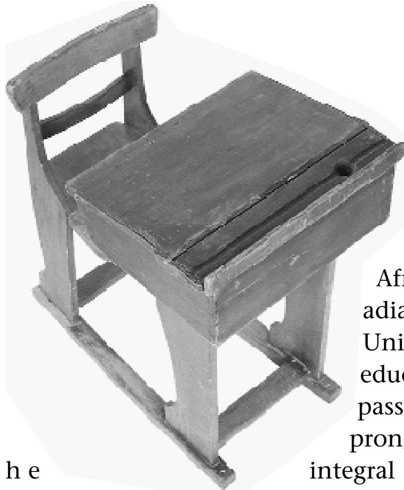
SCHOOL IS STILL THE PLACE:
Stories of Immigration and Education

By Patricia Goldblatt



Several years ago I heard Stephen Lewis, United Nations special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa and former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations, speak at an educational conference. His passionate speech had two prongs. The first concerned the integral role that school plays in the lives of children in Africa. When communicating with children—some maimed, some used as sex slaves, too many orphaned—in war-ravaged countries, he would ask, "What can I do for you? What do you want?" Invariably, the answer was, "I want to go to school." The second prong reinforced the first as Lewis dealt with the terrible events occurring in the outside world. Lewis affirmed that these terrors must provide the basis of a teacher's curriculum. The purpose of teaching about recent terrorism and violence must be the development of a future society of peacemakers.

Lewis delivered the message of African children who despite their daily acquaintance with turmoil, terrors, and torment proclaim that in school there is salvation. Unfortunately, the loss of innocence is not news in African countries in which 8,000 people a day die of AIDS or in Cambodia where the number of land mines far exceeds the number of people. To learn from Lewis's children, who retain hope for stability in a one-room mud building or even a more traditional place of learning, is a leap of faith: instruction from those who are usually on the receiving end. These children have proffered a light to the rest of the world, and in particular to teachers, that school is still the place where futures are possible, ideas are shared, growth can occur, vistas are dreamed, and visions beckon.

Indeed, how do we change the culture in our classrooms in North America, vanquishing the fear, mistrust, and cynicism that children ingest with their morning cereal? The smoke of September 11, 2001, lingers and will continue to pervade our schools and henceforth, our way of looking at life. The youngest of children needs to know that when he or she is tucked into bed at night, his or her parent or guardian will still be there in the morning. Those who have completed their high school and college studies, poised at the brink of their futures, ponder if there is a viable future in which to develop their talents. They must be taught that they themselves constitute an essential component in the reconstruction and regeneration of society. Knowing themselves to be part of the process substantiates a credibility that fresh beginnings are not only possible, but probable: "It is at times of bewilderment that the weapon of analysis and criticism comes into its own" (Umberto Eco, 2001, 23).

For educators, books that juxtapose contrasting versions of at least two world cultures invite analysis and comparison and provoke discourse that encourages the student to construct new realities.

As Lewis pointed out in his speech, these times filled with world horrors may, in fact, yield the peacekeepers of tomorrow. For educators, books that juxtapose contrasting versions of at least two world cultures invite analysis and comparison and provoke discourse that encourages the student to construct new realities. Beliefs, hatreds, and antagonisms already set in place through indoctrination by parents, media, or peers need to be examined. Just as teachers must confront their previous assumptions and inspect their baggage (Dilger, 1994), so too must students. Teaching becomes cultural and social intervention (Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Wasson, 1992).

Often authors use satire in storytelling, since situations exaggerated become somewhat depersonalized, objectified, even laughable in their extremes. Daily routines or patterns of existence lampooned, much like cartoons, provide sources of ridicule or point out flaws. Yet on reflection, we often realize that those who behave in a ridiculous fashion are not so different from ourselves, and that acknowledgment is sobering and instructive.

