example, the way they walk, run, or talk, the style they use to decorate their houses or offices, the objects they place in the study room, the food they eat and the way they cook. She learned how to weave tapestry and also the Persian language. All the efforts she has made as flesh-and-blood author informed her about Persian culture and enriched the implied author in the text. Therefore, the implied author in these two books 'instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn' (Moosavinia & Khaleghpanah, 2019, p. 2).

Within *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*, three patterns of Persian culture including poetry, carpet, and Sufism pervade the text. Nelles (1997) asserts that the implied author is the creator of every possible meaning of the text. The implied author is perceived as a set of implicit and explicit norms operating in the text. A similar approach is adopted in this study in which I stress the ideas, messages, and norms that the real author has incorporated into these two books through these three patterns. These ideas and norms are more than a group of traditions that happen to be collected in one narrative. They denote a collective concept with important links to Persian culture.

The protagonist's fascination with Persian poetry, storytelling, and music. One of the most distinctive characteristics of Persian culture is its glorification of poetry, storytelling, and music. As Yarshater illustrates (1988), 'poetry is the art par excellence of Persia, and her salient cultural achievement. Despite their considerable accomplishments in painting, pottery, textiles, and architecture, in no other field have the Persians succeeded in achieving the same degree of eminence'. The Persian tendency to celebrate poetry is evident even when ordinary people express their everyday thoughts: 'Most Persians possess the faculty of composing rhythmical speech; you will find very few indeed who will not on all appropriate – and sometimes even on inappropriate – occasions ornament their discourse with rhyme' (Arberry, 1994, p. 47). Firmly established is the Persians' national and personal aptitude for versifying almost everything. In short, 'one might say that in the Persian view, speech without rhythm

and rhyme is not worthy of attention' (Arberry, 1994, p. 47). Even occasionally what seems to be Persian prose tends to read as a rhythmic text with added repeated pattern of sounds.

Thus, the Persian language, both spoken and written, is essentially poetic. Poetry continuously passes from one form to another, similar to the way that culture endures in the world. As Yarshater (1962) indicates, 'poetry is the most significant artistic achievement of Persia, and, as an art with wide scope, sustained energy and universal appeal, provides the broadest stage for artistic and intellectual expression' (p. 61).

In addition to poetry, storytelling in Iran is also considered part of popular culture. From 1501 to 1736, coffeehouses in Iran became centers for oral storytelling (Hanaway, 2011). Storytellers performed at private as well as in public spaces, and their performance had a religious significance beyond that of simple entertainment (Hanaway, 2011). Furthermore, in the context of stories for children, *The Asurik Tree*, the oldest Persian children's story, dating back to about 3000 years ago, is 'a legend in rhythmic verse' (Ghaeni, 2008, para. 6), which is a literary 'debate between a goat and a palm tree' (Ghaeni, 2008, para. 2), two of the most common sources of food in ancient times. Alongside these historical landmarks, stories and storytelling have carved out a distinctive space in Persian culture.

Therefore, to validate the authenticity of books about Persian culture one of the most prominent examinations is to explore to what extent there is an attention to story, storytelling, verse and poetry. By including poetry, storytelling, riddles, and music within the plot of both stories, the implied author in *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter* refers to a perennial interest within Persian literature and highlights distinct traits of poetic writing style in Persian. The significance of poetry and storytelling is not a random casual addition to the plot but has been crafted deeply in the different levels of the story. For example, when Anahita's father plans to wed her to the khan, Anahita decides to weave a riddle into her wedding carpet. She would only marry the man who solves the riddle because 'she could not live with someone who did not enjoy riddles' (p. 20). The design of the riddle, the answer to the riddle, and the person who could solve it are the major driving forces of the story. In other words, poetry, story, and riddles play major roles in the narrative.

As another instance, in the process of weaving the wedding carpet and completing the complex patterns, Anahita and her fellow weavers need to memorize the form of the pattern. They commonly use rhythmic chants to remember patterns and reproduce them as frequently as required, creating an association between weaving and their rhythmic chants. As Anahita's fingers race up and down the large wooden looms, the stanzas from the poem 'A Great Wagon' come to her mind. 'Each knot she wove became a word. Fifteen in all, appearing from right to left across her loom—angular—the way she learned to write them with ink in the linen-bound book' (p. 228).

Within *Night Letter*, when Anahita is kidnapped, she carves the answer to her wedding riddle on a rock to leave meaningful clues for her family to find her. At the teahouse, she makes up a fairytale of her marriage for a little girl. Later, the same girl helps Anahita's family find and rescue her. Also, the riddle Anahita designs for the harem's eunuch helps her to escape from prison. Along with all these examples, the presence of Arash and his poetic conversations with Anahita, exchanging love letters with frequent references to Sufi poets, as well as the most eminent and celebrated Iranian classic poets such as Sa'adi, Rumi, Omar Khayyam, and Attar, all demonstrate the implied author's authentic perspectives on Persian culture.

