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In Search of Self-Knowledge in *Missing Soluch*

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Abstract

This study discusses self-knowledge and its possibility in literary works, particularly in novel proper. Novels can depict the development and change of characters and are an ideal form to portray the self-knowledge that characters gain as they grow up. I inquire into the limitations that a literary work places on both the author and the reader's imagination. Whether to attempt to depict or to defy the real world, literary imagination is checked by outside reality. On the other hand, the reality itself is framed by the literary work to be representable and expressible for the literary medium which either narrates or depicts objects, thoughts and emotions, and events. The narrator can relate the characters to the readers who can connect with the characters' thoughts and emotions. On this account the possibility of self-knowledge is probed in Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel, *Missing Soluch,* and how both the characters and the readers are engaged in the story's events. For the purposes of this paper, I set out to explore the kinds of knowledge we gain by reading the novel, contrast the epic with the novel in order to see how they portray a character's thoughts and emotions, and discuss the importance of narrative in a character's development.

Keywords: Dowlatabadi, Character, Narrative, Novel, Self-Knowledge, *Missing Soluch*

1. Introduction

When it comes to a literary work, in addition to the issues regarding its story, integrity, originality, background and author, another issue may require attention; that is, do they teach us anything about ourselves and the real world? Is it possible

to acquire knowledge from a fictional narrative? If the response is positive, then what kind of knowledge is it? These are some of the questions we might ask ourselves when confronted with a literary work. When we start reading a piece of fiction, say a novel, do we search for facts or a lesson to learn from it? We might ask the same questions concerning knowledge and learning when we are watching a wildlife documentary or reading a scientific magazine. How would the scientific content be a source of knowledge? What kind of knowledge do we acquire from it? One of the conditions for a proposition to be a source of knowledge is that it should be true and the truth condition of a proposition is that it needs to be justified. Then if justified, our belief concerning that proposition is called knowledge. Therefore, the true and justified propositions can serve as the premise of a reliable argument. We can see such demands also placed on historical or philosophical inquiries since they must prove their prepositions right to become justified as knowledge. But when it comes to fictional texts, the pursuit of knowledge seems not easy to be engaged in. For instance, are the fictional texts argumentative, as the philosophical texts are? Do we seek after truth when we read *Anna Karenina*? Should a narrative story be tested against epistemic reliability?

The above questions relate to what is sometimes called literary cognitivism or literary knowledge. It precisely involves cognitive values of literature and its alleged contribution to arrive at a better understanding of ourselves and the world of facts. To understand ourselves and the world truly we need to be rid of illusory knowledge. Here lies the crux of the matter, namely that how a fictional work can give us factual knowledge, i.e. a knowledge that is not illusory, and how fictional characters and events which happen to be unreal and made-up could be trusted for self-knowledge. Then, is the life-size knowledge we gain from fiction arguably different from the knowledge we gain from science or philosophy? To answer these questions, we look into a literary work to properly understand the nature of the argument. The Iranian writer Mahmoud Dowlatabadi in his novel, *Missing Soluch*, tells the story of a rural family whose main characters are a

mother, Mergan, her two sons, Abbas and the younger Abrau, and their little sister Hajar. The story narrates the lives of them living in the absence of their father, Soluch. The third-person narrator of the story shifts attention onto each one of the characters while not distancing himself from the axial position of an absent father whose phantom lingers all along. Like most of the novels, the characters in this story grow up and change and experience the events but what is remarkable in Dowlatabadi's story is his fascination with self-knowledge and characters' attempts to acquire it. This paper examines how acquiring knowledge would be possible in a literary fiction and what kind of knowledge we acquire from it.

Discussion

In his book, *Noone Neveshtan* (*The Initials of Writing*[1]), Dowlatabadi makes a manifesto-like statement about literary realism and pronounces on how it should be.