THE TORTILLA CURTAIN

Although Robert Adams (2001) has cited most of T. Coraghessan Boyle's early works as satires, he says *The Tortilla Curtain* is much more than exaggeration of life's problems. Adams explains and defines the tragic hero as one who, in spite of the terrible plight he finds himself in, behaves nobly. He is doomed by his belief in an impossible world, a utopia that cannot exist. The hero must fall despite his best efforts,

and that is what produces tragedy: his surge toward a courageous humane act in the midst of a world he knows is corrupt. Interestingly, the character we might originally identify with in *The Tortilla Curtain* is Delaney Mossbacher, an upper-middle-class American who fancies himself a liberal, a pacifist, and environmentally astute. He holds that "everyone deserves a chance…immigrants are the lifeblood of this country" (101). He resists fences, walls, borders, and any demarcations that would marginalize and separate him from the rest of humanity. He abhors racist jokes and adheres vehemently to principles of right and wrong. The trappings of Delaney's life—his Izod shirts, sushi, Japanese lanterns, Buddhas—suggest a mixing and appreciation of diverse cultures. Yet we gradually discover that Delaney is more rhetoric than reason. When his adopted son, Jordan, pouts over the choice of Cranberry Nut, Boysenberry Supreme, or Papaya Coconut high fiber breakfast bars and his wife, Kyra, takes her 12 separate vitamins and proclaims that her Lexus is her sanctuary and her work as a real estate agent is "altruistic" (75), we begin to look more deeply at this person who proclaims himself a naturalist.

Not only is his name a strange and unharmonious-sounding blend of Irish and German nationalities, his home, located in Arroyo Blanco, a perfectly manicured representation of suburban values, seems to be a strange fit for a man who espouses his stated ideals. However, his sensibilities—a culture of mayonnaise jars and Diet Coke cans; lobster tails and Perrier-Jouet—do indeed define the man, who ironically conceives of himself as a "pilgrim" and a seer. He outfits himself in the latest gear and expensive shoes to walk in the mountains and ravines surrounding his home in order to meditate on his devout relationship to nature. He laments that the "mustard seed is an interloper here" (78). Vaingloriously, he commiserates with the world of starvation, expressing depression above all with the suffering environment in which the planet's resources are being devoured, chastising the five and half billion people "chewing up the resources of the planet like locusts" (82). He is a man who believes himself a lofty, concerned intellectual, yet when he is confronted by the overwhelming number of Mexicans who have arrived in his posh neighborhood from the slums, favelas, and barrios, he ardently wishes he could hustle them back to Mexico, for they are "overwhelming the schools, welfare, the prisons and 'now' the streets" (185). In fact, when his car seriously maims an unfortunate Mexican, Delaney is more concerned about the dent on his car and offers the man $20 to just go away, fearful he will sue. Delaney considers that he should "leave the idiot to his fate and deny everything" (50).

Delaney's nemesis is the man he hit, Candido Rincon. Candido is nothing like his namesake, Voltaire's naive and gullible Candide, and he would never consider that *he lives in the best of all possible worlds*. In contrast, the name of Candido's wife, America, does convey her personality, her belief in a better life and the establishment of the American dream. Pathetically, she wishes for a gas range, a refrigerator, a little house, and even a small garden with a few chickens: "the glitter of the North like a second Eden" (29).

As the highest fulfillment of the American Dream, Delaney enjoys his status. Removed from life's indignities, his decline is facilitated by his accruing encounters with Candido. Candido desperately wants the right to work. But progress in spite of bone-breaking work and indomitable will are not possible in a racist society. Candido and America must hide in the bushes. They are cast as parasites, a disease inflicted on an inclement world.

With no power to confront the forces that deride and strip him of his manhood, Candido turns his rage on America. He can belittle her, treat her as a child, and raise a fist. She is a "no-nothing." In the ravine, she is prey and set upon by men like Candido who view her as defenseless, helpless, and of little worth except to satisfy their primal urges. In spite of his love and desire to protect her, Candido puffs himself up with machismo, subjugating one whom he considers inferior to himself and incapable of retaliation because of her sex.