Knowledge of these poets' composition is essential to an understanding of the characteristics of Persian literature. The implied author in *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter* demonstrates an awareness of the most influential classic poets of Iran and the significance of story, poetry, storytelling, and music in Persian culture. In both *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*, the concept of storytelling is one of the most significant agents that progresses the plot. Within these two novels, storytelling is not a fancy addition to the plot. Rather, for Anahita, storytelling is how the powerless can attain power.

The protagonist's curiosity for Sufism. Sufism is the mystical and spiritual form of Islam. It 'is an affiliation between an Elder/Master and his devotee, between the Beloved as the heralding spirit and the Lover as the pursuer' (Solati, 2015, p. 9). Sufism is not a separate religion, but rather a belief and practice emphasizing the mystical love, inner piety, active

remembrance of God and devotion to God, not out of fear but only for the sake of God. A spinning dance combined with mystical devotion, purification of the soul, and remembering the presence of God is one of the major Sufi rituals. Some Muslims, especially, the conservatives, challenge the legitimacy of Sufism since Sufis emphasize developing an intimate, intuitive, and direct experience of God rather than learning the Islamic laws.

In both *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*, there are many instances of Sufi belief and practices. The Sufis in these books are generally known as individuals who are enthusiastically seeking the truth of the divine world through their continuous devotions. In *Night Letter*, after Anahita's escape from the emir's harem, she meets a group of Sufi dervishes – spiritual seekers. She disguises herself as a male dervish with a long robe and their whirling skirt as well as a tall hat. She learns to practice their spiritual rituals and she becomes fascinated with their special way of worship. As she expresses her thoughts,

a new perception –an inner eye-awakened. Something began to churn inside me –a constellation, a starry night of galaxies. A secret within us makes the universe turn. Maybe this silence was offered to me by the Sufi like a thoughtfully wrapped gift, a space through which I received clarity. (Sayres, 2012, pp. 225-226)

Anahita is fascinated by Sufi rituals and is very eager to discover their spiritual development. For example, she learns that 'patience can be an action, a form of receptivity' (p. 168), and 'sometimes the better option is to stop weaving and watch how the pattern improves' (p. 223). Also, she is amazed by the fact that 'only in stillness will an oasis flower' (p. 229). Anahita enjoys the whirling dervishes' spiritual ceremony, including dancing, praying, and singing, when 'the Sufis spread their arms like wings, one palm up to gather divine grace, the other down to give it to the earth' (p. 154).

The implied author in Sayres' novels shares ideas and beliefs by Persian Sufi poets such as Rumi (1207–1273) and Hafiz (1315–1390). Through using their metaphoric language, the implied author establishes a perception of Sufis whose heart and soul are connected to the divine world. The presence of Sufi in the books is not an isolated incident; it is prominent and

highly linked to other elements of the narrative. In contemporary Iran, Sufism might be attacked by mainstream Muslims as a modern innovation. However, as precisely presented in these two books, the younger generation is more likely to practice Sufism than orthodox Muslim practices.

The protagonist's celebration of carpet. The hand-knotted carpet is an essential and timeless cultural 'commodity' (Moallem, 2018, p. 3) in Iran. Persian carpets are always distinguished by their spectacular beauty and delicacy of design, the finesse of knots, as well as the variety and richness of organic colours. While Persian carpets remain as an everyday floor covering, they are also used to decorate the wall, as a luxury handicraft, treasured possession, or even an inheritance or an investment. As Moallem (2018) states, 'the Persian carpet connects different worlds: production and consumption, labor and leisure, and matter and the immaterial, along with the East and the West, without finality' (p. 8). It is also worthy to note that every carpet's design pattern, weaves, and knots are distinguished by symbols and detailed variations from a specific tribe or a geographic area. Even, occasionally, individual or group weavers are likely to leave distinctive secret design elements in the carpet to record their story and history.

The elaborated ideas about Persian rugs in *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter* indicate that the implied author in these books is an insider to the world of designers, weavers, traders, sellers and household consumers of Persian carpets. For example, in *Anahita's Woven Riddle*, Arash, Anahita's lover describes her carpet as

a metaphor of the relationship between Anahita and our land. Any carpet is a matter of the senses and the mind. The mind is one with the body, as the body is one with the earth. But Anahita's carpet is beyond the reality of five senses, beyond colors, and beyond motifs. (Sayres, 2006, p. 315)

In another instance, Arash asks a carpet merchant, 'this gelim [tapestry rug] ... Would you say it speaks the truth of Persian life?' (p. 64). Anahita's carpet glorifies glowing colours, manifests her creativity, and fascinates viewers; however, it is not a decorative object to grace

the walls and floors. She weaves the carpet on two levels: one level related to their tribe's most beloved emotions, locations, animals, and possessions; the other level is a mystical allure.

