

The Experience of (Cultural) Reality in Henry James's *The Ambassadors*

Ali Taghizadeh
English Department, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

Abstract—The later Henry James's fiction is a productive field of cultural experience. The present paper takes to analyze the creation of symbolic cultural realities in *The Ambassadors* through the exposition of James's main character to the manifestations of Parisian life. To achieve this purpose, it is argued that his character searches for the salvation of his consciousness mainly in language. But in search still of more new experiences, his consciousness often gets extended even beyond language. Cultural reflection in narrative language, negotiation with the other for interpretive analysis, experience as discursive, meaning as culturally represented in narrative, the quest to the beyond of language in search of experience, and cultural reflection for "civilized behavior" are among the issues which the present paper will analyze for the elaboration of its subject. The application of these techniques in James's novel enables his character to infiltrate history through his consciousness for standing in direction connection with the nature of things.

Index Terms—James, *The Ambassadors*, experience, (cultural) reality, language, reflection, transcendence of consciousness

I. INTRODUCTION

The rise and development of the English fiction has conventionally been regarded a social and/or cultural issue. For example, Lionel Stevenson (1960) has defined the novel as "a long fictitious prose narrative (p. 6), and has ascribed its emergence to some factors all of which were social. These factors included the purpose of the publisher in the classification of his trade list, the satisfaction of the bookseller in the arrangement of his counter, and the motivation of the librarian assigning his counter. Also, Ian Watt (1957) has mentioned a number of social factors which he believes were effective in the emergence of the genre in the 18th-century English society. One of them was the role of women, because the "women of the upper and middle classes could partake in few of the activities of their menfolk, ... Such women, therefore, had a great deal of leisure, and this leisure was often occupied by omnivorous reading (p. 48). Other factors which Watt has mentioned for the emergence of the novel in the 18th century include the evolution of the health conditions, the common compulsory education, and the development of journalism.

However, the argument of the present paper goes counter to that of those thinkers, for it takes to discuss the production of cultural experience in Henry James's *The Ambassadors* as a work of literature. Firstly, it will be argued that cultural experience is generated through the excitement of James's main character's free imagination in the context of literary language. The kind of experience produced here is far from the conventionally pre-given "transcendental signified" in the Woollettian community, for it is a dimension of an in-between man-made structure which is both relational and suppositional.

Then, Strether's consciousness will be clarified on as hovering for long times on the manifestations of Parisian culture for the emergence of new experiences. In a next step, the generation of meaning in the novel is discussed as a practice of discursivity. In the hands of James, the paraphernalia of literary language, the techniques of point of view for example or the insertion of the real with the imaginary, make it capable to function for the production of cultural reality. And it is hypothesized that narrative legitimacy is rooted in its capacity to give the character and reader the occasion to coin experience through trial and error, and through negotiation with the other.

However, not the whole of cultural experience can be generated via the language potentialities. Therefore, in search of still more new experiences, the subjectivity of James's character is extended even beyond language. Here he often questions the validity of the codification systems within the established language and attempts to set up a new system which is based, it seems, on a one-to-one correspondence with the nature of things. Out of the prison-house of language and feeling unified with creation, he is now an agent of cultural reflection who renders the materials of life to the building blocks of his artistic creations. This infiltration of history through his consciousness makes it ultimately remolded. In his voyage to the heart of things without the intervention of language, his illusion becomes radically intensified, the theme and form of creation gets embedded in him, and he "touches the bottom" of life.

II. DISCUSSION

A. A Space of Cultural Reflection

When the reader of *The Ambassadors* sees Lambert Strether reviewing his Woollettian experience in Paris, he gets curious about the nature of a review and the cultural job it does. He also wonders if this text shows James reviewing the American civilization. A review is a medium for the clash of “ideas.” It is, in this sense, a method for synthesizing the modern counterarguments for the psychological sanitation of the modern man, and a mechanism for taking the pulsation of the modern liberal society into control. These notions excite James’s reader to believe that he should read it for the production of cultural experience also.

