

# A Post-structuralist Reading on Henry James's 'The Figure in the Carpet'

Ali Taghizadeh

English Department, Faculty of Arts, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

Email: altaghee@yahoo.com

**Abstract**—The present article discusses Henry James's "The Figure in the Carpet" (1895) mainly deconstructively. Structuralism, which claims can disclose the secret of literature, is firstly posed theoretically against deconstruction, which maintains that literature is a space of the impossibility of (any unitary) signification. After that, James's story is read as a "writerly" text, as a system of relations. Meaning is neither a relation between an object and a pre-existent concept (like in the Platonic world), nor is it a relation between an idea and an object (like in our real world). Meaning occurs in the text, is relational, and is the result of gap and difference. Like a game of "hide and seek," James's story structures a figure of impossibility. His text is a space of "plurisignation" also, because, as an illustration of "difference" and "supplementation," it also illustrates how narrative experience generates itself in a process of critical interpretation. In the last part, where James's story is read in the space of "post-classical narratology," it is analyzed as a tool for thinking and interpretation.

**Index Terms**—James, deconstruction, undecidability, plurisignation, post-classical narratology

## I. INTRODUCTION

This article intends to discuss Henry James's "The Figure in the Carpet" in the light of a post-structuralist mode of criticism. The discussion will be mainly deconstructivist. Meaning is neither a relation between an object and a pre-existent concept, nor a relation between an idea and an object in the real word.

Four main ideas will be discussed. The first is that like a game of hide and seek, James's story structures a figure of impossibility. It is illustrated as a space for the abortion of the previous systems of understanding and the emergence of new "modes of intelligibility." The reconstruction of meaning in this story is possible, to borrow from Jacques Derrida, through "supplementation" and "difference." The logic of the supplement promises the priority of the written sign over the oral, and the inevitable relation between presence and absence. The story provides a space for a game of presence-absence, and for the practice of difference. The sign is always differed and deferred, and the meaning is, consequently, suppressed or aborted. In the endless chain of signifiers, what comes next is not a signified but is always another signifier, so that the story presents an empty structure that although signifies no central or ultimate meaning, it stands as the spectrum of a number of different meanings.

The second idea is the differences of structuralism and deconstruction as applied to James's story. Read structurally, James's work is a space for thematizing narrativity, for hermeneutic maneuvers. Ambiguity is the main product of a structural reading of it due to which it is impossible to say which of its meanings is ultimate and truthful. However deconstruction renders, not the meaning of the story as impossible, but the story itself as unreadable. The opposite functions of foregrounding and backgrounding result in a "catachresis" as a figure of unreadability, because the story dismantles the traditional modes of reading and limitlessly re-structures itself so that it always remains unread.

The next idea is that James's story works through cancelling the searching project of the reader which enables it perpetually to hide its secret and abort its meaning. In this way, the story provides a space for the production of new meanings through interpretive readings. Among the techniques used in James's story for this purpose are (a) the employment of an unqualified narrator-character to review a story who can never accomplish his task, and (b) the application of death as a non-communication.

And the last idea is James's story as read in line with two models of "postclassical narratology" by which it is usually meant the post-2000-year models of narrative studies. Therefore, postclassical narratology is expected to be a more developed stage of (post-) structuralism. Instead of describing the grammar, the poetics, and/or the rhetorical features of the story, post-classical narratology evolves all of such considerations into interactive dimensions of a single program for narrative analysis.

In the first model, which has been provided by Emma Kafalenos, the events lose their eventness and only complete the verbal structure of the story. Verbal action is in the service of language and is interpreted, not from the perspective of the doer, but from that of the perceiver. The second model, which David Herman has formulated, discusses the stories as tools for thinking and interpretation. Narrative is an abstract structure, but its system helps us to devise patterns for our cognition and structure our experience. Reading narrative makes it possible for us to embed the external realities of our life in the abstract structure that we make of life.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. *A Structure of Impossibility*

Like in Hugh Vereker's tale, a major feature of James's story, which is narrated in a limited point of view, is that its meaning is perpetually undecideable. A technique for producing this effect is the use of an un-qualified narrator to review Vereker's story who hardly can fulfil his job. Therefore, the rhetoric of communication in James's story is inadequate, and it is not a tale of presentation, but is a discourse of non-presentation.

For rendering its revelation impossible, the figure in the carpet of the story takes numerous shapes. When the reader feels he is at the threshold of untying the text, the meaning hides itself, and the reader is left alone to search for it. But what is more real about this story is that its reader's continuous search for an ultimate meaning is but futile. The death of George Corvick as the sole possessor of the secret of Vereker's story, the pertinacity of his wife on passing no information about the secret to the narrator, the death of Vereker and that of his wife, and the death of Gewdolen before saying anything to Daryton Deane (all) support this system of non-communication. Consequently, the narrator admits that he was "shut up in my obsession for ever," while "my gaolers had gone off with the key" (James, 1947, p. 212). After Vereker's death, Drayton Deane "wrote on a thousand subjects, but never on the subject of Vereker" (Ibid., p. 213). And the narrator is continually as if gone astray from the right path of signification.