Along with these descriptions, within *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*, carpet is a significant agent in advancing the plot. Much of the actions in these two books are in connection with floral and 'festive carpets' (*Night Letter*, p. 123) because as highlighted in the book, 'palace carpets have ears...and lips. They whisper stories' (p. 164). The narrative in both books consists of interwoven stories between Anahita and carpets; carpets are there to help Anahita to win. The implied author in these two books convincingly demonstrates the culture that embraces carpets not only as a valuable and ubiquitous commodity but also as a significant non-human agent in the story.

The Implied Reader

Regarding the role of the implied reader in *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*, I examine the imagined reader whom Sayres, the real author, seems to address. In so doing, the dialogues among the protagonist, the second main character, and to a lesser extent the members of the families and friends express a combination of perspectives that might suggest as implied readers contemporary young women who are downgraded and suffer in patriarchal societies.

Anahita is an 'outspoken,' (Sayres, 2006, p. 259) 'a freeborn woman,' (p. 136) and always talks more than she listens. As she often mentions, all she wants is 'a choice' (p. 110) and 'the privilege of choosing her husband' (p. 330); she advocates for the rights and entitlements for all young women who are prevented from making personal choices in their lives, women who are ignored or suppressed. Once she states that 'surely women should not be afraid to speak out in this man's world' (p. 26). In one important scene, she resists patriarchal control by breaking the rules of swimming through 'floating in the deep pool on the men's side of the bathhouse.' (p. 291). Anahita has a strong desire to push the limits for other Iranian women. She claims, 'I would save myself. I would need nobody's help. Not even Allah's' (p. 104). Although such a bold sense of self is not common for women in the early

20th century in Iran, it portrays the attempts that could be made to advocate for women's rights.

The implied author in *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter* speaks with a positive and uplifting voice, giving hope to the implied reader. The stories contribute insights into the problems underlying gender inequality in patriarchal societies. Although some of these perceptions and sensibilities for women seem to be sympathetic comments from the outside position, they can still help both insider and outsider women to consolidate their agency.

Examples of Inaccuracy and Inauthenticity

Although the cultural ideas and viewpoints represented in these two books seem highly close to an insider perspective, there are still some minor inaccuracies in both *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter*. For example, although *Anahita's Woven Riddle* demonstrates an awareness of Persian culture on many different levels, the khan's description of his kitten with fluffy red hair appears inauthentic since Iranians, especially during the Qajar period in the early 1900s, were less interested in keeping cats as pets.

Also, in some scenes, *Anahita's* conversations and actions seem closer to the outsider than the insider position. For example, her experience of visiting Mashad, one of the most religious and populous cities in Iran, appears more likely to be narrated by a non-Iranian than a local visitor:

Did you see the yellow marble floors in the Chamber of Salutation? The gilt-and silver doors? Did you touch the Carpet of the Seven Beloved Cities, which took ten thousand weavers fourteen years to make? The one with thirty million knots? (Sayres, 2006, p. 59)

Furthermore, another important inaccurate observation is 'a rendering of the prophet Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac' (p. 123). According to the Bible, Abraham offered to sacrifice Isaac, but Muslims believe that Ishmael was the one offered to the Lord by Abraham. Abraham's story represents a longstanding disparity between Islam and Christianity and is overlooked in *Night Letter*.

Conclusion

As suggested at the beginning of this paper, of the many narrative elements, authorial voices and devices, the two concepts of the implied author and the implied reader contribute significantly to clarifying and explaining the debates within multicultural children's literature. It is the ethnicity of the implied – not the flesh-and-blood – author and reader that reveals the culture of the text. As I have already indicated, Meghan Sayres is a significant example of an outsider who has made sustained efforts to take on a Persian perspective.

The implied author and the implied reader in *Anahita's Woven Riddle* and *Night Letter* are representatives of the importance of fearlessness and determination for young women to retain their dreams even under near impossible circumstances. Through the process of designing and weaving Anahita's carpet, the narrative evolves as a richly textured design to decipher the unwritten nuances of Persian culture. The characters in both of these books use poetry, riddles, and storytelling in their everyday conversation; their actions seem familiar, recognizable, and admirable. Characters such as Anahita and Arash have distinctive perceptions and understanding of Persian culture in their capacities as Iranians. Their behavioural repertoire is representative of their cultural identity and their lifestyles are genuine, believable and complex, neither simplified nor stereotypical. Both Anahita and Arash use speech that accurately portrays Persian language and customs. While one or two quality books like these may not address every need for diverse books in English language education in the USA and around the world, they are genuine efforts in 'cross[ing] cultural gaps,' (Cai, 2002, p. 38) advocating that we do not have to be a member of a cultural group in order to understand.

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