On the second day of his life in Paris, and while he is visiting the Rue scribe, a sequence of chaotic impressions rush upon Strether’s mind. The great avenue is now like a “spur to his spirit” which serves him to “begin business with” (James, 2003, p. 109). And a second file of impressions rushes into his consciousness when he goes into the reception room of the bank. Here an impulse reminds him of the post office in Woollett which brings the image of a “transatlantic bridge” into his mind. Therefore, his mind is the store of many missives randomly superimposed that add to his restlessness. To give another comparison from the novel, his restless mind is like an “elaborate engine” that intakes unrelated impressions and changes them into the materials of new experience. In addition, when he starts roaming, his consciousness is like an oversensitive photographic slide, because whatever is exposed to it makes a deep impression on it.

In the context of Parisian culture, and to accomplish its job, his subjectivity will stretch everywhere. To create new meanings, it acts like a workshop where “these little brisk figures ... take their smooth diagonal” (James, 2003, p. 111). For example, as he gazes into the “irremediable void” of the palace, “the historic sense” freely plays in his mind. And it often shuttles back and forth between the past and present of European culture. Like a drift, and in search of new experiences, it aimlessly wanders where the components of time and place, or the historical and geographical dimensions, are “composed together” to make it into a “consciousness of difference.”

As James’s character roams in “the wonderful Paris spring,” he makes numberless figures and changes them into imaginary artistic creations. The strong engine of his freedom is now his restless mind and fluid imagination while its logic is based on perpetual escape. The logic of such a curiosity is like the logic of the polygon erected by his spontaneous perceptions and intruding impressions. But these blocks of curiosity can be made only in the workshop of the Parisian polyhedral social life with all its variety, complexity, and fluidity. In search for new ways of becoming, the American envoy lingers in the garden of life where art will guarantee its perpetual renovation so as the monotonous life will no longer exhaust his soul. His searching policy is, among other things, the celebration of defamiliarization via the elixir of art. Book 2 chapter 2 reads

In the garden of Tuileries he had lingered, on two or three spots, to look; it was as if the wonderful Paris spring had stayed with him as he roamed. The prompt Paris morning struck its cheerful notes – in a soft breeze and a sprinkled smell, in the light flit, over the garden-floor, of bareheaded girls with the buckled strap of oblong boxes, in the type of ancient thrifty persons basking betimes where terrace-walls were warm, in the blue-frocked brass-labeled officialism of humble rakers and scrapers, in the deep references of a straight-pacing priest or the sharp ones of a white-gaitered red-legged soldier. He watched little brisk figures, figures whose movement was as the tick of the great Paris clock, take their smooth diagonal from point to point; the air had a taste as of something mixed with art, something that presented nature as a white-capped master-chef. (James, 2003, p. 111).

In Strether’s mind, and in the mind of the reader, this process of becoming is far from unconscious. It is based on seeing and watching, and on observing formations which exist only on the border of his imagination and which are therefore always prone to disappear from his mind. However, although these formations are imaginary, he changes them into concrete materials of observation, like the materials which he extracts from the context of the real Parisian culture.

Yet, it is not the process only of a focused thought. Once again, when he is sitting in his nook in Luxemburg Gardens, “the waves of the single day” bring the image of Mrs. Newsome to bid him that he should be worried about nothing that was not of the essence of his task. He feels “so distinctly fagged out,” but at the end he lights on a happy form. He feels he has arrived at the real truth and that in the flood of his imagination such a truth can take on significant functions. If he can maintain his grasp of it, he may do everything he wants. But the fiction of James shows truth as far from independent and self-sufficient. He shows it as formal, relational, and relative. The outcome of Strther’s conscious observations in search of experience here is a kind of structural truth which is suppositional and phenomenological. And it is evasive, smuggling, and is always open to fermentation.

B. Experience as Outcome of Cultural Reflection

With Strther’s “short gusts of speculation—sudden flights of fancy” (James, 2003, p. 116), the American delegate is the great architect who will erect the monument of a new kind of truth. At his back, when perhaps no innovation was possible in American experience of life, he sees “the great desert of the years.” There are sequences that he, the would-be stretching projectile of American consciousness, has missed, and there are “great gaps in the procession” of his European citizenship. Now his mind “hovers” for long times to suspend in the air of this establishing truth. Thus, if he wonders and laughs and sighs, it is all for the sake of his mental achievement. For the process of his conscious becoming, he provides a full program; and he waits to see if it needs any further proofs for its applicability to the experience of the modern life.

