

Poetic Realism and Children's Altruism in Abbas Kiarostami's *Where Is the Friend's House?*

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Abstract

*This article examines poetic realism and ethical responsibility depicted in Abbas Kiarostami's film *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987). It explores Kiarostami's minimalistic storytelling, which embodies social ethics and human connection underneath the poetic framing. The film is treated as a visual text whose key emphasis is placed on observational cinematography, minimalistic editing, natural settings, and the use of non-professional actors. To elucidate, Andre Bazin's film theory and Emmanuel Levinas's ethics and the face concept have been used to define poetic realism using the child's perspective. The finding suggests that, through long takes and mundane encounters, altruism appears as a lived and ongoing process rather than a dramatic act. The film offers a hopeful vision of moral agency grounded in simplicity and sincerity. Kiarostami thus reminds viewers that moral responsibility does not originate in grand gestures or abstract principles but in small, compassionate acts enacted within everyday life.*

Keywords: Kiarostami, observational cinematography, poetic realism, ethical responsibility, minimalistic

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Introduction

Abbas Kiarostami's film *Where Is the Friend's House?* takes place in the rural village of Koker in Iran. It tells the story of Ahmad (Babek Amedpour), an eight-year-old boy who mistakenly takes his classmate's notebook with him home, far from his friend's home. The story follows Ahmad as he embarks on a determined journey to return his friend's notebook, defying his mother's disapproval. *Where Is the Friend's House?* is one of the critically acclaimed films from the Koker trilogy by Kiarostami.

This film echoes Kiarostami's trademark style of minimalistic storytelling, non-professional actors, children's narration at the core, natural settings, and observational cinematography. Highlighting how these qualities align with the cinematic tradition of poetic realism. Everyday life is depicted as it is, with deep focus, extended takes, and an attention to human struggles. This research conducts a close visual analysis of six pivotal scenes from film. It focuses on Kiarostami's signature film techniques such as the use of long shots, lengthy takes, tracking shots, minimal editing, deep focus, natural locations (real environments over studio construction), non-professional child actors (natural behavior), and respect for spatio-temporal unity (events unfold in real time and space). Guided by Bazin's (1967) argument that cinema has the unique ability to preserve the spatial and temporal continuity of reality. The study examines how Kiarostami's restrained aesthetic lays bare reality, rather than manipulating it through excessive montage or dramatization, following Levinas's ethics and the face concept to dissect children's altruism in Ahmad's quest. By focusing on Ahmad's movements through everyday spaces, narrow alleys, household courtyards, and the rugged landscapes of Koker, the analysis interprets how poetic realism allows proper meaning to arise organically from the rhythms of daily life.

The main purpose of the study is to analyze how Kiarostami's use of poetic realism shapes the profound morality in Ahmad's altruistic journey. Ultimately, to find a human connection beyond ethics and morality. It also intends to investigate whether children's perspectives challenge adult authority and convey noble superiority. The central hypothesis that guides this research is that Kiarostami employs poetic realism to elevate a child's altruistic act. It is hypothesized that these particular film techniques help us interpret children's morality and honesty through the use of poetic realism depicted in a minimalistic way.

The research aims to achieve specific objectives based on the theme that it explores. Moreover, it explores how poetic realism not only outlines the cinematographic beauty of the film but also deepens the virtuous value of altruism performed by a child using Bazin's auteur theory and realism in cinema. The research addresses a few questions, including how Ahmad's altruism can be analyzed through Levinas' concept of ethics and face. How does Kiarostami's use of poetic realism shape the moral depth in Ahmad's unselfish pursuit? In what ways does a child's perspective challenge adult authority and convey noble superiority?

The film is treated as a narrative and visual text whose interpretation emerges through cinematography, mise-en-scène, framing, camera movement, pacing, facial expression, gesture, and sound design. A key methodological emphasis is placed on long takes, camera tracking, natural lighting, the observational camera, and non-professional actors. This qualitative article is based on the analysis and interpretation of the visuals from a film where zig-zag paths, crossroads, and hills create a metaphor for ethical confusion and inner determination. The relevant dialogues and scenes from the film have been used for the analysis.

To analyze Ahmad's altruistic nature, Levinas's ethics and the face concept have been used as a theoretical framework. Similarly, drawing upon the idea of Bazin's auteur theory and poetic realism to understand how Kiarostami's use of poetic realism shapes the profound morality in Ahmad's journey.

