

many publications of Sufi literature, Idries Shah (*The Way of the Sufi*, 1969) indicates how central to the training of the sages and saints of Islam are the traditional tales. Sometimes they are no more than small anecdotes, sometimes lengthy and involved adventures such as were collected into the Arabian Nights.

As I pointed out, using the example of the Christ story, the first step is to learn the story, as if it were laying down the foundation. The next phase rests with the natural process of the imagination.

The story is, as it were, a kit. Apart from its own major subject—obvious enough in the case of the Christ story—it contains two separable elements: its pattern and its images. Together they make that story and no other. Separately they set out on new lives of their own.

The roads they travel are determined by the brain's fundamental genius for metaphor. Automatically, it uses the pattern of one set of images to organize quite a different set. It uses one image, with slight variations, as an image for related and yet different and otherwise imageless meanings.

In this way, the simple tale of the beggar and the princess begins to transmit intuitions of psychological, perhaps spiritual, states and to relationships. What began as an idle reading of a fairy tale ends by simple natural activity of the imagination as a rich perception of values of feeling, emotion, and spirit that would otherwise have remained unconscious and languageless.

The inner struggle of worlds, which is not necessarily a violent and terrible affair, though at bottom it often is, is suddenly given the perfect formula for the terms of a truce. A simple tale, told at the right moment, transforms a person's life with the order its pattern brings to incoherent energies.

While the tale's pattern proliferates in every direction through all levels of consciousness, its images are working, too. The image of Lazarus is not easily detached by a child from its striking place in the story of Christ, but once it begins to migrate, there is no limiting its importance. In all Dostoevsky's searching adventures, the basic image, radiating energies that he seems never able to exhaust, is Lazarus.

The image does not need to be so central to a prestigious religion for it to become so important. At the heart of *King Lear* is a very simple little tale—the Story of Salt. In both of these we see how a simple image in a simple story has somehow focused all the pressures of an age—collisions of spirit and nature and good and evil and a majesty of existence that seem uncontainable. But it has brought all that into a human pattern, and made it part of our understanding.

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3 ♦ What Happened to

Imagination?

MAXINE GREENE

Teachers College, Columbia University



Burton #0254

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In the recent proliferation of reports on education and calls for reform, there has been little or no mention of imagination. There seems to be a general association of imagination with the noncognitive, with the intuitive, or with the merely playful; and none of these are granted relevance for serious learning or for mastery. The neglect and the distortion trouble me. They appear to signify an acquiescence to existence within boundaries or frames: a contained, systematized way of living closed to alternative possibilities.

I think of all those (poets, painters, mathematicians, philosophers) who have recognized that a "one-dimensional" life (Marcuse, 1964) is a life of confinement to one of the multiple realities available to human beings. What we know as "reality" is, after all, interpreted experience; to limit learners to a single dominant mode of interpreting their experience may be to frustrate their individual pursuits of meaning—and, consequently, their desires to come to know, to learn. It may involve (it probably does involve) the imposition of a predefined conception of the "given," which these days is a largely technical rendering of the world.

It is not simply the idea of confinement that troubles me. It is the idea that young people are not encouraged to look *through* the windows of the actual on occasion, to regard things as if they could be otherwise. They are given few opportunities to gather what the poet Hart Crane called "reflections," which might enable them to perceive such relationships as that between "a drum and a street lamp—via the unmentioned throbbing of the heart and nerves of a distraught man . . ." (October 1926, pp. 34-5). Young people are given few opportunities to discover the kinds of connections Lewis Thomas made visible when he described, in *The Lives of a Cell*, what he called the

music of the spheres (1975) and the rearrangements associated with the process of entropy.

If there were to be sounds to represent this process, they would have the arrangement of the Brandenburg Concertos for my ear, but I am open to wonder whether the same events are recalled by the rhythms of insects, the long, pulsing runs of birdsong, the descants of whales, the modulated vibrations of a million locusts in migration, the tympani of gorilla breasts, termite heads, drumfish bladders. A "grand canonical ensemble" is, oddly enough, the proper term for a quantitative model system in thermodynamics borrowed from music by way of mathematics. (p. 25)

Not only is Thomas able to move back and forth through the multiple provinces of meaning; he recognizes the ways in which experience can be expanded through the entertainment of associations and alternative possibilities. For Mary Warneck, imagination is one of the powers of cognition, allowing for the sense "that there is always *more* to experience and *more* in what we experience than we can predict" (1976, p. 203). It seems to me that Thomas' writing is an example of this, even as is the wonder-struck inquiry of a young student made aware that there is always something beyond.