Yet, his “fairly open sense of the irony of things” (James, 2003, p. 118) will make his predicament bristle. His vibrating imagination and straying consciousness let him appreciate the irony of things. The Jamesian experience is not

elemental, but is ironical and compositional; and one faulty relation in it will gangrene other relations. In Woollett, identity was sharply defined in narrow ways and in terms of separated factors. The ways of life and being, pre-determined as they were, were limited by division and rivalry. And consciousness was mainly linear and was a one-level structure. However, in the Parisian life different things mingle in the consciousness to provide the experience which is embedded in and by language. This kind of experience, which is the outcome of togetherness, intersection, and compromise, is therefore culturally represented.

It is often said that there is not so much of narrative in *The Ambassadors* but there is so much of observation. This is because James wants us to bring the experience of critical thinking into our lives. So, another cultural issue in this novel is how we render critical thought. James wants to show the process of thinking in us is never very ordered, and that although our thought is vague and scattered, it can be illustrated. On one hand he proves that our knowledge is limited, while on other hand his fiction invites us to discover the whole truth. What we have is the perception of more than one character: how a first character perceives another character and how this another character perceives the thought of the first character, etc. In this way, in James there is often few objective and one-lateral dimensions of thought, and everything is seen through an opaque filter that forces us to interpretation also. However, the reader of *The Ambassadors* sees the other characters only through the eyes of Strether. Therefore, his gain of reading is a handful of reflected experience, a kind of experience that is not the result of spontaneous intuition but the outcome of conscious mediated reflection on the things of thought and life.

C. *Meaning as Discursive Interpretation*

Strether's problem is a real theme of his story. However, it is rather hard to give word to it. He is here in Paris to understand the relation between Chad and Madam de Vionnet. In Book 5 chapter 2, when he advises Little Bilham to do his best to pass a full and free life, he has discovered a rash conflict between openness and closure, between real freedom and its simulacrum. This theme is a great part of the effects of his consciousness. Thus, he intends to renew his own subjectivity as well as to map the transcendence of his reader's mentality.

His unstopable imagination keenly reacts to whatever it perceives from the external world. So, we find him a victim to such a flood of external impressions which are too intrusive for him to control. For him, the signified freely streams beyond the signifier, and it is the energies of the narrative discourse that create meaning in his mind. The Jamesian narrative is often not the result of the author's omniscient knowledge but is the outcome of a close interaction of different social forces enacted through narrativity. In the transcending consciousness of the American delegate, cultural experience is the aftermath of the interaction of the things of narrative language.

Strether's consciousness is, to speak metaphorically, a 'balcony' of observation and recognition, for these are the methods which he uses for a possible reconstruction of his mentality, which guarantees its transcendence also. Experience is produced in no simple and clear-cut process but in a long and complicated one which is often based on trial and error: the onlooker observes the things, makes mistaken inferences of them, comprehends that his inferences are mistaken, then he makes another inference but mistakenly again which he ultimately refutes to make new inferences. For example, in the scene of Boulevard Malesherbs, when Strether passing by sees someone in a flat balcony, they stand and look at each other. Strether, and with him the reader, firstly think that this someone is Chad, but a little later the novel reads otherwise: "the interest was affected by the young man's not being Chad" (James, 2003, p. 124). Then the ambassador thinks he may be "Chad's friend." Then later again he thinks it is Miss. Gostrey. However, the narrative nullifies this fancy also. Toward the end of this scene we read: "Waymarsh, and Waymarsh alone, ... struck him as the present alternative to the young man in the balcony. When he did move it was fairly to escape that alternative" (James, 2003, p. 125).

In Book 3 Chapter 1, when Waymarsh asks Strether "Then what the devil do you know?" he replies, "almost gaily, I guess I don't know anything!" (James, 2003, p. 131). Their negotiation grounds the concern of James's reader with the authenticity of his tale; that is, with if he can believe in the claims of James's character. The narrator is other than Strether, and if he knows nothing, can it be suggested that the story is about nothing? Or that it is about the might of ignorance? Whatever the answer is, James's American delegate is curious about the working of things in Parisian life, about understanding deeper layers of the transatlantic culture. Under these pressures, he seems so severely exhausted of his excessive curiosity that he would like Waymarsh "to come down on me and squash me" (James, 2003, p. 133). On other hand, he says his interest lies in his not being squared, in the idea that his cognitive hard drive will be demystified with no certain tool. He says he likes to be anticipated or to be outrun, yet the story cancels his recognition and postpones our understanding. Such a narrative strategy gets authenticity mainly through active responses to the necessities of interpretation.