While analyzing the film, there might be an authentic contextual gap since this research is studied from translated and subtitled versions of Kiarostami's *Where Is the Friend's House?* It may fail to present the cultural sensitivities, idiomatic meanings, and finer connotations of the original Persian context. Throughout time, scholars explore various ideas regarding Kiarostami's artistic filmography, such as Italian Neorealism, Humanity, and the Iranian New Wave, with a subtle undertone of socio-political settings. However, this research examines Ahmad's altruistic endeavors and analyzes how poetic realism affects the moral depth of his actions.

Concept of Poetic Realism and Ethical Responsibility

Poetic realism is a distinctive style in French cinema that emerged in the 1930s and captures the complexities of human existence through lyrical storytelling. Kiarostami embraces poetic realism through his restraint, minimalism, and observational style of filmmaking; he successfully portrays the ordinary lifestyle existing between childhood innocence and the nature of society. In an attempt to understand poetic realism, Martin posits it as:

The two seemingly oxymoronic terms linked together as “poetic realism” describe a mode of filmmaking whose “realism” is characterized by the depiction of working-class lives on the margins of society. . . The “poetic” aspects lie in the emphasis on the details of setting and atmosphere over action and movement, evocative locations scattered with apparently mundane objects that may become fraught with significance, and visual emphasis on context and subjective response. (2017, pp. 2-3)

Poetic realism is not a contradiction but a synthesis that carries the quiet significance of ordinary life and uses poetic techniques as a lens. This not only offers an everyday life but

also provides a nuanced exploration of the director's distinctive style in storytelling and artistic vision. "By the power of photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can see, nature at last does more than imitate art: she imitates the artist" (Bazin, 1967). In filmmaking, an image or scene we see on screen is more than just a scene; it's the artist's vision, a vision that has been captured like the imagination of a writer.

Set within the world of childhood, the narrative invites us to view events from Ahmad's perspective. His search for his friend's house exposes the indifference and hypocrisy of the adults, whose lack of concern leaves him isolated in his determined mission. Kiarostami's film opening or ending is never grand. The opening scene begins with just a continuous still shot of the door with noise in the background that feels enough to comprehend the backdrop of childhood innocence (Kiarostami, 1987, 00:00:20 – 00:01:45). The observational cinematography, using long takes and moving camera shots, brings the cinematic experience closer to reality, creating the illusion of real life while simultaneously highlighting the moral weight of Ahmad's actions.

In the same manner, Stephens in his article recalls the classroom sequence of Mohammad Reza (Ahmad's friend) not writing his homework in the notebook. Stephen (2022) argues that the classroom sequence ends with an uninterrupted take (37 seconds) in which the teacher lectures on discipline. Through extended takes, Kiarostami maintains the integrity of the filmed world, allowing everyday gestures to transcend into psychological depth. Following, the action then cuts to the children running outside to play, and soon Mohammad Reza falls and hurts himself. Then follows another long take (36 seconds) in which Ahmad looks after his friend, which signifies empathy and responsibility (Stephens, 2022). Kiarostami's observational cinematography resists dramatic manipulation, allowing moral action to be portrayed authentically from lived experiences.

Additionally, Kiarostami foreshadows Ahmad's altruistic nature using long takes and deep focus. Ahmad's simple act of lending a hand, cleaning his friend's pants with water, and all these actions throughout the film capture human connection beyond ethics and morality. Ahmad's quiet determination is shown through plan- sequence shots, lengthy takes, and tracking shot reflect true responsibility, and upright action can emerge from small, everyday gestures, emphasizing care and moral awareness over formal authority. His depiction of Ahmad's altruistic nature, who denies his mother permission and later writes his friend's homework to help his friends contrast adult moral authority with noble responsibility, is compelling.

While existing scholarship emphasizes this moral purity, fewer studies explicitly connect it to Levinas' concept of ethical responsibility. Domrzalski (2010) argues that Levinas' writing focuses on what he calls the face-to-face encounter with the other, an experience in which an individual is made aware of the other's morality and vulnerability.

Ahmad's moral quest embodies both care for others and subtle resistance to adult-centered norms, turning his small act into a powerful reflection of righteous integrity and human connection.