The fact that the story negates any ultimate meaning is a guarantee of its plurisignation, for it illustrates, to speak with Roland Barthes, a "production without product, structuration without structure" (Barthes, 1990, p. 5), because it wants to ground many possible meanings at the same time. Unlike a traditional "readerly" work, the "infinite of the signifiers" in James's text makes it a mystery story with many significations that can be considered as right although opposite to each other they may however be. The loose and multi-directional movement of the sign in it, its multileveled ground of signification, a virtual space in it where the energy of an "as if" structure makes its things both real and unreal at the same time, and the existence in it of a number of secretive characters who can read their texts each time in a different way turn this text into a metafiction that is integrally plural and reversible, and frankly indeterminable in sound and sense.

James's text is a work of art the theme of which is but itself. We should read it, consider it, meditate on it, and develop its sense and feeling in our inward life. When we read it closely, we get involved with it not only physically but also intellectually and emotionally. Therefore, as we privately and penetratingly think about it, a decisive agent takes mission in us to support our lucid desire, we begin to find our way through James's oeuvre, and knowledge starts to get established in us. In this way, we witness the formation of an intruding insight in us, our curiosity gets deeper, and an unknown agent in our consciousness starts producing meaning. However, this story has perhaps no certain figure for deciphering. Instead, the figure is the work itself that is for reading and perusal. If we read it attentively enough, we refuse to get satisfied of our pellucid desire for more knowledge, but start to search for the main secret of its narrativity.

The narrator writes a review on Vereker's newly published story and publishes it in the journal "The Middle." However, when the novelist says the review is not more than "a usual twaddle," the narrator gets so deeply inflicted that he starts avoiding him. But although the novelist visits and relieves him, he frankly tells him that he has missed the point of his story "with inimitable assurance." Therefore, the narrator ardently asks him "what your 'little point' happen to be?" If "The Figure in the Carpet" is a tale about structuration in tale, it is perhaps the dramatization of the figure in the carpet of the last two phases of the fiction of James where the main task of the reader is to discover how the story cancels its own discourse.

### B. *A Space of Incompatibility*

Mas'ud Zavarzadeh argues that a large part of the contemporary fiction is meaningful but ill-formed. However, he claims that "In fact it is through their seeming ill-formedness (non-belonging) that innovative narratives challenge the existing modes of intelligibility and eventually modify them" (Zavarzadeh, 1985, p. 610). In such a context, a useful way to account for the meaningfulness of the modern narrative is reading it as a narrative rather than thinking about if it is ill-formed or well-formed. It can be suggested that "The Figure in the Carpet" is incompatible to the previous narrative forms before James, that is, it does not belong to the logics of literary understanding before him. A face of its incompatibility is its outstanding self-referencing. And its incompatibility leads to another opposition in the structure of this story with that of the traditional fiction in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: this story develops a sense of a perpetual searching for something which is always absent as the subject of the story. It does not lead the reader to any material theme external to itself but leads him only to the necessity of more searches. Therefore, a (post)structuralist mode of approaching this story is to read it as a highly metaphorical text which means what it highlights is always lacking.

However, a product of a deconstructive reading on it can be a new kind of analysis about its plot, characterization, situation-making, and suspense; for in the term of such considerations it leads us to different directions. The text shows that James was highly anxious about the vulgarity of Victorian literature and would suggest that the writers should contribute more attentively in the production of a more refined fiction. On the one hand, he wants the readers to develop new habits of reading by learning the literature before him. On the other hand, the last phase of his own fiction is much different from traditional fiction for it is highly metaphorical and inquisitive. And "The Figure in the Carpet" offers new fields of exploration to the modern writer and new styles of criticism to the reader. In some of its strategies and

techniques, in the application of causality for example, it goes counter to the Victorian fiction. Tzvetan Todorov argues that it is the effect, the purpose, of this story that causes something which can be considered as the cause; for the secret of James's story is, like that of Vereker's tale, an open-ended search for something that leads to the tale itself and that is always absent. Such a search is constitutional perhaps to the whole last style of the Jamesian fiction.

Thus, this story is a tell-tale search. Firstly there is a searching and then there is the tale. In it, we read the story of no usual search but read about how a story can structure itself in an act of searching. This means that this story is not a search-carrying tale but is a tale-making search. And the fact that the cause of the search is always absent or escaping, we can consider it as a typical example of the modern narrative that is incompatible with the previous laws of coherence. In addition, the numerous physical movements of its characters suggest that they cannot centralize their searching maneuvers. The searching movements in the story are spiral: always circular and expanding. And the story is like a broadcast: always intruding and reaching, and always unfaithful to the past and bent to the future.