Realist literature, in its economic respect, should not change into the poor's protests against the rich. In this regard, literature should be able to prime humans with their capabilities and potential. ... We as authors might be able to prime humans with these capacities which can play a part in their destinies and histories; moreover, humans also have responsibilities towards their own destinies and lives. ... perhaps this comprehensive analysis gives our people [Iranian people] the opportunity to undertake a serious study into their selves and destinies. Because these people should eventually know their selves, discover their hidden values ... In this respect, I hope literature, to the extent possible, would be able to fulfil its duty. (19)

He believes that literature, realist literature in particular, is able to show new paths to take that would be different from the ones taken before. Literature could be a major event that when we take part in it, our experience and confrontation

with it might work like an epiphany; we come to discover that we understand other people and also our self differently. This new understanding and knowledge that Dowlatabadi thinks we gain by reading a fictional work poses the questions of truth and belief in a literary work since it is difficult to believe the imaginative manipulations of an author. The idea that we can gain knowledge from literature is contested in some ways. The oldest objection can be traced back to Plato where he famously lambasted bad poetry. Bad poetry, as he says, is an attempt at "hiding oneself behind a pretend character [that] is implicitly deceitful and dubious", namely a poetic discourse where the poet hides himself behind the fictional characters and by the act of mimesis "causes one to become like such persons in real life" (Janaway 4). Therefore, this new knowledge that a person acquires about oneself is an illusion of knowledge because it is not based on true knowledge but a fictional inaccurate representation of life that involves reader's identification with fictional characters. And yet, as Robin Waterfield says, Plato's criticism of poetry is ultimately a moral one:

> Plato's criticisms of poetry are overwhelmingly moral in tone, even when he is adducing metaphysical grounds for mistrusting its value… a great deal of Plato's worry has to do with people assimilating themselves to the wrong kind of model, since one becomes like one's role models… The more moral a person is, the closer he is to being unified, stable, and so on. (Republic xxx)

Plato is quick to say that the identification with fictional characters is carried through emotions and our emotional engagement with them. He sees emotions as a weak spot in humans that are against moral precepts and our cognitive development, thereby rendering us irrational. The binary of emotions and reason used by Plato properly explains his idea but is insufficient to explain the relation between the two. As Noël Carroll says, the relation between emotions and reason is not mutually exclusive. Emotions are not a rival faculty for reason; on the contrary, they are joint participants in forming a judgment on fictional works. That is what Aristotle thinks when he proposes that we can educate emotions such as pity and fear by visualizing objects for these certain emotions. Thereby,

we exercise our capacity to undergo these emotions and by experiencing them, though indirectly, deepen our understanding (131).

In Plato's anti-cognitivist understanding of literature, a literary work reveals nothing about the nature of our world. But literary texts do not share the same goals with philosophical or scientific texts and that literary texts frame their own cognitive perception. In other words, literature does not want us to believe what it narrates. Further, we do not seek after truth in a novel in the same way we do in, say, a philosophical work. In philosophical works the whole text is read to extract a couple of propositions or concepts depending on what we are searching for. Even if the philosophy authors use a fictional piece in their writings, they still do so to illustrate their main ideas. The story is there to be an example of a general proposition and although it contributes to concept clarity, the meaning and structure remain intact without it. In his essay *The Novel*, Anthony Cascardi states that novels "shed light on the formation" of the story narrative but philosophical texts "presuppose" its formation to develop the ideas and propositions (167). John Gibson raises a problematic issue by pointing to a strategy adopted to interpret a fictional text. He explains that when we convert a story's theme into a hypothesis or propositional form, philosophical content replaces literary content and the object of appreciation moves "from the text to what is ultimately outside it" ("Literature and Knowledge" 472). To associate archetypal and psychoanalytical interpretation of recurrent images in *Missing Soluch* like fire, house, holes, and wells to the characters' behavior and emotions is foisting a symbolic quest on the narrative: "An appeal to symbols, relying as it does on the 'standing for' relation, may not be apt for all thematic content" (John 210). We no longer encounter the theme, which is to be developed inside the story, but some propositions applied to the story to prove that these propositions are significant. In a nutshell, the story is used to call attention to the given proposition. In *Between Truth and Triviality,* Gibson, pointing to *Othello*'s

jealousy, states that “the text does not assert these thematic statements of extra-textual reality. So, while it might be true of both *Othello*'s world and ours that ‘jealousy destroys what one holds most dear’, *Othello* does nothing to attempt to inform us of the worldly truth of this” (228).