The notion of something beyond reminds me of Wallace Stevens, who once called imagination "the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos" (1965, p. 153). In one of his poems, a blue guitar becomes a metaphor for what he means. There is a man with a blue guitar charged with not playing things as they are. The man replied, "Things as they are/ Are changed upon the blue guitar . . ." (1969, p. 165). Those around him object; they want him to play a tune about things "exactly as they are." Later on, he tells them: "Throw away the lights, the definitions/ And say of what you see in the dark/ That it is this or that it is that/ But do not use the rotted names" (p. 183). He seems to be asking that his listeners break with their stock responses, their fixed ideas of the actual; that they see for themselves beyond even what familiar names disclose. And, at length, he says, "You as you are? You are yourself. The blue guitar surprises you." Surprise, yes, and the unpredictable. And, as importantly, an open self in the process of creation. It seems evident enough that the self, so conceived, can neither be measured nor predefined. Given the emphasis today on young people as "human resources" to be trained for productivity in the technological society, I am inclined to believe that such a rendering of a human being may seem inappropriate to those concerned about efficiency and man-

ageability. It may suggest one of the reasons for thrusting imagination aside.

Clearly, Wallace Stevens was no more a spokesman for education than for the values associated with good management; but certain of his metaphors summon up (at least for me) a whole range of ideas relating to knowledge and the life of meaning. The last stanza of his "Six Significant Landscapes" (1969, p. 183), for instance, embodies an entire argument for a way of being and attending other than what is taken for granted today. He wrote:

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses—
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon—
Rationalists would wear sombreros.

Each time I read that verse, I find myself experiencing a true shock of recognition and, at once, an actual release from confinement. In this case, it is a confinement to the logical and linear, and to a particular kind of academic order that imposes its own forms on what is felt and perceived. Unexpectedly, every time I read the verse, the triangles begin to reform themselves and actually become rhomboids; and then there is an opening to a multiplicity of anticipated shapes and forms. The surprise comes with the move to the half-moon, which can only become visible through a window the rationalists (with their solemn mortarboards) did not suspect was there. And then there is the other, comical surprise at the image of those mortarboards somehow curving into sombreros. Why not? They are not required to give up their work in the square rooms; but they are offered new possibilities of vision, new extensions of consciousness. That is what imagination can do: create new domains, new vistas, expansions of ordinary awareness. For me, this seems profoundly important in a time of formulated pieties and glittering reassurances that stun audiences into silence and make it difficult to believe that anything is susceptible any longer to critical examination or to change.

Violence, conspiracy, and arms-trading preoccupy us on the one hand; homelessness, hunger, pollution, racism, and the AIDS epidemic tear at us on the other. Private interests overtake what was once

a public space. On all sides, people withdraw into enclaves, if they are not simply letting themselves be absorbed in the television "reality." In the face of all this, the educational messages have largely to do with technical expertise, with measurable achievements, with economic competitiveness, with a "cultural literacy" grounded in the most ancient of verities. Of course, there are remembered voices that some of us try to keep audible: John Dewey's, speaking of intelligence and de-liberation; Hannah Arendt's, speaking of "newcomers" and a common world; Jerome Bruner's, speaking of life-stories, models, and discoveries; other voices, summoning up images of growth and openness, of nurturing and repairing and keeping things alive. There are contemporary voices like that of Donald A. Schön, shaping images of a "reflective practitioner" seeking a technology that will "help students become aware of their own intuitive understandings, to fall into cognitive confusions and explore new directions of understanding and action" (1983, p. 333), or that of Theodore R.Sizer, saying that inspiration and hunger are "the qualities that drive good schools" (1984, p. 221).

They feed my desire to speak of a kind of education that recognizes imagination as fundamental to learning to learn, essential to the feeling that life is more than a futile, repetitive, consuming exercise. The idea of beginnings is central to this: Hannah Arendt's view that "it is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical everyday purposes, amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle" (1958, pp. 177-8). To talk about beginnings and the improbable where teaching and learning are concerned is to presume that, somewhere in the background, there is the sound of a blue guitar.

Also, it is to conceive of both teaching and learning as modes of action, not behaviors, since action is what signifies the taking of initiatives, the starting up of something new. From the vantage point of the initiator or the agent, all sorts of things seem possible; things can become different from "the way they are." A space of freedom may open up; the individual, conscious of others around, may experience (unexpectedly, perhaps) a power to choose, to move towards what is not yet, while he or she looks at things (the classroom, the faces of the students, the books open on the desks, the abstracted eyes, the attentive eyes, the view outside the window) as if they could be otherwise. Or we might shift to the vantage point of the student, perhaps decid-

ing to undertake his or her own action to find out, to teach himself or herself something new. It appears that few persons are likely to feel that way or act in that way if they are not nourishing an image of what it would be like "if only . . . " or some image of what is not yet.