In conflict also this tale is unique in nature and in degree. It is different from the typical story before James, and it does not fit to the prevailing models of intelligibility. Its conflict is not between man and man or between man and nature; it is between two styles of writing and reading literature. The narrator-character of Vereker's tale desires to find the secret of it, but like James's story, it perpetually hides what he searches. This conflict is powerful enough for the story to suggest a new mode of thought. In the traditional tale, the conflict is usually solved to the benefit of the protagonist as the better or stronger side. This agreement between the logic of traditional story and the interest of the average reader would provide poetic justice, and would fulfill the expectations of the romantic and bourgeois societies. But in James's story the conflict should remain unresolved, because if it is resolved, the movement of the sign is halted and the story will stop working. Thus, its conflict is extended beyond it, for by the time we have read the whole of it, the opposite energies that produce its conflict remain improbable to come to terms. Every one of these energies is equally contradictory to the other one. As the story expands, the conflict becomes wider and deeper, and the reader feels deeply uncertain.

### III. THE STORY AS NONREPRESENTATIONAL

Representational narrative creates a virtual world where unreal people do unreal things. Its unreality makes it quite ubiquitous and appealing to the imagination of the reader. So it is inclined to map out the ideals and dreams of the reader and control his ideology, and is imaginatively qualified to transfer its values to the reader and change him to a more cultured man and a better citizen. Although the reader knows that the story is fiction, he believes in it and in what the characters say and do in it. This is because the world of fiction intrudes into the consciousness of the reader, suspends his disbelief, and overshadows his own world. Such a submissive reader comes into full agreement with the discourse of the text and accepts the norms and values of the narrative. In such a situation, no two-way communication is established between the text and the reader, because the narrative discourse is intrusive while the reader is quite defenseless. Thus, it can be suggested that (reading) representational fiction gives us no more than a limited enlightenment. But the fiction of James in his last phase is not representational. It is not for naïve reading, but is for reproduction through critical interpretation. And "The Figure in the Carpet," which does not appeal to the disbelief of the reader, makes no clearly represented world, but its world is always ethereal and in a process of cancellation.

#### A. *Impossibility versus Unreadability*

James's story is not a "factive" narrative, but is wholesale fictitious. A structural reading on it is a hermeneutic gesture that is new, radical, and contradictory to all traditional reading modes. Such a reading is rebellious and centrifugal; and, to speak with Zavarzadeh again, is inclined to "eclipse the signified" (p. 621). This story is a meta-fiction, a self-reflexive art narrative the theme of which is (its) narrativity. Zavarzadeh admits that such reading sets up a "grammatological interrogation of intelligibility itself, especially the public intelligibility as appropriated and narrated in mimetic fiction" (p. 621). Meaning is not regarded as self-present or self-evident, it is rather pre-causal; and is always lucid, relative, absent, and even non-existent. It is not somewhere outside the discourse of the story, but is the sum total of the narrative.

And reading is a rivalry of text and history. It is an inspection for discovering the grounds of the authority of narrative, for invading its important strongholds and foregrounding its signification. However, backgrounding the signified by the text causes it to escape from the domain of signification and renders it intangible. This feature in the modern narrative increases to its remoteness, secrecy, and open-endedness; and makes it difficult for the reader to discover its patterns of signification. In deconstruction the text combats with reading to repeat itself through canceling signification. However, it is not the text, but the action of reading and its effects, that provides the main critical controversy. The echo of reading and the essence of combat animate the text and generate meaning. In the modern fiction, backgrounding always renders foregrounding as futile, and a totality of the signs makes a network which no reading can disable. Shoshana Felman admits that no reading can exhaust "The Turn of the Screw," for it always repeats itself in reading. In "Turning the Screw of Interpretation" we read,

The essence of the critical debate is thus a *repetition* of the scene dramatized in the text. The critical interpretation, in other words, not only elucidates the text but also reproduces it dramatically, unwittingly *participates in it*. Through its very reading, the text, so to speak, acts itself out (Felman, 1977, p. 101).

Such a dramatic tension between text and reading (between fiction and criticism) is perceived in "The Figure in the Carpet" also, because an important hermeneutic aspect of it is the development of our metaphoric understanding, since while we read it, our knowledge about it changes. On the one hand, it transfers us to a previously known world. On the other hand, our familiarity with it, is in a secret way destroyed. In reading a text, we not only trace or apply our own pre-suppositions in it, but also apply the text as to ourselves. The result of this self-application in the text is a process of self-education, self-realization.