The reader who initially identifies with the life of Delaney hears voices of both Candido and Delaney. Each moves further and further from resembling people we would like to know. Delaney's increasing bigotry and his illusions about himself vilify him. Ironically, the author creates a level playing field in which both men are authentically shown as wanting to survive and to protect what they feel is their right.

Neither society, Mexican nor American, is lauded. Each has produced undesirable, cruel people, wanting territory over which to preside in order to assert an illusion of worth. Covert acts of violence by the Mexicans and discriminatory selfish acts by the Californians recreate two worlds: the "haves" unwilling to share and the "have-nots" intent on taking. Umberto Eco sees a kind of equality over time in the means employed by both the victims and the victors:

> Saracen pirates did many wicked things, but the buccaneers of the British majesty set fire to the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean. As a form of self-protection from cultures mis-under-stood…[both]… used tactics of separation, marginalization and even elimination in order to remove the fear of an interloper who threatened his world. (2001, 23)

In Arroyo Blanco, gates and alarm systems are installed. Boyle, in his staging of these two worlds, juxtaposes the needy and the affluent, one salivating at the good life of the other. His depiction of Mossbacher's world is not kind, however realistic in its greedy need to rip out the "interlopers." Yet the world from which Candido wishes to escape has little to offer. Boyle does not glorify poverty as noble or romanticize Candido as a hero. Candido is unappealingly crusted with bruises, urinating blood, a pariah hiding in the bushes or scouring dumpsters for food. He has not earned our respect and we are not drawn to champion his plight. Although we may decry the injustices heaped on him, our

judgments are tempered by his treatment of the gentle America and the cost both must pay for his fierce desires.

The Tortilla Curtain is a stark portrayal of two men from vastly diverse cultures whose behavior is neither exemplary nor commendable. Yet a culminating event brings both men to a camaraderie that reveals an ultimate humanity. Candido, whose blind newborn and drowned wife should have rendered him suicidal or, at least, murderously vengeful, is resurrected by a final act that redeems both men and unites them in a gesture that refigures and sustains belief in the possibility of the American Dream.

The Tortilla Curtain is indeed rich. Contrasts, rights, cultures, economics, needs, lifestyles, and race are all topics neither sentimentalized nor simplified for the student. The book offers a powerful journey, one not likely to be forgotten. The author depicts a world in turmoil. Tough issues that affect different cultures and the resolution of conflicts are at the heart of the story. Boyle gives us hope by reestablishing our faith in the power of people to find a way out of the madness of physical and spiritual destructions.

INTERPRETER OF MALADIES

Interpreter of Maladies by Jhumpa Lahiri is a short story anthology that gently portrays displaced persons living in and attempting to adapt to the United States. "Mrs. Sen," one of Lahiri's narratives, brings together Mrs. Sen, the Indian wife of a mathematics professor, and 11-year-old Eliot, an American boy. Mrs. Sen is a lonely woman. She misses the human comforts of friendship as well as the traditions of her country. She confides to Eliot, "At home, not everybody has a telephone. But just raise your voice a bit, express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements" (116). Like the odor of mothballs and cumin that preserves and pervades her apartment, so Mrs. Sen attempts to memorialize her former culture. Eliot is fascinated with the vermilion powder dabbed on her scalp, her spices and pastes, her collection of broths, and the bright pink yogurt she laces with rose syrup.

In spite of the small security that she shares with her husband, she feels terribly marginalized. When her husband entreats her to learn how to drive, she refuses at first but gradually comprehends that a motor car may be her route to freedom, or at least a means of avoiding stares when she returns from buying fish at the seaside market. She asks Eliot, "Could I drive all the way to Calcutta?" Reminiscent of Proust's *madeleine*, fish evoke for Mrs. Sen the memory of things past. She teaches Eliot about life in India by explaining that back home, one eats fish before bed, first thing in the morning, and if one is very lucky, as a snack after school—even the tail, eggs, and head!