To learn, after all, is to become different, to see more, to gain a new perspective. It is to choose against things as they are. To imagine is to look beyond things as they are, to anticipate what might be seen through a new perspective or through another's eyes. Or (to return to George Herbert Mead and his work on human interactions) it might be to take the view of the "generalized other," what is seen as the community's attitude (1948, p. 154), and discover something unexpected in what it happens to disclose. The crucial point has to do with the capacity to break somehow with what is merely given, to summon up some absent or alternative reality. John Dewey once wrote that imagination is the "gateway" through which meanings derived from prior experiences feed into and illuminate present experiences. Imagination may also be viewed as the source of a future vantage point from which to consider what is lacking in the present or the now. In any case, Dewey went on to say that experience becomes conscious only when accumulated meanings enter in; and he made it eminently clear that, as he saw it, imagination had an essential role to play in the development of mind. Without it, without consciousness, Dewey said, "there is only recurrence, complete uniformity; the resulting experience is routine and mechanical" (1934, p. 272).

This only becomes meaningful, however, from the perspective of someone who has overcome the feeling of being a functionary or a mere cog in a system, who sees himself or herself as attaining a sense of agency. We have only to recall some of our own experiences with beginning things, the consequences of which could not be predetermined. When Dewey described deliberation, it will be recalled, he called it "a dramatic rehearsal in imagination of various competing possible lines of action" (1916, p. 188). He meant a kind of thinking or reflectiveness very different from the predictive or the calculative. He meant the kind that leaves possibilities open, that allows for the unexpected or surprise. The issue may be as simple as turning aside from the discussion of a story in an English class to give students an exercise in paragraph construction. It may be as complex as deciding, in the face of some climactic public event, to try to bring into being a space of dialogue within the classroom. Often we take initiatives that are unexpected even for us (unless we insist upon thinking of ourselves as technicians working in terms of instrumental generalizations). Rehearse in imagination as we may, we often discover that

the resultant action is seldom precisely what we had in mind. ("The blue guitar surprises you." Of course it does. Every time.)

To highlight what can be involved in that approach to teaching, it is well to compare it with the approach of certain administrators who feel themselves bound to take the vantage point of the system rather than that of the practitioner engaged in new beginnings. Very frequently they speak and report in terms of cause-effect or input-output relations, tendencies, trends, or probabilities. They focus on observable and usually measurable behaviors resulting in or failing to result in desired end products or prespecified performances. Their preoccupations tend usually to be with endpoints and products, not beginnings; and they look back from the end points when they make their judgments about "mediocrity" and the absence of excellence. They do not ponder alternatives or possible lines of action in the way Dewey described when discussing specific teaching situations. For many officials, for all their occasional acknowledgment of the random and the uncontrollable, freedom (like imagination) seems to be an irrelevance. It is at odds with statistical probability, with prediction, with regularity. It is not only inefficient; it is disruptive to take into account.

I have difficulties with this, apart from my difficulties with the constriction of experience to which it may lead, the confinement of human beings to some version of "square rooms." The notion of normalization arises too easily: Individuals of all sorts are treated as creatures who are to be "normalized," thrust into acceptable boxes or molds, and judged accordingly. It becomes, then, less and less likely that teaching and learning will be thought of as situation-specific; and there will be (indeed, there presently are) principles and regulations to be applied to schooling in general, with an eroding sense of alternative possibilities. I do not mean that the public's representatives or the system's administrators ought to keep their hands off particular schools. It is troubling that guarantees are sought that cannot be given: guarantees of protection against drugs and adolescent pregnancy and "secular humanism." It is particularly troubling that the current malaise and powerlessness so often find expression in scapegoating public schools.