On the other hand, in James's text the figure is integrated so closely with the carpet that separating the former spoils the latter itself. "Backgrounding the signified" is a feature of it, and it adds much, to speak for J. Hillis Miller, to its "Unreadability," "undecidability." It is the realm where "the figure and the ground constantly reverse." "Backgrounding the signified" is the name of a process through which, as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan says, the narrative "renders choice impossible and frustrates the reader's expectations of a univocal, definitive meaning" (p. 186). In the modern narrative, this guarantees the textual relations and conspires to make a strange figure that is unknown and non-realistic. But Miller says the figure in James's text is "at once a name for the actual 'figures' or characters of the story, and at the same time it is the name for relation, for a design which emerges only from the retracting of 'the related state, to each other, of certain figures and things'" (Miller, 1980, pp. 110-111). Backgrounding the signified makes it possible for this story to limitlessly retell itself. Therefore, another poststructuralist reading on it is an exercise for solving the problem of the limitless; the problem that perpetually renews itself. Miller calls this figure of impossibility in James's story, and in fiction in general, "catachresis", which he says is

the name for that procedure whereby James uses all the realistic detail of his procedure as a novelist to name in figure, by a violent, forced, and abusive transfer, something else for which there is no literal name and therefore, within the convention of referentiality which the story as a realistic novel accepts, no existence. This something else is figure, design, the embroidered flower itself (Miller, 1980, p. 111).

Is this otherness or non-existence the figure of James's story? Does it suggest a process of centrifugal or spiral signification? Whatever it is, it is the outcome of the backgrounded signified, and it makes the story increasingly open-ended and the text inter-textual. It is a possibility for this text to dismantle the traditional modes of reading and to limitlessly restructure itself.

Although Rimmon-Kenan maintains that Miller only nominally "replaces my notion of ambiguity by a notion of undecidability or unreadability" (p. 186), what the former calls ambiguity in James's story is not the same as the latter's undecidability. Ambiguity is, For Rimmon-Kenan, "the conjunction of exclusive disjunctions, or—in less technical language—the co-existence of mutually exclusive readings" (p. 185). It is an element in the works of Henry James, Robbe-Grillet, and Thomas Pynchon for example that renders choice impossible. Rimmon-Kenan tentatively formulates ambiguity in this way: " $a \cap b$ ," when " $a$ " and " $b$ " stand for concepts or statements, and " $\cap$ " means "or" in a strong disjunction. It means that when two statements are strongly disjunctive, only one of them, but not both of them, is true. Her formula for conjunctive statements is " $a \cdot b$ ," when " $\cdot$ " means "and." This means that when two statements are conjunctive, both of them are true.

But for Miller unreadability or undecidability does not turn, while for Rimmon-Kenan it turns "from an impossibility of stating meaning to a statement of this impossibility as the meaning of this particular text" (p. 187). Rimmon-Kenan takes it for granted that the meanings of the story destroy each other so that it can have no ultimate meaning. But, Miller takes it as a feature of "The Figure in the Carpet" where "the figurative and the literal are like figure and ground reversing constantly" (Miller, 1980-1981, p. 191). By backgrounding the signified and foregrounding the signifier, the narrative produces a big store of energy by which it plays upon the reader and defers signification. Here also the text is metamorphosed into something like a painting that is a great landscape of vagueness. The constant reversion of ground and figure changes it to an unreadable product in the foreground and background where figures are limitlessly plural. Rimmon-Kenan believes in the impossibility of an ultimate meaning in James's story, but Miller finds a procedure of unnameability in it which is a dimension of the modern fiction in general. Miller's "catachresis" is therefore the name of an absence or otherness the representation of which is a real feature of the modern narrative.

Therefore, post-structuralism reflects a major difference with structuralism. The latter wants to analyze literature scientifically. It claims can achieve mastery over literature through demystifying it. Here the play of the sign leads to a hierarchy of significations, and the meaning of a literary work is textual rather than absolute and transcendental. Post-structuralism also believes in no transcendental signified. But it proves that literature is not scientifically approachable, for the signified is perpetually differed and deferred, which renders the meaning undecidable. In a reply to Rimmon-Kenan, Miller states "Deconstruction wants to show the impossibility of mastery" (Miller, 1980-1981, p. 190) over literature. Structuralists believe that in the modern literature the literal reference is subverted, for literature repeatedly refers to itself. However, deconstruction ascribes the absurdity of reference in literature not to its self-referentiality but to this catachresis, unnameability. The findings of Todorov and Miller in James signify another aspect of the difference between structuralism and deconstruction. For Todorov, although the absolute cause of James's fiction is always absent, it is in existence. However, Miller argues that the possibility of the cause may be not only absent, but non-existent also.

#### B. *The Abortion of Communication*

There is a strong desire in the narrator of Vereker's tale to realize the unavoidable secret of it. However, he will never resolve its secret, because it works like a riddle which nullifies our searches and renders signification impossible. The

tale employs an abundance of techniques for doing this, for what structures it is a search for a figure that is always hidden, since upon the discovery of it, the narrative stops working, and reading turns out to be absurd. A technique for postponing signification is the creation of loose and complex relations between ideas for the illustration of which he uses the priorities of a certain prose style.