Interpretive experience is even more highlighted when Strether claims that his interest "lies in my not being squared. If I'm squared where's my marriage? If I miss my errand I miss that; and if I miss that I miss everything—I'm nowhere" (James, 2003, p. 135). In the fiction of James, the logic of squarity runs counter to that of marriage, for if the former is the logic of exactitude and demarcation, the latter is the state of compromise and intercourse. Marriage is the celebration of relations, but squarity is to be restricted from relations. Marriage is the protocol for the unity of the text and the reader for what Roland Bathes calls "the pleasure of the text." It is a strategy for the celebration of textual relations the outcome of which is the emergence of a series of text-reader negotiations for the sake of interpretive experience or subjective reality.

D. *Beyond Language*

In addition to the emergence of subjective reality as the outcome of text-reader negotiations, it seems that Strether's consciousness in search of cultural revelation is often extended even to the beyond of language where it is consequently no longer controlled by the latter. Chapter 1 of Book 1 reads: "He wondered what they meant, but there were things he scarce thought they could be supposed to mean, and 'Oh no – not that!' was at the end of most of his ventures" (James, 2003, p. 139). This is because his subjectivity is now open to a full flood of impressions which is too spontaneous for him, perhaps too rash, to control by language posts. In the book of Parisian culture which he is reading, the grammar is other than that of language. However, he does not "shirk the dilemma of reading," and from anything that comes up he hears a "roundabout echo." It no longer seems to be the echo of his nerve excitation when he attempts to express himself in words. Rather, it is the echo of his deep reflections when he attempts to go beyond the realm of language, to defeat the signifier, and to enlighten his mentality with the alphabets of another semantic codification.

Whatever this new text of life or this other semantic convention is, he puts to himself to read it and to formulate its "logic." In Woollett, the moral experience, which was one-sided, was taken for granted. But in Paris he reads the book of life differently, for he is "in the presence of new measures, other standards, a different scale of relations (James, 2003, p. 137). This transcendental experience is the outcome of a long and gradual process of which the first step is to doubt about the previous norms and conventions and to annihilate them. The outcome of this strange codification system is a kind of supra-structural experience the law of which the American delegate is designing in his intrusive consciousness.

Strether's cultural reflections are never stable. They uncontrollably change; and each reflection entails a riddle which he attempts to solve in order to format his conventionally one-lateral Woollettian consciousness, and develop it into a multi-level structure. In such a process of perpetual mutation, he is sure "he mustn't dispossess himself of the faculty of seeing things as they were" (James, 2003, p. 140). If he already knows about the illogic and deteriorating power of language, can it be proposed that he wants to go beyond language to infiltrate the law of nature, the law of universal human experience, into himself? This is because the logic of metaphorical language is different from the logic of life and is therefore rash and intrusive. However, the great imagination of James's character enables him to exceed the illogical functioning of metaphor, delve into the nature of things, and make one-to-one relations with them without the interference of language.

In this way, it can be claimed that James's realism in his late fiction is the realism of higher levels of life, the realism of human consciousness in radical deliberation in search of new experiences. In *The Ambassadors*, it is mainly the realism of the intensified illusion of an intellectual missionary who searches for cultural transcendence in the light of Parisian life, the realism of the abstract laws and principles of the universal human experience. Yet, these features turn Strether's searching into a loose and intrusive job, for he should be perpetually anxious for more demystification and recognition.

E. *The Good in Cultural Reflection*

With Miss. Gostrey's re-arrival onto the scene in Book 3 chapter 2, yet a new phase of evolution starts in the American missionary's consciousness. He starts to dramatize the notion of "civilized behaviour" more artistically. For him, civilized behaviour is the possibility of invoking action to raise artistic faith to its maximum, the meaning of the ideal beauty of goodness. It is in this respect that one can gain material and spiritual salvage through the artistic objectification of his theme of life. Therefore, it is in search of civilized behaviour that James's character makes "a thousand flights and funny little passionate pounces" (James, 2003, p. 141).