Nojournian and Nojournian (2017) explain that one could identify two major noble choices made by Kiarostami's child characters: an ethics of care and responsibility to the other or an ethics of resistance and refusal to sustain a responsibility to oneself. The study illuminates a crucial tension in Kiarostami's representation of children; their actions extend far beyond sentimental innocence. Instead, he expounds the child protagonist's worthy choices as not mistaken by innocence but morally conscious choices, which demonstrate a higher moral awareness than the adults around him. These zig-zag paths, doorways, and hills create a metaphor for ethical confusion and inner determination for Ahmad's journey. Kiarostami crafts a deceptively simple narrative through a child's point of view that resonates with profound moral and philosophical questions.

Levinas's ethics of the other provides a complementary conceptual lens. Levinas (1987) argues that moral responsibility is awakened through the encounter with the other, before rational calculation or social obligation, because the Other's presence demands a response. This study uses Levinas's ideas to understand Ahmad not simply as an innocent child but as a subject who acts out of ethical necessity.

Kiarostami presents childhood innocence with small interactions. Ahmad asks a local carpenter, "Is Mohammad Reza your son?" (Kiarostami, 1987, 00:46:27–00: 47:30). His inquiry comes from childhood innocence and urgency to find his friend, whose surname resembles his friend's. Through these interactions, Ahmad's altruistic behavior is conveyed with subtlety and exemplary depth, rather than a simple child-centric plot. Through the child's point of view, where ethical power lies not in moral instruction but in the natural, spontaneous purity of the child's action. Both children and especially adults can recognize it as deeply pure. The venture does not give us a grand climax but keeps us hooked, whether he can find his friend's house or not.

Auteur Theory and Film Techniques

Kiarostami's auteurism, examined through Bazin's concept of poetic realism, becomes central to comprehending how ethics is visually and narratively articulated in *Where Is the Friend's House?* as an altruistic act. Kiarostami's observational cinematography resists dramatic manipulation, allowing moral action to be portrayed authentically from lived experiences. Heydar, Rajabi, & Foroughi (2018) claim that Kiarostami never gave in to the whims and conventions of mainstream cinema and faithfully adhered to the end of his lifetime passion for experiment and innovation. A realistic and poetic visualization of the moral path of a child emerges in these terms. It employs a sparing but consistent aesthetic of extended unedited takes, slow-moving camera shots, deep-focus compositions, and the extensive use of empty or open frames.

The filmmaker is no longer the competitor of the painter and the playwright; he is, at last, the equal of the novelist (Bazin, 1967). The art of filmmaking extends beyond what is presented, but how it is presented that makes it distinct from other multidisciplinary art forms. Grounded in realism rather than sentimentality, Ghorbankarimi (2018) similarly notes that throughout his career, he experimented with both form and medium, creating a transcendent cinema unique to him, which earned him the title of ‘author’ and yet is so diverse that his films cannot be easily and exclusively categorized within one genre or another. Kiarostami closely approaches a Bazin idea of film techniques in such a way that leaves the audience in moral reality, untainted by the forced ideological choices of the auteur.

Kiarostami's consistent use of plan- sequence shots combined with tracking shots and extended takes in the movie gives a strong sense of realistic effect, providing the audience with enough time to observe the setting, absorb the mood, and evoke poetry through careful framing and emotionally engage with the characters without breaking the flow. Kiarostami crafts a deceptively simple narrative through a child's point of view that resonates with profound ethical and philosophical questions.

The zig-zag path is the most effective route up such a steep slope, but it also signifies the indirections Ahmad must take. He appears tiny because he is far away from the viewer's position, but he is also metaphorically small because he is regarded as insignificant in this world. Rather than guiding the audience through rapid editing, the extended and tracking shots provide space to understand Ahmad's character and his circumstances through visual observation.

Figure 1

Running in Winding Slopes from Where Is the Friend's House?



Source: Kiarostami, 1987, 00:22:50 [Screenshot].

The above shot is one of the striking scenes that appear when Ahmad runs towards the village of Poshteh. It is captured from a respectful distance where Ahmad sneaks the notebook in his hands, trying to conceal this action from his mother, who had just refused him permission to visit his friend's house to return the notebook. Defying her instructions, he takes the road towards his friend's house instead of picking up bread, which is captured through observational cinematography, including extensive takes and moving camera shots.