Comparing the prose style of Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* with the second chapter of James's *The Ambassadors*, W. B. Short acknowledges that both of these works are replete with long, periodic, and complex sentences. However, if the complexity of the Johnsonian sentence is due to his complex ideas and sentence structures, that of the Jamesian sentence is, for Short, due to the loose and vague relations among his ideas for the illustration of which he uses loose conjunctions, vague parenthetical structures, pronouns with unclear references, etc. In "The Sentence Structure of Henry James," we read,

Obviously, then, although the sentences of James seem formidably long and complex, they are, in one sense, not so. The kind of complexity possessed by the Johnsonian sentence, that violent discharge of a mindful of ideas, the Jamesian sentence does not possess. By contrast, James's ideas are expressible in relatively small numbers of words, and the smaller word groups are loosely linked together, with many interjections and parentheses, to form a complexity that is not of *idea*, but of relationship between ideas; whereas a long sentence by Johnson expresses an idea in a complex grammatical structure, a long sentence by James throws into relationship a number of ideas, each of which may have, within the sentence, its own finite grammatical structure (Short, 1947, p. 73).

In James's story, it is the figure, the total relations, that gives meaning to the life of characters and puts the searching force to work; and it is the force of seeking that provides the needed energy for the hiding mechanism. This unknown figure is the principal 'actor' in the narrative. Thus it can be proposed that in quest of a more refined type of fiction, James's text searches to burlesque signification in the conventional (Victorian) English literature. The narrator eagerly puts all his energy into his project, but "shut up in my obsession forever" (James, 1947, p. 212), he is frustrated both in body and soul.

We read the last style of James, not for fun, but mainly for interpretation. "The Figure in the Carpet" is a searching mission which Corvick and Gwendolen intelligently undertake. The first desires to fulfil what the narrator fails to do. "The temple of Vishnu" is, Peter Lock says, "where the goddess is revealed" (p. 182). It is in the domain of this temple as a site of revelation that Corvick is able to put all the pieces of the critical riddle in their places and to provide an interpretive whole. Nonetheless, this does not mean that James's text will expose its life-giving figure to all readers, because there is a discursive element in it which challenges the current modes of understanding. The story also informs us about the death of three characters that have important communicative roles. Lock expresses this formula of non-communication in this way: "Vereker dies after transmitting the secret to Corvick, who dies after sharing it with Gwendolen; and the secret dies with her" (p. 173). Communication is conditional, problematic, procrastinated, even aborted. When a character knows a secret which the other ones do not know, and the knowing character is asked for revelation, he either remains silent or makes the revelation conditional. Hugh Vereker dies before revealing the secret of the story to any fellow. Corvick will transfer it only after he has it validated by Vereker and has got married to Gwendolen. But soon after transferring it to Gwendolen he also dies. When the narrator tries to extract the secret from Gwendolen, she also repulses his attempt. Therefore, with her death the secret of the story dies also, because she has shared it neither with the narrator nor with Drayton Dean her second husband.

In such a space of severe procrastination, the occasion is provided for initiative criticism to formulate the patterns of cognition and reflect on the literature of a whole period for structuring the ideology of the reader and stimulating the lucid and durable experiences of his life. But how can the reader of James's story possibly perceive its (whole) experience? However we read that the figure in the carpet of the story is concrete, the story will reveal it only to the reader who tackles the sign captured in its context. The function of the figure in this hypertext is like the function of our heart. By circulating the blood of meaning in the whole body of the text, the figure does two services: on the one hand, it guarantees the life and movement of the verbal sign, while on the other hand it makes it vulnerable to the initiative search. Vereker says the figure is not a secret of knowledge but is a secret of language, of art. It is not only a question of form, but is also a question of life; for it guarantees the very existence of the work. This means that for unravelling the secret of this story, we should study it but not on the basis of the conventional modes of criticism, because such criticisms do not often exceed the questions like the subject, the theme, the conflict, and the character of the typical literary text. Instead, we should read it to discover the grammar of it, that is, the function of its narrativity and the role of its language. Among other things, we should read this text to realize how the story in it is taken in the service of language for the creation of the desired effect of narrativity.