And he is able to fulfil the requirements of his mission, for he is ultimately settled in the "final nest" of artistic creativity which is the ivory tower of formulaic recognition. He has already gone so far in this way, and the story shows him in the very remote realm of art the norms of which are not, in the fiction of James, so different from those of real life. He desires domination over language via the elixir of artistic vision, and he finds this artistic vision helpful enough in the ascension of his soul. Therefore, "civilized behaviour" is mingling artistic vision with the raw materials of life for the artistic solution of the riddles of life. If art re-enlivens the stale life and makes it bearable, "civilized behavior" is, with James's character, a process for defamiliarizing the insipid hollow life and exhilarating it.

The "ivory" and "brocade" that the American missionary sees signal his artistic vision. Yet, we are not familiar with the topography of this new level of his consciousness. He already sees himself 'in' the realm of art where he makes one-to-one relations with the "empire of things." Here his vision gets more enlarged till he will soon reach "the very innermost nook of the shrine" which is "as brown as a pirate's cave (James, 2003, p. 141). Here is the most private residence of his wondering imagination where he satisfies his curiosity to see life spirited to its maximum. This private pavilion is where the stretching hero of *The Ambassadors* has waywardly gone to see how the polygon of life can be generated by artistic means of cultural negotiation. Here is perhaps the hyper-realm of creative imagination, where Strether will disrespect the established lexicon and grammar, and will inaugurate the laws of a transcendental culture for the possibility of a notion of life that is as artistic as possible. However, he still seems to be in deep alienation from this artistic realm of life, and the things are not yet quite clear to him.

The story provides Strether with an agency that although speaks through his mouth, is out of his control. Now his consciousness has mustered all its powers to make the things into a cause of knowledge and recognition. Yet everything in his consciousness is only promptly determined. It changes him to a "man to whom things had happened and were

variously known” (James, 2003, p. 166), a man with the ability to read history in the form of a new narrative structure which yet can deconstruct itself. It shows him as the incarnation of subtlety and smoothness: “it had retouched his features, drawn them with a clear line” (James, 2003, p. 166). In *The Ambassadors* we do not read a story that wants to narrate or illustrate truth, but read the story of the transcendence of a truth-oriented consciousness that wants to be narrated. Strether is perhaps the Jamesian embodiment of the subtlety needed for the new American mind. If Woollettian tradition is rough and uncivilized, James’s solution is that through the subtlety of our mind we can “make the future the real right thing” (James, 2003, p. 167).

But James mentions that if the American ambassador in Europe is to design a new mode for gaining cultural experience, he should also use the advantages of the “liberty taken with him” (2003, p. 141). Authority makes stasis via hindering innovation and promotion. The dominant conservative power keeps individuals from acting out their potentials and fulfilling their expectations, and so keeps them from the possibility of promotion and development. But if to guarantee cultural development we need departure from authority, departure itself needs freedom. Departure from authority to freedom in James is perhaps an application of Max Horkheimer’s theory about the departure from “traditional theory” to “critical theory.” In an essay published in 1937, he wrote “where traditional theory conceived of itself as ‘stored-up knowledge’, that is, a condensed description of ‘the actual facts’ of the present, critical theory sought to understand the social world as changeable thereby stripping reality of its character as pure factuality” (quod. in Milner and Jeff, 2003, p. 57). Strether’s consciousness is the agency for upraising symbolic freedom in search of cultural experience via the application of creative imagination in the realm of art, because freedom guarantees the deconstruction of all taboos and the generation of supra-realities.

His imagination, which is now free from the stretches of language, allows him to synthesize things into formulas that he can use to demystify the most cunning riddles. His wondering mind is now a structure-making projection, for he can see a single man both as pagan and gentleman; for in paganism he sees something of a gentleman and in gentlemanliness he sees something of a pagan. His mind is the canvas on which “the painter of life” has mingled his impressions to produce opposite nuances and shades of meaning. Now the ambassador’s free imagination is the realm where good and evil (or black and white) meet for synthesis and unification. His consciousness has already moved not only beyond the horizons of the usual mind but also beyond those of language. In the realm of his consciousness, the product of artistic creation is not opposition between good and evil but is a formula for compromise and mutual understanding.