Eliot is the interested, nonjudgmental presence who appreciates her agility as she swoops down on her vegetable garden. He is enchanted by her innumerable saris of every texture and shade, one for each day of the week. Even her habit of beeping her horn to alert birds that she is approaching does not seem to trouble or perplex him. Reflecting on his own mother's cropped hair, shaved exposed legs, and small lies, he prefers Mrs. Sen's foray into a magical world of mincemeat and raisins, semolina, and halvah. He is not repelled by her difference but rather entranced, accepting, looking with open eyes at her serene and well-ordered world.

He intuits her loneliness and the absence of loved ones. He reflects on a Labor Day holiday when he could hear the music and dancing of his neighbors at a party next door to which he and his mother were not invited. He had wished for the security of a car wash so "he could sit inside. Safe and dry, as soap and water and a circle of giant canvas ribbons…" (116). He knows her solitude.

In desperation to purchase fish, Mrs. Sen attempts to drive the car. The attempt ends in failure. She is a poignant case study, emblematic of a woman who cannot fit into a new world and whose only support is as lonely as herself, unable to aid her in transition. Although Eliot is willing to enter her world of stews, spices, and striving, her accident with the car removes him from her life.

Discussing how the fates of both characters might have been altered, students are able to enter into worlds of exclusion, examining their own searches for meaning and acceptance. They might ponder the emotions, the needs, the lengths to which individuals or countries might go in order to achieve the security that people so desperately need in a society. Eliot Eisner has attempted to create student-*connoisseurs* (1991). His process of engaging student thought is through a process of discussion, interpretation, examination, and further attention to themes. The teacher actively stimulates and co-creates (Freire, 1973) along with the student. Like fine wine, stories must be carefully savored and attention paid to details. Readers must learn to discern facts, smells, sights, sounds, voices, and contexts—all elements that play into the creation of the wine or in this case, the narrative. A dialectic established between character and his/her setting or background substantiates and provides understanding of motives for action. Much like sleuths, we pry into the whys and hows of human development and motivation. Lanier (cited in Broudy, 1967) suggested what he called "canalling" or focusing directly on a particular element, much like the light from a flashlight. Identifying one issue at a level of understanding appropriate to student interests not only acknowledges teacher awareness of student knowledge, but also creates bridges

beyond the classroom to the world outside.

"This Blessed House" from *Interpreter of Maladies* features Twinkle from Calcutta, who unlike Mrs. Sen is more than ready to embrace the contradictions she finds in America. Although betrothed at age 16 in India, she has been educated at Stanford, even writing her master's thesis on an obscure Irish poet. Her husband, Sanjeev, is a well-established professional fascinated by his wife's exuberance and willingness to adapt. He dislikes her high heels, her smoking, and her fondness for whiskey. To the outside world, he has been acculturated, yet he is fixed in patriarchal habits of tradition.

When they renovate their home, Twinkle is delighted to come across Christian artifacts: three-dimensional postcards of St. Francis in four colors; the Three Wise Men on black velvet; a tile trivet of Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount; a statue of the Virgin Mary; dish towels with the Ten Commandments printed on them. Incensed, Sanjeev instructs her, "[These are] nonsense left behind" (139) and demands that she pitch them out. To Twinkle's growing curiosity, he repudiates the artifacts as "[y]our biblical menageries," and adds "I refuse to have this" (139). Her increasing interest in unearthing these remarkable treasures only serves to irk and irritate Sanjeev, dislodging his concept of a perfect home. It is as if these objects desecrate his notion of Indian tradition.

Content to present himself as an Indian with a beautiful and charming wife and a person who has not only successfully integrated himself into Western society but also risen in its corporate structure, Sanjeev serves champagne and samosas at his posh party. Yet both he and Twinkle prefer pre-roasted chicken sandwiches from the supermarket and Italian bread to Indian fare. However, accepting the food of this new world does not extend to the religious traditions its inhabitants might embrace. He tells Twinkle, "We're not Christians, we're good little Hindus" (137).