Regarding this, Li states (2023) that Kiarostami frequently inserts seemingly insignificant shots into his films. Far from being irrelevant, however, these shots reflect the fluidity of the director's thinking and his desire for an interaction with the audience. As Ahmad climbs and descends, he passes narrow stairways, winding alleys, mud-brick houses, low walls, and open courtyard spaces, allowing us to interpret and reflect upon the intimate rhythm of rural village life. The first winding slope continues for sixty seconds.

Figure 2

Ahmad Peeking in Narrow Alleys from Where Is the Friend's House?



Source: Kiarostami, 1987, 00:28:17 [Screenshot]

Furthermore, the camera follows Ahmad through a moving camera shot, capturing his hesitation in the narrow alley, unsure of which path to follow. This uncertainty reflects his deeper moral dilemma between obeying authority and fulfilling his principled responsibility to his friend. Through this quiet moment, the film transforms a simple choice of direction into a moral dilemma rooted in poetic realism. Kiarostami also applies this philosophy by using lengthy takes and avoiding montage at all costs, allowing lived experience to unfold without narrative dramatization or emotional coercion.

Figure 3

Ahmad Touches a Hanging Pant from Where Is the Friend's House?



Source: Kiarostami, 1987, 00:29:30 [Screenshot].

In the movie, moments such as Ahmad walking towards the unknown alleys, winding slopes, narrow roads, repetition of the same pursuit, and apparent narrative stability, such as prolonged pauses while noticing the pants similar to his friend's hanging on the clothesline or at closed doors, are not shaped by montage. As shown in the above shot, through continuous unedited takes, we get to see Ahmad waiting on the stairs, repeatedly touching the pants he mistakes for his friend's, with the duration of the long take emphasizing his uncertainty and moral dilemma. These moments transform ordinary actions into poetic gestures, provided through observation rather than dramatic emphasis from heated conversations or sounds. This moment proves Kiarostami's auteur sensibility, in which a simple, lingering shot transforms hesitation into virtuous reflection.

Ahmad's confusion in the narrow alley allows us to unfold without any narrative guidance; Kiarostami invites the viewer to actively engage with the character's moral uncertainty. Montage could suggest the time involved. Flaherty, however, confines himself to showing the actual waiting period, the length of the image, and its true object (Bazin, 1967). Kiarostami uses poetic realism to elevate a child's altruistic act into an exemplary event. Ahmad's effort to return his friend's notebook gains moral significance among the audience because we are allowed to travel alongside Ahmad, which is unfolding in real time.

Kiarostami's use of non-actors in the film plays an important role in shaping poetic realism in the film. Most of the characters, especially the children, are local villagers with no professional acting background. Because of this, their performances feel natural and unforced. The children do not act in a dramatic sense; instead, they behave as children normally would, hesitating, repeating questions, walking, running, and remaining silent at crucial moments.

The acting style throughout the film remains understated. Adults such as the teacher, the mother, and the grandmother exert authority through routine actions and habitual speech rather than emotional intensity. Moreover, their strictness feels ordinary and socially conditioned, which indirectly highlights how a child's moral concern is often overlooked within adult systems of discipline. This restrained performance style encourages the viewer to observe closely and find meaning in small gestures, pauses, and everyday interactions.

Figure 4

Ahmad Meets His Classmate from Where Is the Friend's House



Source: Kiarostami, 1987, 00:27:15) [Screenshot]

For instance, Ahmad's brief interaction with his classmate Morteza feels unforced and pure, shaped by simple gestures and natural speech rather than performance. The use of non-actors allows the moment to unfold with everyday authenticity, free from dramatic emphasis. This understated exchange exemplifies poetic realism, where ordinary childhood interaction quietly carries innocence, sincerity, and naive sensitivity among children.

The rural landscape of Koker village further strengthens this realism. The film is shot entirely in natural settings, mud houses, narrow alleys, winding dirt roads, and open hills without artificial sets or lighting. The village is not merely a background but an active part of Ahmad's venture. The repeated shots of lengthy paths, steep roads, and crossroads visually reflect the child's confusion, determination, and moral choice. As Ahmad moves through the village and beyond, the vastness of the landscape often contrasts with his small figure, emphasizing both his vulnerability and persistence.

Similarly, Ahmad's behaviour at home where he repeatedly calls out to his mother for approval. Ahmad asks, "Mother, I took Mohammad Reza's notebook by mistake. I have to take it back to him. Mother. Mother. Mother (Kiarostami, 1987, 00:14:41–00:14:56). Mother

replies, “What?” (Kiarostami, 1987, 00:14:57–00:14:59). In response to this line, Kiarostami reflects the same natural rhythm of everyday life between mother and son. While his mother remains absorbed in household work, she quietly establishes Ahmad’s behaviour within the domestic space.