In Gloriani’s garden, when Gloriani shows “a fine worn handsome face” (James, 2003, p. 199) to the delegate, the condition of his mind is Parisian. His mind is a great source of inspiration; and he has mobilized all the capacities of his consciousness to grasp the utmost insight from this figure. He stands briefly face to face with Gloriani whose eyes are holding his looks. They are “the source of the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed” (James, 2003, p. 200). Now his consciousness is beyond ordinary condition, and he is capable to receive “the greater of the mysteries? ... the most special flare, unequalled, supreme, of the esthetic torch, lighting that wondrous world forever” (James, 2003, p. 200). His fancies are not hopeless, because this situation gives him a new light for deeper looks and more enjoyment. In the cumulative pot of his consciousness what is melting is the “illustrious spirit” of the universal man. To celebrate the experience of a transcendental consciousness, *The Ambassadors* gratifies a kind of relation that takes advantage of non-lingual materials also: the air of their sitting, the delicate room, the world outside, the First Empire; the matters far-off and quite near that are in the service of the relations between Strether and Vionnet.

Another non-lingual measure for the celebration of relations in his mind is the infiltration of history through it, for relations are both structure-making materials and the means for the explosion of his mind. His mind converts everything into a relation to the benefit of a cultural analysis of narrative for the vivification of his understanding. Such relations can profit by “a mass of things,” by elements that are even external to his mind. His mind delves deep into the substrata of history and comes up to the surface again to establish a net of relations. For example, it changes a relic of the “First Empire” or an unbroken clasp on the hand of the woman living now into sources of relations. In every incident and situation he finds “relations and relations,” like those between Chad and Vionnet, because structures, which both embody recognition and are the spaces of it, are the natural aftermath of relations. All these relations, and the numerous questions that Strether asks Vionnet, help him to get a handle on the situation. In this way, Vionnet is another source of relations for the American delegate. But true recognition for James’s character and reader will emerge when they examine these relations and make them into well-made structural experiences.

In Book 11 chapter 4, the supremacy of the vocabulary of delay makes the narrative into a new source of cultural reflection and interpretation. The result of Strether’s strange meditations over the nature of the relations between Chadwick Newsome and Marie de Vionnet is that he feels “verily, verily his labour had been lost” (James, 2003, p. 468). As the story approaches ending, their relations become the building-blocks of a new phase of this experiential construction, and his “spiritual stomach” grinds them up into materials of cultural revelation.

In this process of recognition, vagueness is natural and trial and error is elemental. So, the erected structure is not unlike when “a little girl might have dressed her doll” (James, 2003, p. 468): the effect of asymmetry, certitude versus possibility, positiveness versus vagueness. Strether has investigated the possibility in vagueness, and is feeling “the pity of its being so much like lying” (James, 2003, p. 468). Feeling lonely and cold, he decides to talk about these things perhaps only with Miss. Gostrey. Tomorrow, when he sees her, he asks her “what on earth – that’s what I want to know

– had you then supposed?” (James, 2003, p. 468). Although he tries to suppose nothing about the relations of Chad and Vionnet, but his transcending consciousness is well out of his control, for he finds himself “supposing innumerable and wonderful things” (James, 2003, p. 468).

But what is the use of Strether’s visiting Vionnet? Although the story states what he imagines by visiting her, she wants to “set something right, to deal in some way with the fraud so lately practiced on his presumed credulity” (James, 2003, p. 476). The story offers no clear suggestion about their fraud or “eminent lie”. However, it is perhaps because of his credulity that he imagines “he could trust her to make deception right” (James, 2003, p. 477). The powers of the narrative produce in him a measure of fears and braveries, of art and innocence. But suspense is perhaps at the peak here, because soon he will get worried, for Vionnet will appeal to him to let her risk in telling him the truth.