Sanjeev resents Twinkle's openness, her ability to accept, laugh, discover, and enjoy. When she finds a solid silver bust of Christ, three times the size of Sanjeev's head, he is forced to admit that it is valuable, resplendent with serenity and even beauty. Yet he hates it because he cannot fathom why Twinkle might love it. For Sanjeev, the price in dollars establishes its worth, not the exciting, delightful, and strange troves of unexpected traditions.

As a lens to explore the perspectives of those bound by traditional thought and those willing to encounter and experience new ways, the story provides an interesting contrast of behaviors. It is obvious that Twinkle is welcomed by Sanjeev's new colleagues. They embrace her and will no doubt learn through her about the Eastern customs she has in no way abandoned. She is a carrier as well as a receiver of culture as "dynamic experiences" (Burke-Feldman, 1980). Sanjeev's attitude and carefully constructed façade will never permit the closeness of a real relationship in America, since he is incapable of looking beyond his own traditions that are continually fossilized within him.

Sadly, Mrs. Sen as she continues to withdraw, her cups of tea growing cold, the television left on as company, does not have the ready entry to society that Sanjeev experiences daily. Both will suffer. Mrs. Sen's happiness will exist only in letters home or in the tape of family voices recorded on her wedding day. For Sanjeev, his agreement to allow the remnants of Christianity in his house does not mark a willingness to accept or comprehend another's reality; rather, it is a way to ensure that a lovely woman embraces his success as a man of means to the outside world.

Is it possible for the immigrant to combine diverse worlds and remain whole? Can one ever return from the new world and see the old one in the same light again? Books that introduce diverse cultures invite curiosity and entrance into new worlds. They permit safe observation platforms, secure placement for comparisons and queries. Books allow for contemplation and reflection, a source for establishing dialogues with collaborative communities as students reach out in discussion to understand difference.

In my own classroom, students would select a person who had departed his or her home. They would adopt that character's persona and write a letter in that voice, empathizing and presenting the feeling and reasons why she or he has had to leave her or his country of birth. Using the pronoun "I" creates a bridge, as the writer of the letter must imagine herself or himself as the immigrant. Numerous lenses inform thinking, challenging ingrained beliefs. In poignant human terms, emotional losses and familial estrangement propel identification as well as self-scrutiny for the student transformed in the process from objective reader to disenfranchised traveler, as he or she must find the words needed to communicate with a former friend or lover of his or her new life from home. Appropriating and considering another's values, ideas, and traditions in a safe environment opens doors to empathy and understanding.

Joseph Schwab's Polfocal method (Schwab, 1971) also presents a way to stimulate discussion among students. In this method, one student recounts the story studied. A second presents an alternative perspective. Having heard the second insight, the first student is asked to reconsider his or her point of view. The second is also asked to consider the first's interpretation. "What begins as a debate between two views is steered into conjoint inquiry regarding alternative readings" (Shulman, 1992, 12). As point-counterpoints emerge, other students enter into the fray. In this way, both cognitive and metacognitive processes are called into play, expanding perspectives and bringing about change.

WHITE TEETH

Like *The Tortilla Curtain*, Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* creates a society of extremes. Smith places her protagonists in a real time and place. Smith's London reflects the societal changes of the formerly all-white culture of Mary Quant, the Beatles, and the British Monarchy of the 1950s. She reproduces a contemporary portrayal of the British city, now a multicultural metropolis. It is a picture of the economically strapped, bustling world of immigrants from one culture, struggling to find a place for themselves and their children

far from their birthplaces. Laborers from Jamaica and refugees escaping repressive governments or seeking to worship as they please have altered the previous demographic. Names reflect the hybrid of intermingling cultures: Quang O'Rourke, Danny Rahman, Irie Jones: "Names that secrete within them mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals, medical checks" (281). Smith probes a society in transition through the relationship of 47-year-old Archie Jones and his 19-year-old Catholic school bride, Clara, whose parents are both Jamaican and British. In spite of the coexistence of divergent cultures, traditional London has not completely warmed to "the other." Abdul-Mickey is a friend of Archie's and owner of O'Connell's Pool House. Combining aspects of his past and present life, Abdul-Mickey has retained the name of the bar along with the original George Stubbs paintings of racehorses, yet he refuses to serve pork, forbidden to Muslims. Abdul-Mickey is beaten nightly and when he asks the police for help, they add to his mistreatment. He comes to expect it.