The kind of encounter with a text that attempts to apply the concepts to literary texts is what other works of inquiry such as anthropology or philosophy should undertake to have, not a literary evaluation. The juxtaposition of literary theme with philosophical truth and moral principles disdains literary narrative and form, thus literature might become a servant of other humanities, namely that literary understanding should follow evidence-based organized systems of knowledge. In his autobiographical work, *Obur Az Khod* (*Eclipsing the Self*[2]), Dowlatabadi points to the same issue and cautions against such approaches to literature: “I think literature should never be a perfect slave of mechanical-theoretical rationality and of relevant and irrelevant syllogisms. This blind rationality is anti-wisdom and brings about technocracy, yet literature is the locus of becoming universal” (34).

Earlier in this paper, Dowlatabadi states that literature should enable us to discover our potentials and capabilities, such that play a part in our destinies and histories; in other words, he believes that literary texts can enhance our capacities for understanding of human experience, thus they could be a source of knowledge that is not derived from outer reality but is sourced from inside the text. Therefore, literature is a *sui generis* form of understanding that in Gibson’s words, “does not treat the world as an object of knowledge but as a subject of human concern” (“Literature and Knowledge” 483). Given the unique kind of knowledge that literature grants us, what is this knowledge like? To answer this question, we consider different kinds of knowledge that a fictional work might give us by focusing on novel proper since Dowlatabadi’s *Missing Soluch* is a novel and also we can probe literary cognition more comprehensively in novels owing to their length and narrative style.

The belief that literary authors write fiction without any constraints on their imagination and that they can write autonomously about their desired subjects and are exempt from common knowledge is overplayed either to highlight the aesthetic effects or to emphasize that we cannot gain knowledge by reading a novel. Gordon Graham, writing about art in general, states that “we must not understand the claim that works of art are wholly imaginary to imply that the artist's imagination operates without constraint” (31). At least two things limit the author's imaginative autonomy.

Firstly, the theme limit, that is, the propositions which relate to significant subjects and human concerns; the subjects that are not confined within the plot, thus to use them means to bring something into the story from outside. Further, themes work as signs scattered across the story, so there cannot be a number of them just randomly and thereby dismissed as an effective way to yield outside world concerns. With themes as signs recurring in the story, the reader gets a panoramic view of the plot and gains a thematic understanding, however this understanding is gained at the cost of imaginative autonomy. The author, intentionally or not, uses themes to bring elements that have “content-linked reverberation that operates across … a work’s subject-level content” (John 207). The theme of loss and longing reverberates around *Missing Soluch* and is crucial to characters' quest for self-knowledge. We will return to this later.

Secondly, there are reality cases according to Lucy O’Brien, which could be traced in fiction. The cases she mentions are “within the fiction”, “cross fiction-reality”, and “reality” cases (138). By applying her taxonomy to *Missing Soluch*, we can spot many corresponding examples. We read in the story that Abbas is an arrogant, self-serving teen who even attempts to take advantage of his own brother. Such cases are true only within the fiction. Also the fact that the few well-off villagers who bring a tractor and a water pump to grow pistachios is a case of cross fiction-reality; using machines that exist in real world viz tractor

and water pump help us to verify that the plot unfolds at a time when the locals are on the verge of a new chapter in their lives. This is another case true within the novel since it happens only in the story confines. The reality case is the third case which includes the beliefs that are true irrespective of being in the story, out of which we select the "general beliefs" and "self-beliefs". The general beliefs are the universal propositions that work as a reminiscence of outer world beliefs. Put differently, they exist as facts outside of the fiction, that in spring camels develop an unusual disease called spring fever that drives them mad and they feel an uncontrollable urge to hurt other camels and even humans, or pistachio saplings take seven years to give the first fruit, to cite a few examples. Moreover, there are cases of self-beliefs or self-knowledge which as they suggest are true about the reader and his judgments, that is, she puts himself in fictional characters' shoes to think what she would do were she in their shoes. To say that if we were Mergan, we would not in any way consent to Hajar's marriage to Ali Genav is gaining a basic self-knowledge by being "the object of our attention … through recognizing ourselves—seeing ourselves—reflected in the portrait of a fictional character. Thus, if we come to have self-knowledge through reading novels it is something like recognitional knowledge" (O'Brien 146).[3]