As Leo B. Levy quotes from F. O. Matthiessen, James's story "was designed as a plea for ... mature criticism" (p. 457). Part of Levy's article discusses the awkwardness of James's situation as a writer of fine and complex intentions who is faced with readers and critics that are unequipped for responding to any work of literature. But James's narrator embodies the numbness of the general sensibility of his own time. The critical history of this tale shows that many critics have had problem with reading it. In such a context, a question is how this structure of ambiguity was to ground the development of critical appreciations. James was unhappy with the current critical modes and was anxious to offer new approaches of literary analysis. But what role this story could play in this regard? And why the scholars were fully absorbed in it and widely reacted to it? Levy mentions R. P. Blackmur's opinion in this regard also: "it would seem

actually, as written, to mean no more than that there is a figure in the carpet if you can imagine it for yourself; it is not there to discover. ... Or it may be that the figure in the carpet is necessarily ineluctable; perhaps it only ought to be there" (p. 457). The question here is not about the function of the figure but is about the existence or the nature of it. Although the figure may be quite objective, it is equally subjective and personal, because it is the product of the imagination of the reader to which he appeals in an act of interpretive textual analysis. For Levy, the figure in James's story is both abstract and personal, the sum total of relations in its interior that make it into a systematic language product. Such a system is the marriage point of intention and design. The form of the story is not divisible from its content but is part of it.

The sum total of such innate qualities, added to James's idea that the figure in the carpet of his story is personal, provides the ground for the absurdity of any unitary and ultimate interpretation for it. The symbolic code frees both the text and the act of reading from the established norms, and transfers them to the domain of the plural, the lucid, and the liberal. A totality of internal relations is integral to the life of the text, and it structures a system that is potential to generate many subsystems. In this way, the fact that modern criticism admits of no ultimate interpretation, makes this work into a fantastic fiction that is always open to restructuring. Thus, this story shows James the grammarologist outrunning James the novelist.

This story searches for something and hides it at the same time, for its energies of hiding and searching, which necessarily create and nullify each other, originate from a same source. However, in the time of James such an emphatic relativity in experience seemed quite bizarre and incompatible to literary tastes and traditions, for knowledge and oblivion were not congruous in the under-structure, and truth was not identified with untruth. The figure symbolizes a "right combination" of all intricate elements of the work in the mind of the reader. This narrative is not the product of text, but is the product of reading and critical interpretation. Its structure is not something concrete which is already there in the text, but the text is something that structures itself in reading. And if its figure is concrete, it is the reader's mind that concretizes it, for out of his mind there is no figure, no structure. This claim is certified by the difference between the narrator who is a failure and Corvick who discovers the figure. The former does not have enough love and courage to carry out his job, but the latter loves structure and life and communication for which he sincerely searches. With his achievement, literary imagination becomes authorized to inspect many regions of life that have always been closed to us. Therefore, if Levy is right when he says the figure is a pattern of "psychic impotence" (p. 457), what Corvick does typifies a structure-making diagnosis which is confirmed by the use of story in the service of language.

#### IV. STORY FOR THINKING AND INTERPRETATION

With the beginning of the third millennium, narratology started to develop into a big subject of research. In the profusion of all the models of narrative analysis, which David Herman calls "postclassical narratologies," narrative is discussed from many perspectives including as a field of interpretation. These models seem rather personal and quite diversified. The remaining part of this article discusses two such models and applies them to James's story as a field of interactive thinking.

Structuralist narrative studies developed mainly out of the Saussurian linguistics while "postclassical narratologies" have been formulated on the structuralist narratology. However, by "postclassical narratologies" Herman means something more than from an expansion of linguistic analysis of literature. "Postclassical narratologies" show the limits and deficiencies of the post-structuralist approaches also. To formulate new modes of reading, postclassical narratology re-thinks about and re-evaluates structuralist methods and norms of literary analysis. In structuralist narratology, the researcher would attempt to describe the grammar, the poetics, or the rhetorical features of a literary text. In the grammatical model (like in the works of Vladimir Propp, A. J. Greimas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tzvetan Todorov, and Roland Barthes) he would search for the langue of it, while in the poetical model (like in the works of Wayne Booth and Gerard Genette) he would search for the techniques of fictional representation, and in the rhetorical model (like in the works of Roman Jakobson and in Anglo-American New Criticism) he would search for the function of the linguistic meditation in extracting the meaning and effect of the work.

But the recent developments in cognitive science, linguistic pragmatics, and discourse analysis have helped these classical models of narratology evolve into interactive dimensions of a single program for narrative analysis under the general title of "postclassical narratology" that is much wider than the classical and includes more critico-theoretical trends. For example, what in the Greimas model comes under the term "actant," which he assumes for characters, in the postclassical model is examined as the role of a behavioural perspective in a socio-cultural context. Also, postclassical narratology pays much attention to the response of the perceiver of the work while in the 'classical' models this function is rather disregarded.