Ahmad’s sense of responsibility is communicated more through his regretful and hesitant movement and persistence than through dialogue, which makes his moral concern appear genuine rather than scripted. Koker village and its people represent a simple rural life shaped by routine, community, and endurance. Through long takes and patient framing, Kiarostami allows the landscape to unfold slowly, aligning the rhythm of the film with the child’s journey. In this way, everyday rural life is transformed into something quietly poetic. The combination of non-actors, natural performances, and the authentic rural setting allows the film to maintain a documentary-like pragmatism while expressing deeper, noble concerns, particularly the idea of children’s altruism and moral responsibility within an indifferent social structure.

Children's altruism and ethical responsibility towards others

In the film, Ahmad’s disposition, whether it is expressed through small gestures or larger actions, plays a significant role in understanding his altruistic behaviour. His childhood innocence is repeatedly tested within an adult world that neither understands him nor offers meaningful help. Ahmad is denied permission, is misunderstood, and receives little guidance from adults, placing him in a moral dilemma where he must respond independently, breaking the instructions. Houck (2025) notes that the perspective of child characters in film creates a discursive cinema because children’s opinions and desires interrupt the homogeneity of time and experience represented through the adult’s perspective. As Houck rightly stated, how child characters such as Ahmad generate meaning beyond the narrative itself, encouraging dialogue, reflection, and critical engagement even after the film concludes.

Throughout the film, Ahmad is presented as a quiet, gentle observer, someone vulnerable to others’ needs. He helps his friend, family members, and even strangers he encounters along the way, without feeling hesitant to help.

Figure 5

Ahmad Helping His Friend from Where Is the Friend's House?



Source: Kiarostami, 1987, 00:09:17 [Screenshot].

The above shot shows Ahmad helping his friend clean up with water, when he fell down while running. This brief, understated gesture foreshadows Ahmad's honest disposition and anticipates his final altruistic act. Similarly, those gestures follow up when he assists his mother with household chores or helps care for the baby when he is told to go to the market to buy bread. Even helps a village woman retrieve fallen sheets despite being unable to reach them. He could have easily ignored her request, especially since he was in a hurry to find his friend's house, yet he still helped. These moments are composed with careful depth of focus and minimal dramatic gestures. This emphasis allows the audience to perceive Ahmad's worldview as one shaped by sincerity rather than self-interest.

Moreover, Ahmad is nurtured by adult authority figures who are primarily concerned with discipline at home or school. For instance, his mother compares him with his brother, and his teacher enforces rigid rules in the classroom. His grandmother insists on strict manners, such as taking off shoes before entering the room, and his grandfather recounts stories of punishment meant to instill obedience. Each adult attempts to correct Ahmad's behaviour through instruction, punishment, or comparison. Yet Ahmad's altruism does not emerge from this disciplinary environment. Instead, it arises from the moral responsibility he feels toward his friend's emotional vulnerability. The ethics and face chapter from Levinas (1979) talks about the face-to-face relation, where he suggests:

The ethical relation, the face to face, also cuts across every relation one could call mystical, where events other than that of the presentation of the original being come to overwhelm or sublate the pure sincerity of this presentation, where intoxicating equivocations come to enrich the primordial univocity of

expression, where discourse becomes incantation as prayer becomes rite and liturgy, where the interlocutors find themselves playing a role in a drama that has begun outside of them. (p. 202)

This Levinas legitimate interruption finds a clear cinematic parallel in Ahmad's character in the movie. Ahmad's return of his classmate's notebook becomes an innocent demand that cannot be contained within adult rules, discipline, or convenience.

What moves Ahmad most is not the authority of the rule itself or layered interpretation. But the direct vulnerability of his friend, already humiliated and crying in front of the class earlier by the teacher's scolding. Although the friend is physically absent during the moral quest, his presence remains purely present. He does not become a problem to be resolved rationally but an absolute responsibility that weighs upon Ahmad's conscience.

For him, returning his friend's notebook comes as an immediate, honest obligation to fulfill his responsibility before rules, consequences, or morality. Kiarostami's representation of children: their actions extend far beyond sentimental innocence. Instead, he expounds the child protagonist's moral choices as not mistaken by innocence but morally conscious choices, which demonstrate a higher worthy awareness than the adults around him.