The self-recognition that O'Brien thinks we achieve is like Dowlatabadi's assertion about the role of literature in enabling us to recognize our cognitive capacities. But the link here between the characters and the reader is missing, namely how the self-recognition through reading about fictional characters and situations becomes possible. Gaining self-knowledge from fiction requires that I identify self-knowledge in fiction. A fictional narrator needs at least an event, an action, and a character to tell a story and in order for the story to give us self-knowledge, it needs characterization in relation to events and actions, so that the characters as such can display thoughts and emotions. The difference that characterization makes lies in revealing the inner life; such that we can see a contrast between modern and ancient fiction. As Julie Sedivy explains, talking about emotions is absent in ancient fiction and narratives relate actions and events

rather than how the characters thought and felt (Sedivy). According to Elizabeth Hart regarding the medieval or classical texts, “people are constantly planning, remembering, loving, fearing, but they somehow manage to do this without the author drawing attention to these mental states” (qtd. in Sedivy). In *Missing Soluch*, antithetical to the rest of the story, we see the epical account of Abbas's struggle with the mad camel, a scene of pure action in similar vein as battles accounted in *Shahnameh* (1010). We might see how Abbas is feeling only through the action but not his own words, therefore the reader has no clue to recognize his emotions and thoughts at that moment. Then, although in epic narratives we are carried along by the events, we seldom have a chance to gain knowledge of the self.

The narrator in epical narratives is like an overarching intelligence that thinks on behalf of the characters; a puppeteer who uses “direct speech and gestures … to convey intense emotions in a stereotypical way—lots of hand-wringing and tearing of hair” as Monika Fludernik notes (qtd. in Sedivy). In her book, *Towards a 'natural' narratology* Fludernik makes yet another case for novel's psychologism by distinguishing the Renaissance romance from novel and argues that "unlike the generally mannered and formalistic soliloquy of the Renaissance romance, novelistic renderings of characters' minds move away from the rhetorical set piece to a representation that evokes more individualistic emotions" (27). To see that fictional characters reveal their beliefs, desires, and feelings, a shift is needed in how to narrate a story to give an account of a character's character and cast light on her inner life. The shift becomes possible when the narrator gives a unique direction to characters' destinies, and though the narrator is still the director, she cannot weight the narrative in favor of an either-or form and a clear-cut outline of the plot and character since by revealing the characters' thought and emotions, she is giving them their own voices and are open to interpretation and evaluation. Dowlatabadi's intentions as author and

narrator, albeit significant, would be a complete success if the whole story of *Missing Soluch* was like Abbas's battle with the mad camel since that is one of the rare occasions that he is in full control. In other occasions, he advances the story from different perspectives. The formation of characters requires that the narrator cast light on each one of them and each of them give her partial account in connection to the main action. When Soluch leaves home for good, the other members of the family, seeing their family life is falling apart, try to deal with the father's absence. The story becomes a report on four characters' venture to understand their new condition, therefore each account is given in narrative fragments. This is what Cascardi calls “perspectivism”, that is, the novel as the locus that exhibits human experience and development in fragments (167). He notes that it is the novel's very form that is problematic. It bears no authority and does not regard it necessary to link beginnings, middles, and ends and resists the “goal-driven behavior”. In the fragmented world of the novel, the author's intentions are not certain to be met, and characters and readers abandoned by an overarching intelligence directing the epic story, are left alone to seek after self-realization (175).