To provide postclassical methods for analyzing stories, Emma Kafalenos does a research in which Herman says "function analysis" (Herman, 1997, p. 14) plays an important role. She focuses on the "event" and "sequence" in the narratives to describe how they are different from other kinds of discourse like arguments or descriptions. A description is a sequence of propositions which recount no event, but a story is a sequence of propositions used to recount events which occur in a particular temporal sequence. In this position, James's story can be analyzed as a tool for thinking, because it repeatedly defers the information that it promises to deliver in its opening chapters. By suppressing information, the story grounds the receiver's interpretation about the represented events. Such an event is represented in

a way that it loses its eventness and becomes “a function of the sequence in which it inheres and the sequence taking its identity from the events that constitute it” (Herman, 1997, p. 14). The event is mainly verbal, for it does not complement the action of the narrative but necessarily completes its lingual structure. In addition, by “sequence” Kafalenos means both the sequence of actions and a sequence of interpretation that is attached to the primary event-sequence. Such an opaque language event, disjunctured with its primary function as it is, signals further developments in the postclassical poetics of narrative. The narrative action is analyzed mainly as in the service of language. The action is interpreted from the perspective not of the doer but of the perceiver, and the story is considered not for exploring a certain theme or meaning but as a material for reading and interpretation, that is, as a tool for thinking. The purpose of Kafalenos is, like that of Barthes in *S/Z*, “to remain attentive to the plural as a means to subvert univocal readings” (Kafalenos, 1977, p. 33). She intends to elude epistemological closure and reward the reader of prose fiction for his critical endeavours.

Another aspect of Kafalenos’ model of narratology is a discussion about “sjuzhet” and “fabula.” In traditional models, in Russian formalisms for example, or in early structuralisms, fabula is the entirety of events in their logical or chronological order, and sjuzhet is the wholeness of the same events in the order of their representation. The former is the basic story stuff and the latter the representation of it. But Kafalenos defines fabula as a “construct that the reader makes from a sjuzhet” (p. 37). She ascribes the construction of the fabula not to the giver of the narrative but to the perceiver of it. And she admits that the displacement changes the focus of attention, “from the Formalists’ issues, ... to epistemological issues that can fruitfully be pursued” (p. 37).

She draws upon Propp’s discussion about the structure of the Russian fairy tales in *Morphology of the Folktales* (1968), as well as on Todorov’s cyclical pattern of movement in the story in *Poetics of Prose* (1977) where he defines story as a move from equilibrium to imbalance and back to equilibrium again. However, her model involves considerable adaptations to the models of the Russian and Franco-Bulgarian theorists. Of Propp’s 31 functions, Kafalenos selects only 11 which “name stages in the segment of the cycle that extends from imbalance to equilibrium” (pp. 40-41). She argues that her selected functions provide a vocabulary for talking about interpretations of causality. In America, for example, the people are taught that the colors of the rainbow are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet. These names allow them to look at an object and interpret its color as orange, yellow, etc. But without such names for colors, one would not be able to speak about them. Similarly, a list of functions provides the language that we need to interpret a particular event. In this sense, stories provide us with language spaces where we can express and interpret our beings.

As to the pattern of Todorov, although she believes it helps the analyst to determine to which extent the plot of a narrative is complete, it has no value in determining the shape of the story. Instead, she interprets the narrative events retrospectively, for she defines them according to their consequences and in relation with other events in the configuration. She assigns the act of interpretation not to the author but to the reader, to the characters through whose participations the reader views the narrative world, and to the people who interpret the events in our world.

Kafalenos draws also upon Rimón-Kenan’s analysis of ambiguity in James’s “The Turn of the Screw.” The latter considers two reasons for ambiguity in that story. One reason is our inability to confirm the reliability of the character-narrator’s perceptions and conceptions, what the narrator says is not independently confirmed. Another one is that the story shows both “singly directed clues” and “doubly directed clues,” while the first kind of clues support only one hypothesis and contradict the alternative, but the second kind of them support both alternatives. After acknowledging the validity of Rimón-Kenan’s analysis, Kafalenos suggests a third reason for ambiguity in James’s story: the “permanently suppressed pieces of information that the introductory framing section has given us reason to assume will be revealed” (pp. 45-46). The fabula contains some deferred information which includes the gaps that the reader will fill in later on when the narrative provides them. But the gaps also contain the suppressed information that the narrative will never provide. Kafalenos focuses on the epistemological effects of such missing information in this story. Deferring fictional information has certain unavoidable outcomes: (1) the resulting gap provides a window through which the receiver interprets the represented events, and (2) the missing information makes the receiver’s interpretations differ from when no information is missing. It also affects the structure of the narrative provided in the consciousness of the receiver. Such structural ambiguities ground the configuration of the story by the reader, for depending on which configuration she makes, her interpretation will also change.

What is represented in a narrative shapes the reader’s configurations, and what the reader configures, shapes her interpretations of it. The beginning chapters of “The Figure in the Carpet” change it to a tool for critical thinking, for they promise to reveal some information, but as they perpetually postpone delivering them, the situation is provided for the reader to think more excitedly for historicizing the text by revising it in her own way. Therefore, as we read the story and configure the fabula, we also interpret the events in relation to our configurations. In the course of reading, the fabula grows moment by moment, and the sequence in which events are revealed affects our experience of reading.