Although immigrants to Britain seem to self-segregate in cheap and affordable neighborhoods like Willesdem in the story, each national group fears the loss of its traditions to an overwhelming and bland majority culture. Archie and his Indian comrade, Samad Iqbal, share an endearing friendship as war buddies from World War II, yet Samad is frantic to retain his Muslim traditions. He is terrified of assimilation. His wife, Alsana, does piecework at home, sewing crotchless panties for sex shops. In site of his vocal participation in his twin sons' school and his dalliance with one of their non-Muslim teachers, Samad is a harsh critic of the way people lead their lives in London. He deplores Alsana's niece, who has taken a female lover. He shouts at Alsana:

> They [her sisters] won't go to the mosque, they don't pray, they speak strangely, they dress strangely, they eat all kinds of rubbish, they have intercourse with God knows who. No respect for tradition. People call it assimilation when it is nothing but corruption. Corruption. (165)

Samad considers deeply that "tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles" (168).

Although Bangladesh is torn by war and natural disasters such as cyclones, earthquakes, mudslides and floods, with a life expectancy of only 52 years of age, Samad embarks on rescuing at least one of his twin sons from the ravages of British culture. Smith mocks Samad's attempts. Maguid returns to his grandparents and falls under the spell of a British expatriate poet, who so impresses the boy that he becomes a perfect David Niven miniature, spouting the Queen's English as if he had been educated at a proper prep school. In contrast, the rebellious Millat, who remains in London, embraces KEVIN, a splinter terrorist group that lauds the values of Islam. Portraits of the two assert that no pure racial identity can exist in a world of shifting people and values and no one person, particularly a parent, can choose traditions, customs, or values for his children.

Smith juxtaposes Samad's wild dash to impose Bengali heritage on his children with his friend Archie's vapid, milquetoast personality; Archie is a man incapable of making any decision at all. Indeed, when he is forced to answer a question, Archie flips a coin, allowing fate to have the final say. As well, Smith mocks Samad's attempts by the decisions of both boys to follow the exact opposite fates Samad arranges for them. Archie's daughter Irie, whose name means "I'm okay," is the paradigm that addresses the issues of maintaining a sense of one's own heritage while being assimilated in a polyglot of diverse cultures. Initially she despises her thick, abundant body shape: "big tits, big thighs, big teeth, she was thirteen stone" (229) and hates her curly hair inherited from her fundamentalist Jamaican Christian grandmother. Smith makes Irie large; she towers over most of the bigoted, self-absorbed, or uncaring characters in the tale. It is no accident that Smith reinforces Irie's bulky appearance. An intelligent girl, an avid student at school, Irie gains insight from her relationships and decides that she will proceed on her own path of self-recognition and identity.

Partly due to her exposure to the Chalfens, a thoroughly modern and dysfunctional family intent on pursuing the science of cloning at any cost, Irie decides to educate herself about her own human roots. Considering Marcus Chalfen's experiments, "he created beings. He went to the edges of his God's imagination and made mice Yahweh could not conceive of: mice with rabbit genes, mice with webbed feet" (269). The prurient interest in selective breeding permeates the inward and outer structure of this family: The mother works at grafting in plants and reveals a rather strange, sexual interest in the very handsome Millat. At first Irie is impressed by the closeness of the family, their clever repartee, but she soon realizes that their intents are dehumanizing. Everything and everyone they encounter is dissected, pried apart, or put under a microscope for reorganization in "the Chalfen way." The family is a study in science gone awry.

In an effort to deepen her own understanding of growth, heritage, identity, and placement in the world, Irie implores Clara, her mother, to allow her to take a year off to see Africa and visit "the people of the world." She laments, "I've lived in this bloody suburb all my life. Everyone's the same here" (324). Irie combines thought and action, dreaming of the word "*homeland* [as] one of the magical fantasy words like *unicorn* and *soul* and *infinity*" (345). She will, in fact, return to Jamaica pregnant, adding another racial component to her own Black-Whiteness mixture, herself a burgeoning world that mixes diverse cultures.