In *Missing Soluch*, the pursuit of each character's life and observing the aftermath of father's absence for them are perspectival and particular. It is much like the real life, especially when something like an earthquake strikes a place and, in its aftermath, people try to survive. And of course, in real life we cannot handpick an event and downplay the rest, except when we want to look back and tell what happened back then. But in fiction the handpicking of events is a must-take path to have a plot. Alan Singer, interpreting Aristotle’s mimesis, points out that in order to learn from fiction, we need to imitate life through a plot (370). However, constructing the plot with a cast of characters is only the machinery of the story. Richard Shusterman, referring to art in general, notes that art dramatizes life by picking some parts out and putting them into a frame. Art stages life (367). “[A]rt distinguishes itself from ordinary reality not by its fictional frame of action but by its greater vividness of experience and action,

through which art is opposed not to the concept of *life*, but rather to that which is lifeless and humdrum” (368). Plot and narrative both are needed to give dramatic effect, as the narrative picks out the eventful fragments and the plot connects them, as what is done in real life when one thinks about her life in retrospection and remembers those events which were eventfully significant, thereby gains higher self-recognition. The dramatic form manifests those angles of life that might remain unseen in everyday stream of now and here. Gibson, contrasting argumentative structure of works of inquiry with dramatic structure of fictional narrative, states that fiction is a dramatic investigation into human nature which does not present scientific knowledge but acts upon the concepts we already have in mind. Fictional narrative contextualizes the concepts that we bring along to our reading stories; it is the capacity of a literary narrative that gives shape and structure to the values and experiences that define human reality (“Literature and Knowledge” 468, 481, 82, 83). Daniel Hutto draws a contrast between narrative and theory: “Theories enlighten by focusing on what is abstract and law-bound, whereas narratives cast particulars in a certain light to reveal the significance of what happens and why” (294). There is a gap between our emotion concepts such as joy, fear, sorrow, regret, and our worldly experience which the works of inquiry like philosophy, science, or history are silent about. Literary narrative undertakes to fill this gap and assist us to complete our relation to the world (“Truth and Triviality” 237).

There is another kind of contextualization, that is, contextualizing the action (Hutto 296). Every action in *Missing Soluch* could be unintelligible if Soluch's desertion did not happen. Thus, the narrator, by providing a narrative, contextualizes the actions and their causes. Also, characters’ capacity for self-realization in *Missing Soluch* is recognized through the dramatic form of the narrative. Mergan, a housewife, feeling baffled and helpless after her husband’s

desertion, and left with three kids, tries hard not to abandon hope, and get a sense of closure and understand what has happened to her:

Mergan straightened her back and rose. She had to set out, once again. The past had been a heavy load, but looking to the future compelled her onward. Is it possible to stay frozen in one place? How long can you continue to sulk in your hovel like a beaten dog? In this immense world, there is, after all, a place for you. There is, after all, a path for you. The door to life is not blocked shut by mud! (*Missing Soluch*, book 4, ch. 3)

Likewise, Abbas, the older son, who feels impotent and dependent on others due to his incurable physical condition after the mad camel incident, seeks after his self:

Abbas had wanted to stand on his own two feet, even if helped by his crutch. He wanted his existence to have its own color, to carry its own burden. Perhaps the ordeal had left one thing of Abbas behind; himself. A “self” with whatever face it had. And perhaps Abbas was instinctively struggling to find these scraps, these scattered shards, so as to put them back together as one … To do this, he had to emerge from beneath his mother’s wings and present himself … In this, they can only make mention of you in relation to someone else. And if you speak of your “self,” it’s only in vain, as in their eyes this actual “self” doesn’t really exist! (*Missing Soluch*, book 4, ch. 2)

Abrau, the younger son, finding a new job as a tractor driver, thinks that his new job is so different that can bring change in his life and distinguish him from other villagers:

Hints of self-regard were already taking root in Abrau; he had begun to look at himself in a new way. Small, worthless tasks had begun to grate upon him. He’d begun to pine for a different kind of work. Work with some kind of stature. Work that was defined. It was his good luck that of all the youth of Zaminej, he had been the single one to be given this job. (*Missing Soluch*, book 3, ch. 3)