Also, the element of suspense, which originates from a permanent gap, arouses our desire, withholds our satisfaction, and grounds our diversified interpretations. Contrary to the classical narratology, where the reader would construct the fabula by arranging a chronological sequence of all the textual events, in postclassical narratology we interpret events as functions in relation to the configurations we have established at the moments of revelation. In this way, a story is not only sequence of events, but also a sequence of interpretations indexed to the primary event-sequence.

The second model of postclassical narratology has been provided by David Herman himself. In "Stories for Thinking," he claims that the action of telling and reading stories helps us to make sense of our world. In this sense, stories are tools or spaces for thinking and understanding. The abstract cognitive structure of the story, and the material trace of that structure left in writing, speech, sign-language, ... make it possible for the reader to adjust and create reality through talking it out. We humans experience the things in random and uncontrollable ways. But the system of narrative helps us to devise patterns for our cognition, and structure our experiences. Narrative makes it possible for the external realities of life to be embedded in the abstract structure that the reader makes of it. It structures our consciousness and gives shape to it. Herman makes an analogy between the text of a story and a board of chess. In a game of chess, each chessman is a representational tool by which the player breaks the stream of experience into limited sections each of which is with useable structures and is thus cognizable. Likewise, stories help us to organize our experiences by selecting from among a set of sequentially and concurrently available inputs, to process those inputs into divided chunks of experience with beginning, middle, and end; and then to base our further cognitive operations on these newly acquired experiences.

We establish our identities through telling and reading stories. As producers and interpreters of narrative, we use a causal order to model the happenings of the story world on the changes in nature or appearances of the recounted participants and events. By representing a chronological sequence, in which the later events originate from the earlier ones, the story establishes our identities over time. Out of story, the data of life are chaotic, disturbed, and meaningless. But within the story they are structured into "causal-chronological wholes" (Herman, 2003, p. 176). Fiction delivers such data in the form of causal networks of which the components are systematically interrelated. It also inaugurates a sense of heuristic judgement in us by which we can detect the causal relations among the things of our world and cluster them in meaningful structures. Such an insight has some additional uses also: it helps the story teller to safely leave the things unstated that take too much time and effort to spell out, and it helps him to learn how to make logical inferences of stories as elliptical and opaque constructions. Narratives provide models for our behaviour in the virtual world they decode; that is, they introduce thought processes by which things and events are mentally modelled as being located somewhere in the world.

A further aspect of stories as tools for thinking and understanding is that they help us to connect the strange with the familiar. In this sense, a story is the domain where we set rhythm for reality, define patterns for it, typify it, and through typification, recognize it, and deal with it in better ways. Reading stories helps us to develop reasonable expectations of the outcomes of our life, for in the failure of our expectations, we learn to re-typify our criteria of coherence and reorient ourselves with new standards. In addition, the face-to-face communicative interaction that the story provides for the readers (and characters) helps them to control their behaviours. Stories enable participants in conversation to contribute for the accomplishment of an expansive network of mutual understanding. Each time a party in a conversation turns her talk to the due of the talk of the other party, she provides the backgrounds of interactive understanding. In this way, the story facilitates the creation of carefully structured and pre-planned discourses. The participants in a narrative conversation reflect on and evaluate the previous, the ongoing, or the possible experiences.

## V. CONCLUSION

The present article has taken to discuss "The Figure in the Carpet" (a) as a space of plurisignation via providing the means of an active impossibility, (b) as a realm for the emergence of relative experiences through the suppression of any ultimate and truthful meaning, and (c) as a tool for the establishment of our identities via thinking and interpretation. Read structurally, it suggests that the meaning is neither incorporated into the text by the author nor integrally inherent to the language. It suggests that the meaning is structural, that it is the result of relations of the language signs, and that it is revealed in a process of critical reading. However, read deconstructively, James's text illustrates how the oppositional functions of foregrounding and backgrounding change it to a space of undecidability and render meaning indeterminable. Thus, the theme of the story is its narrativity. In the movement of the text what comes next is not a signified but is always another signifier, so that its meaning is always aborted. Thus, we read James's story as a modern narrative text not for discovering an ultimate and absolute signification, but for understanding how it cancels its own discourse for the nullification of any truthful signification.

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**Ali Taghizadeh** is an assistant professor at the English Department of Razi University of Kermanshah, Iran, where he has taught English language and literature for 15 years. He has got a B. A. in English from Shiraz University, an M. A. in English from Tehran University, and a Ph. D. in "American Studies" from John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies of Free University of Berlin. His main research interests are fiction, literary history, narrative theory, and American studies. He is working on three research projects including a post-doctoral one which is a comparative study of the postmodern Iranian and American fiction as a space for cultural studies, and a translation project (a translation into Persian of the English version of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*). He has published some books and articles in the areas of his interest.