As Plato noted that, besides the eye and the thing, vision presupposes the light. The eye does not see the light, but the object in the light. Vision is, therefore, a relation with a "something" established within a relation with what is not a "something." We are in the light in as much as we encounter the thing in nothingness. The light makes the thing appear by driving out the shadows; it empties space. It makes space arise specifically as a void. (Levinas, 1979, p.189)

The study demonstrates how we don't see light, but it makes us see objects through its illumination, connecting to Levinas's use of this Plato allegory to develop his ethics of the other. Just as light allows us to see an object, Levinas argues that ethics is the light that makes the other visible, not physically, but decently.

However, Kiarostami's minimalistic and observational style makes the audience see Ahmad's inner empathy, purity, and resilience that take shape within him over the course of the film. The children's altruism in the movie can be further analyzed through Levinas's study of the ethics of the other. Levinas states:

The metaphysical other is other with an alterity that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same. It is other with an alterity constitutive of the very content of the other. Other with an alterity that does not limit the same, for in limiting the same, the other would not be

rigorously other: by virtue of the common frontier, the other, within the system, would yet be the same. (1979, pp. 38-39)

The Levinas study on ethics of the other argues that the other is not simply different from I, their alterity is not defined by comparison or conflict, as explained by Ahmad's honest relation to his friend (Mohammad Reza). Ahmad does not act out either for reward or adult instruction or self-interest, but his immediate realization to return his friend's notebook comes from an independent sense of moral responsibility. Kiarostami visually captures Levinas's legitimate philosophy from a pre-reflective recognition of his friend's vulnerability.

Kiarostami's poetic realism strengthens this noble structure through formal restraint. Ahmad's journey unfolds without dramatic emphasis, moral commentary, or narrative reassurance. Extended takes, silences and stares, repeated walking, and the absence of expressive dialogue deny the spectator emotional catharsis or heroic framing. Ahmad's responsibility appears excessive and uncomfortable rather than morally gratifying; it disrupts his routine, it gets late to go buy bread, isolates him from adult authority, and places him in situations of uncertainty and fatigue. In Levinas's terms, Ahmad's subjectivity is put into question by the other's vulnerability, not affirmed through moral self-recognition. His honesty does not originate from personal choice or adult moral instruction, but from responsibility imposed by the other's face, remembered through tears, silence, and the looming threat of punishment of getting expelled from school. Through childhood innocence and minimalistic storytelling, Kiarostami visualizes an ethical relation that comes before rules and authority, where altruism comes as a direct response to vulnerability rather than as a learned moral principle.

Ahmad's mission unfolds through moments of silence, hesitation, pauses at crossroads, uncertainty between two roads, and repeated acts of peeking through doors and windows while searching for his friend. The encounter with the "buffalo on the path" (00:25:33 – 00:25:40) can be symbolized as a righteous burden. Ahmad does not overcome the obstacle heroically; instead, he waits and carefully navigates around it, even though feeling discomfort and scared, reinforcing the idea that noble action unfolds through exposure and patience. Poetic realism becomes a virtuous form: it mirrors Levinas's persistence that ethical meaning cannot be totalized, resolved, or fully known, but must remain open, fragile, and responsive to the presence of the other.

Conclusion

Grounded in my analysis, this article interrogates the moral frameworks of the adult world without overt critique. Institutional authority and social routine appear rigid and inattentive, whereas the child's actions embody a form of ethical clarity grounded in responsibility and empathy. This contrast is conveyed visually and narratively through poetic

realism. Rather than through explicit commentary, requiring the spectator to actively interpret and evaluate the right-minded implications of what is shown. The open-ended nature of the film further reinforces this engagement, leaving moral judgment incomplete and inviting continued reflection beyond the film's conclusion. This study argues that *Where Is the Friend's House?* redefines poetic realism with sensitivity, using the child's perspective to examine social ethics and human connection. Ahmad's moral courage is a testament to adult authority while conveying the subtle ethical superiority of the child's action. By centering children's altruism, the film offers a hopeful vision of moral agency grounded in simplicity and sincerity. Kiarostami's cinema thus remains profoundly relevant, reminding viewers that correct responsibility does not originate in grand gestures or abstract principles but in small, compassionate acts enacted within everyday life.

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