The event of Soluch's desertion is the propeller of character's action and those emotions which were static before the event. The main action is the

narrative-propeller and action starts from there, even the characters' retrospection on events and memories before the main event is set in motion by the main action. But the reader's intimacy is only with the main characters' emotions and thoughts, since only the main characters are closely affected by the main event; there would not be any empathy with, say, Karbalai Doshanbeh, even when the narrator tells the story of his misfortunes in his youth, because it is not in direct connection to the main event. The narrative allows us to see these emotions and promote intimacy with characters. Without narrative the character's thoughts and emotions could not be linked to action. As Gregory Currie notes:

Narrative is suited to the representation of Character. It is able to represent richly individuated temporal and causal connections between motivation, decision, and circumstance … It provides the space within which we can see a person's character gradually revealed, and perhaps gradually changing, in response to events and to the actions of others. ("Narrative and Psychology" 63)

The dramatic effect of Soluch's desertion is foregrounded throughout the narrative. We are repeatedly encountered with the question of Soluch's whereabouts: where has he gone? Why has he forsaken his family?[4] The reverberation of such questions in readers' mind can be interpreted as an attempt to invite the reader to understand the minds of characters "by imaginatively projecting ourselves into their situations, seeing how we respond to their situations in imagination" (Currie, "Realism of Character" 173). It seems that gaining self-knowledge through reading fiction would not be possible without an emotional response to actions and characters. After all, self-knowledge, if gained, is partly the fruit of a person's inquiry into her emotions and desires. However, having empathy with fictional characters is an initial stage for an avid reader to self-realization, and not all readers would exert themselves to have empathy with characters and be in their shoes. Empathy would highly enhance my understanding of emotions experienced by characters and cause me to have such

emotions alongside the characters without being engaged in the actions that might be painful. That is, surely, a risk-free exploration in a new world and a merit of literary texts. Reading narrative stories "may encourage to adopt a given lifestyle, call attention to certain problems previously treated as marginal, widen and enlarge sensitivity and moral awareness to certain questions" (Filutowska 28). Yet, these are only images of capabilities and capacities of the self, and self-images cannot give assurance that we have gained self-knowledge. Thus, empathizing with and thinking about the characters and actions are only the beginning.

If we suppose that self-knowledge is gained on the part of both the character and the reader, then we can examine its fulfillment in each one of them. Three main characters in the story, Mergan, Abbas, and Abrau, observe their own condition after Soluch's desertion, realizing that they have to stand on their own feet. When Mergan asks her two sons to go out and shovel the snow down the neighbors' roof to buy molasses for breakfast, they make excuses and are unwilling to do it. But Mergan assures them that they are doing it for themselves (*Missing Soluch*, book 2, ch.1). They also suffer severe hardship all along to understand what they are good for and how they can bring change to their condition. Later, as I cited above, there are key moments in the story that they are self-observing and reflecting on their condition. These moments set the scene for them to take action on what they know. They do not stand still to reflect relentlessly on their existence to know their selves. André Gide writes in *Autumn Leaves* (1950) that "A caterpillar who seeks to know himself would never become a butterfly" (qtd. in Nanay). Nanay interprets Gide's sentence as a caution against creating a static image of the self and resisting any kinds of change which he believes is dangerous and thinks that it is the result of an attempt at knowing the self, hence rejecting it altogether. Nanay takes self-knowledge as synonymous with forming self-image which is a contestable point. Basically, why should we bother to know our selves? One of the answers might be that we try to gain self-respect and self-love, otherwise seeking after self-knowledge by