As a symbol, Irie connects elements of the past as well as the future. She will balance and entwine worlds, perhaps even ameliorating both in positive and sustaining ways. Millat, Samad's militant son, also strives to carve a place for himself. "Millat was neither Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali....He lived up to his middle name, Zulitikar, the clashing of swords" (303). Yet there is no resolution for him.

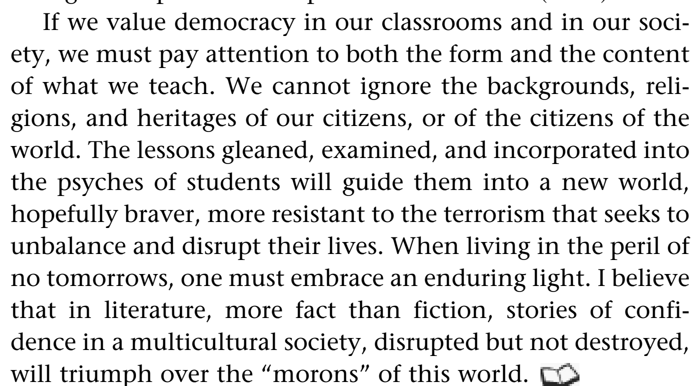
As a tale of instruction, Smith has not only given the reader Irie as an icon, she uses the characters' names to

provide instruction and insight into her tale. Smith's ability to catch and reproduce the authentic voices of a variety of people and cultures grabs the ear of the student who hears the echoes of his/her own voice and is ready to respond. Ensnared by familiar sounds, she or he is already participating in the dialogues created by Smith. The language, the repartee, the slang, the cadences are the sounds of youth, skillfully caught by this talented writer in her twenties, not far from the ages of the people she creates.

If the ending of the novel is not as satisfying as the reader would like, the telling is nonetheless a lesson on living in a multicultural society and surviving with integrity. No longer are the shocking white teeth or the bulging eyes stereotypical indicators of the nonwhite neighbor. These exaggerated characteristics exist alongside skinny noses, chicken arms, dangling butts, pierced eyebrows, ruddy cheeks. In short, people are not defined, marginalized, rejected, accepted, or appreciated for their physical characteristics. Living in a pluralistic society implies exposure to a kaleidoscope of colors, hair, skin, and body types. What should interest the observer is the individual produced by multiple diverse backgrounds. To read about people from numerous cultures is to learn about oneself, to deepen comprehension and connections about how we are similar and different, our narratives adding and enriching others with whom we share space on the planet. Again, it is Umberto Eco's (2001) perception that informs, "It is sometimes hard to grasp the difference between identifying with one's own roots, understanding people with other roots, and judging what is good and bad." Indeed, the face in the mirror does not always smile back. When we consider what is important to take the children of tomorrow into the future, we ponder what they must know.

Margaret Wente, longtime columnist and self-described "educational pundit" for the principal Canadian newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, decries the lack of substantial learning that occurs in Toronto schools. Her diatribes often attack what she calls "equity education"—the celebration and/or study of Harvest Festivals, American slavery, homophobia, and so on. She concludes that the system that permits these studies is "designed to produce 'compassionate morons'" (2001).

If we value democracy in our classrooms and in our society, we must pay attention to both the form and the content of what we teach. We cannot ignore the backgrounds, religions, and heritages of our citizens, or of the citizens of the world. The lessons gleaned, examined, and incorporated into the psyches of students will guide them into a new world, hopefully braver, more resistant to the terrorism that seeks to unbalance and disrupt their lives. When living in the peril of no tomorrows, one must embrace an enduring light. I believe that in literature, more fact than fiction, stories of confidence in a multicultural society, disrupted but not destroyed, will triumph over the "morons" of this world.



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