F. “Touching Bottom”

When Vionnet asks the ambassador in a telegraph to see her and he presents himself to her, he is “mixed up with typical tale of Paris” (James, 2003, p. 472): on one hand, he likes her place and takes pleasure of seeing the picture there. On other hand, he feels a danger because there is an aching sense in him that “somebody was paying something somehow and somewhere” (James, 2003, p. 473). His idling, lounging, smoking, sitting in the shade, drinking lemonade, and consuming ices signify his mixed mind. Although he strikes himself “much as a loafer,” there are times when he can imagine himself “touching bottom.” A “historic sense” re-starts working in him, and he is again subjected to “sudden gusts of fancy,” while odd suppositions and divinations rush upon his consciousness. Hopes and omens are broken out for he notices the “smell of revolution ...or perhaps simply the smell of blood” (James, 2003, p. 475). This Parisian rural side provides him with what he needs for remolding his consciousness. But in the scene after that, when he visits Vionnet, his pleasures are destroyed because he realizes his great mistake: that he has been being ‘had’ by her.

However, the truth the ambassador discovers here erupts no volcano in his mind; and at the very end of the story, when Miss. Gostrey offers herself to him, his “only logic” is, as J. Hillis Miller (2005) says, the logic of “renunciation.” Miller argues that James often makes his main characters renounce a considerable often “sexual” offer to make it into a chance of reflection for the reader; that is, to give his reader an occasion to think about, and make a judgment on, the reasons, the outcome, etc. of the character’s renunciation. After mentioning cases of renunciation in different works of James like ‘The Aspern Papers’, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Wings of the Dove*, Miller claims that “in all these diverse cases the reader must pass judgment on the protagonist’s decisive, life-determining act, or one might better call it, death-in-life-determining act (p. 15).

And Miller’s idea is in agreement with James G. Moseley’s because, if, as the latter claims, “the essential story of the novel concerns the internal movement of Strether’s soul” (1975, p. 475), for appreciating the transformations or developments of his soul, the reader has to ponder why and how he reorganizes his feelings and values in Paris. This is to mean that if Strether’s act of renunciation has something to do with the relations between the word and the thing (or between language and life) in Parisian culture, to appreciate its meaning the reader has to do some critical judgments through consideration and interpretation.

Therefore, it seems that the meaning of Strether’s abstention is the necessity he feels for a new mode of reading and interpretation for cultural production. To speak for Foucault, it is not interpretation for “the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin,” but interpretation which wants to be a means of a “violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning” (qtd. in Scott, 1991, p. 796). This mode of interpretation wants to escape from essentiality and demolish conventional intelligibilities, because its ultimate intention is the production of relational and relativized experience through the enactment of a “deconstructive task of literature” (Scott, 1991, p. 791). Here ‘deconstruction’ is not only for annihilation but is for production also, for what Glenn Jordan (2014) terms “intellectual production” (p. 174), which he says is based on “dialogue, collaborative research, and co-production” (p. 175). In this way, Strether’s departure for America is perhaps the logic of the commitment which an intellectual feels for analytical reading, for a new mode of textually-based interpretive analysis as a means of cultural criticism in a society at the threshold of modernism.

Wayne C. Booth (1961) discusses how in Jamesian fiction, unlike in the works of other story-writers like Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant, “the illusion of reality” does not stay on the level of bodily senses but goes beyond it and reaches the level of mind. Booth argues that illusion in James is not to excite ‘laughter’ or ‘tear’, but is the “intensity of illusion, most often the illusion of experiencing life as seen by a fine mind subject to realistic human limitations” (p. 42). The intensification of “the illusion of reality” on the level of the mind implies that the Jamesian typical narrative provides appropriate spaces for the correspondence between fiction and reader, between the text and the world, for cultural revisionism.

Such cultural revisions in fictitious literature naturalize the compositional cultural reality, and make it legitimate, right, and pleasant to put up with. On one side, such a reality, virtual as it is in this stage, is complementary to the concrete reality. On other side, the supposed materiality of such a construction adds to the complexity of the “illusion of reality”, and makes it possible to understand only for a “fine mind”. Material as “the thing” is supposed to be, it is that which “implied the greatest number of other things” (James, 2003, p. 458). These Jamesian virtual realities of culture in narrative space cannot stand alienated from each other and from the non-textual realities, for they imply numberless relations with the outcome of the text where both kinds of reality can simultaneously be created.

These products of the intensified illusion of reality, which are crafted by the story-teller with as fine a mind as that of James, but which are enacted in analytical reading, are added to the treasures of “live culture” with the purpose of cultural revisionism in the capacities of literary texts like *The Ambassadors*. This is because such texts make the experience of reading, like life itself, replete with implication. Therefore, the production of such cultural relations between narrator, character (who talks to amplify the possibilities of the text), and reader (who interprets the text to produce new meanings and make new lives each time), is another feature of the multi-lateral art of story-writing in James as a space of cultural revisionism.