looking inward would convert into endless self-criticism. For that matter, the obverse of what Nanay believes, gaining self-image might not be always so pleasing that we fall in love with it and resist change. It can also result in self-hatred. The jocose remark allegedly uttered by Goethe, “Know thyself? If I knew myself, I'd run away”, could be interpreted as an escape from forming an image of my self, but the second clause, *I'd run away*, could be regarded as to welcome a dynamic self-knowledge which does not concede to be framed. Knowing oneself does not mean solely to create an image of oneself but to change oneself and move forward. Accordingly, knowing oneself is not the effect of being oneself but becoming oneself, the act of fulfilling oneself. The change and becoming might not be intended or planned, however it needs a trigger to propel the action. Abbas is the one who refuses to change but the main action, namely, father's desertion, and its aftermath, indirectly change his destiny. Should we regard self-knowledge as becoming, then every action we take is the result of a choice we make, even the inaction, the fact of doing nothing, is shaped by our choices. When Mergan hears that her husband may be working in the mines, she has a decision before her, to go or to stay, and she decides to go leaving Abbas and Hajar behind. Other characters also make a decision one way or another, however, it should not be interpreted as a will to change, but more accurately, as a change to know oneself.

Conclusion

Whether fulfilled or not, the characters in *Missing Soluch* seek to change their condition and test their potential for growth and becoming. We can see this in what Dowlatabadi describes as getting primed with capabilities and potential. His idea of self-actualization is closely related to action, and it is not a mere state of mind. Dowlatabadi's characters are successfully exposed to action to test their capacities for self-knowledge. However, to propose as such on the readers' part

needs more than just an image that is gained through reading the story that should involve having empathy with fictional characters and situations to be deemed an ideal engagement in the story. To gain self-knowledge, the readers should also be engaged in action and achieving empathy with characters gives at best an image to the reader that is composed of emotions and thoughts experienced by reading about the lives of others. Thus, being in a fictional character's shoes is not enough for the reader to gain self-knowledge because for her self-cognitive capacities to be tested she needs to actualize those capacities gained from a character's development in the story.

Finally, there must be more than solely an aesthetic experience to literary works and that the literary reader is not an aloof, disinterested observer who will not believe any of the events happening in the story and who is all along aware that characters are fictional and reading a literary work is sheer entertainment. Such approach to literature has bilateral repercussions. On the one hand, for those non-fiction readers who regard reading fiction as a futile activity that says nothing about real events and is wholly imaginative and carefully drafted to amuse the reader, and on the other hand, for the fiction readers who think the former are the philistines who do not understand literature. But the point is we never get the same experience whenever we turn to a literary work and aesthetic experience is only one of them. Moreover, literature uses human language, that is, it is not an abstract form of art to be so vague that would need interpretation. A literary work relates stories to connect to its audience, and its narrative form makes it an apt medium to be a close imitation of life. We emotionally get prepared to relate to characters and events and enter their world. Thus, here we would not be the aloof observers of others' fate, but active readers participating in the narrative and feeling what our favorite characters feel. On this account, Dowlatabadi's novel can actively engage the reader in the story since the longer a story, the longer the path the reader takes and this helps one to have an unparalleled opportunity to live with a fictional character and know her more deeply. The reader's concepts of shame, loss, fear, hate, hope, rejection are

contextualized by reading *Missing Soluch* and vivified in reader's mind and she imagines herself in a character's situation. Involving the self in fictional events and experiences is an initial stage of knowing the self.

Notes

1. Translation is mine.
2. Translation is mine.
3. This is not a discussion of the novel's structure, but rather a brief examination of the ways it could reflect reality. For a structuralist narratology of *Missing Soluch* see the detailed analysis of Ahmad Hosseinpoor Sarkarizi, et al. "Application of Gremas' Actional Pattern in the analysis of Narratology Missing Soluch (Jaye Khalie Soluch) by Mahmoud Dowlatabadi (Case study: "Wake up Mergan and the absence of Soluch)." The whole article is available in Persian as کاربرد الگوی کنشگر گِرِماس درتحلیل روایت شناسیِ جایِ خالیِ سُلوچ (مطالعه موردی: «مِرگان در جُست و جوی سُلوچ»).
4. See *Missing Soluch*, book 1, ch.1. book 2, ch.1. book 2, ch. 2. book 3, ch. 1. book 3, ch. 3 for more thoughts and dialogues addressing the family's struggle with Soluch's desertion.

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