To view the school as defensive against what are perceived to be social evils or as simply reactive to outside forces is to suffer, asSizer says, a "paralysis of imagination" (1984, pp. 218ff.). It is undoubtedly the case that many members of the public view the role of education to be one of supporting and sustaining the status quo, no matter what its flaws. They see the schools as primarily obligated to prepare the

young to fill available occupational and professional slots, to initiate them into the mainstream *ethos*, to equip them with the manners and habits required for acceptability in the community. Their objections to what the schools accomplish are usually a function of the degree to which the schools seem to fail in responding to their concrete demands. In a period when America is ostensibly "feeling good" and proud of itself again, it is difficult to gauge the precise degree of restiveness and dissatisfaction with the public schools at large; and, consequently, it is difficult to know whether the capacity of imagination can be enlisted in pondering what ought to be within and around the schools. Obviously, there are members of the public who feel intensely the deficiencies in their communities and an erosion of those values once believed to be the ground of the nation's commitment: equity, freedom, decency, concern, and even some mode of "excellence." Such people are more likely to create a vision of a better order of things and, indeed, more responsive and liberating schools. For that reason, they are likely to be more sensitive to and articulate about what they perceive to be lacking in the world around them. Often, the sense of lack and deficiency stimulates the imaginative capacity. People begin experiencing the limitations of the status quo; they summon up images of what is absent, of what is not yet achieved.

When I ponder the uses of imagination in social and political spheres, I think about the importance of public dialogue (in multiple voices) having to do with the purposes of education in a democracy. There is a sense in which such a dialogue may become exemplary, particularly if it has to do with the domain in which the lives and futures of the young mesh with the nature and future of what is thought to be the common world. Hannah Arendt has written:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, not to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (1961, p. 196)

If there is substance to what Arendt has said, if the underlying questions might somehow arouse the interest of members of a presently inarticulate public, we would find that both social intelligence and imagination are needed if responses are to be found. Even to ponder

what it signifies to "love the world" is to move beyond the ordinary into domains where poets ordinarily venture. And to save the world from ruin, to cherish it, must involve those who attend in metaphorical thinking: the linking of what is apparently unlike, bringing together disparate ideas, enriching and expanding both. Then, of course, Arendt introduces the idea of "something new, something unforeseen," clearly something that can only be imagined, that cannot (as she herself wrote) be settled by empirical science.

To think this way along with others would inevitably engage people in a quest for possibility. They would be moving outwards if they did this, risking, trying (with newcomers and beginnings in mind) to become what they might become for the sake of renewing, for the sake of loving a deeply resistant world. To express human agency in this fashion with a concrete sense of what is wrong and what is possible nourishes and complicates my vision of what it might mean to educate in dark times like our own. I remember Rilke writing to "the young poet" (1934, pp. 3–4) about inconsiderable things that must be loved, about how they become "big and beyond measuring." And then he reminded the young poet that he was young, and continued: "I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, that cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

If teachers and parents, along with the young, could love the questions and live the questions with the "distant day," somehow in sight, the spaces in which they lived would be infused with wonder and imagination both. Teachers might be more prone to create the kinds of situations in which the young would be empowered to learn in such a way that they might find themselves appearing before others—other free people—provoking one another to move forward in the name of loving and renewing, in the name of care for the least and the most among them. It is a question of opening subject matters as possible perspectives on the shared world, a question of releasing people for their own pursuits of meaning, their own searches for answers, their own efforts to name and to articulate what they live.

Imaginative literature is replete with derelict figures and silenced creatures, with persons struggling for moments of wide-awakeness, struggling out of objecthood towards spaces of freedom in their worlds. Who cannot but think of Bartleby and Huckleberry Finn, of Lily Bart

and Isabel Archer, of Stephen Daedalus and Ivan Ilyich, of Dorothea Brooke and Sula Peace and the Underground Man and Dr. Rieux, of Alice Walker's Celie and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man? It is not only that readers must release their imagination in order to engage with the perspectives of each work and constitute an illusioned world out of the materials of their own consciousness and social experience. It is, more often than not, that the "as-if" so constituted confronts the reader with ambiguities, gaps, voids that must be dealt with imaginatively—and always without guarantees. An individual's experience reveals itself as otherwise than it usually does; it is defamiliarized. Opportunities are provided to see through the taken-for-granted, to disrupt the normal, to see reality anew.

All this suggests a variety of reasons for using the arts when the values of imagination are acknowledged in private life or in public dialogue. Paintings, works of music, dance performances—when made accessible, all have the potential to conjure up new experiential possibility, to make audible a blue guitar. It is not a matter of making people "better," or of initiating them into some elite community where individuals are reputed to be more sensitive, more intimately engaged with the arts. My commitment is to do what can be done to enable as many people as can be reached to crack the old forbidding codes, to break through the artificial barriers that have so long served to exclude. The idea is to offer opportunities to release imagination as all sorts of energies move outwards to the Cezanne or the Haydn or the Balanchine work. The idea is to challenge awed passivity or a merely receptive attitude or a submergence in pleasurable reverie. If people can choose themselves as imaginative beings present to particular works, if they can attend in some "space" they have carved out in their own experience, the works will emerge in their particularity, and new dimensions of the perceiver's lived world may be disclosed.

There are always new beginnings with the arts, the kinds of beginnings spoken of before. That means there are always untapped possibilities, always an element of the unpredictable. I do not mean that what may appear or be summoned up will always be beautiful or pleasant or even significant; not being able to measure or predict, one never can be sure. I do know, however, that whenever I read or see or listen to something as familiar to me as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* or Handel's *Water Music* or the Cezanne still life with the "pepper bottle," I am likely to discover some dimension, some shape or sound or glint of light or meaning I do not remember having recognized before. There have been works (Philip Glass' music, for example) that I did not originally "like" and, after listening over and

over, after learning to notice more of what was there to be noticed, have come to relish for the utterly unexpected break through a familiar horizon of sound (and sometimes even form). Each time new resonances are awakened, new connections disclosed. I am made aware of the uses of imagination and its place in helping me penetrate the "world."

A great deal, of course, depends upon how much I can perceive in the work with which I am trying to engage. A peculiar kind of attentiveness is required to take heed of, say, the shapes and nuances and sounds in a Bergman film like *Fanny and Alexander* or in a ballet as well known as *Giselle*. The more I can perceive, the wider and more complex becomes the field over which my imagination can play: the complex details there are to be integrated, the more richness and fecundity there may be to grasp, even (strangely) in a so-called "minimal" work like Barnett Newman's *Stations of the Cross*. Melvin Rader has written that, in witnessing *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, we cannot actually grasp the interplay between the motifs or appreciate the playing of characters against one another if, say, we identify ourselves with any single character. In some way, imagination must intervene, so that we allow those characters to have their full existence in an illusioned world. We must focus on them, take them as somehow self-contained in a world that is outside the actual, that is extraordinarily "real." "We linger," said Rader, "we savor and enjoy. We then elaborate the experience on the basis created by the tranquilizing and focusing of attention. The elaboration is a moody and imaginative mode of vision for the enrichment of the intrinsic perceptual value of the object" (1974, p. 136); and, I would add, for the enrichment of our experience in its depth and the opening of what lies beyond.

Aesthetic education offers opportunities to find such openings and such elaborations. It can do so by moving people to learn to know, to see, to hear more by exploring the languages and gestures out of which plays (as an example) are made; and by acquainting them with the range of conceivable interpretations and the choices that have to be made, with the craft demanded, and with the persistence of the unexpected, no matter how carefully a work is honed. Each time I realize how multiple are human languages and modalities for addressing the world, I recognize again how cheated we are and how subject to manipulation when no one helps us realize how many possibilities exist within our own experience living in the world.

A concern for imagination—and passion and possibility—ought not lead any of us to forget the links between the development of individual selves and the situation of society. There is some recogni-

tion, even among educators, that if one cuts the tie between consciousness and politics, one is left with an ideal of a self as realizable in private life alone. Confronting the significance of dialogue, of encounter, of live transaction within a school, we cannot but keep reaffirming the importance of overcoming the silences in the public spaces, the product language, and the technological rationality—all of which eat away at community. Indeed it takes imagination to bring people together in these times in speech and action, to provoke them to try to understand each other's perspectives, to tap into others' desires, even others' dreams. To me, one of the possibilities (one of the imaginative possibilities before us) is that of drawing diverse people together to project, to reach out towards a more humane and fulfilling order of things. The order ought to be many-faceted, formed in diverse ways, depending upon vantage point and biography; but, in the very exploring, in the very imagining, those who come together may come upon what is remediable. It may seem insupportable that there is no playground in the neighborhood, no day care center, no arts program. It may seem unacceptable that dislocated families are living in dangerous and inhumane hotels. It may come to seem wholly wrong that young people, alienated by talk of "rigor" and "high standards," drop out of schools that attempt indifferently to "normalize" the excluded and the poor. Perhaps, if imaginative possibilities are made dramatically visible, more people may act together to repair certain of the repairable deficiencies, to do something about the flaws. In so doing, they may create values in their own lives, make commitments that are new, invent ways of acting that may radiate through the community and beyond.

What happened to imagination? It has been discouraged by literalism, by complacency, by technical rationality, by obsessions with predictable results. But I believe that the work we do in our classrooms, in our clinics, still may remain open-ended in our encounter with continuing newcomers. It can still become an affair of beginnings, of thinking about what is not—and what eventually might be. They call to us—the artists, the prophets, the community organizers, the hard-working teachers—to break through the fixities of our age. They call to us to imagine—to look at things as if they truly could be otherwise.

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