It is from this perspective that Booth claims James’s realism is different from other ones. He writes,

James began at a different place entirely, with the effort to portray a convincing mind at work on reality. Feeling as he did that the most interesting subject was a fine but “bewildered” mind dealing with life (pp. 63-64 and p. 66, for example), he was disturbed by Flaubert’s choice of stupid minds as centers of consciousness “reflecting” events. Emma Bovary as a reflector was for him clearly a mistake, and Frederic in *The Sentimental Education* represented an almost pathetic failure of insight, even a failure of mind in Flaubert himself (1961, p. 43).

Booth notifies us that James is concerned with a notion of the real as an outcome of a mind’s activity which is bewildered by the slightest change in the daily routine of life. Then he describes James’s realism as a “higher order” than in the fiction of the aforementioned French writers, for James “seeks the intensity of illusion rather than the illusory reality” (1961, p. 43). Booth reminds us of James’s appeal to a fervent and passionate illusion as “the ultimate test” (p. 43); that is, as the generator of the experience of cultural reality. For example, in Book 11 chapter 3 of *The Ambassadors*, James portrays a pavilion which, with all its paraphernalia, is realistic enough for Strether to go sit there for cultural reflection. He writes

It consisted of little more than a platform, ... Strether sat there and, though hungry, felt at peace; the confidence that had so gathered for him deepened with the lap of the water, the ripple of the surface, the rustle of the reeds on the opposite bank, the faint diffused coolness and the slight rock of a couple of small boats attached to a rough landing-place hard by. The valley on the further side was all copper-green level and glazed pearly sky, a sky hatched across with screens of trimmed trees, which looked flat, like espaliers; and though the rest of the village struggled away in the near quarter the view had an emptiness that made one of the boats suggestive. Such a river set one afloat almost before one could take up the oars – the idle play of which would be moreover the aid to the full impression. This perception went so far as to bring him to his feet; but that movement, in turn, made him feel afresh that he was tired; and while he leaned against a post and continued to look out he saw something that gave him a sharper arrest. (James, 2003, pp. 459-460).

Hanging over the water at the edge of the garden, the pavilion seems like a real one. And, the movement of the full stream, with its turns in short distances that brings it out of and into sight again, make his perception as concrete yet vibrating and transient as the clear water of the stream. His perception is now spontaneous and uncontrollable, and the things of the natural scene add to its power and immediacy, because as the impressions of different kind rush upon him, his subjectivity becomes more expanded. Under the influence of his radical perception, although he becomes frustrated in body, spiritually he becomes re-enlivened. Here the things of the natural scene excite him and us to absorb the uttermost impression we can take for the excitement of our consciousness. The interaction of illusion and reality is radical: the water conveys the greatest degrees of peace and confidence into our psyches; and we will, hereafter, register all these correspondences in the chamber of our consciousness.

III. CONCLUSION

Fiction as a space (for the production) of cultural experience has seemingly started with the work of the later Henry James. It has not only laid the theoretical foundations of fiction for cultural studies, but has also developed a full range of professional readership. In James’s work, the experience is the product not of the text alone but of a goal-oriented negotiation between text and reading.

In this way, James changed the text from something for consumption to something for reproduction in reading. For this magnificent purpose, he also helped the Victorian novel free itself from the ‘vulgarism’ of which it was in pain. In addition, the reader as responsible for the production of new experiences in James, implied that he should accept and acknowledge the presence of Jamesian character as a symbolic ‘other’, and that he should restructure James’s text in an in-between situation. This negotiation between the reader and the ‘other’ is perhaps the greatest privilege of fiction for the origination of cultural studies. For it means that the reader not only recognizes the limits of his own presence but also considers the space of the presence of the ‘other’. This in turn means that (in James’s fiction) the reader understands if and how he is different from the ‘other’.

Moreover, the reader of James’s later fiction defines the grounds, the issues, etc. on which he can come to terms with the ‘other’, as well as the intensity of his agreement with him. This extra performative privilege of (James’s) fiction makes it into a dimension of the modern liberal society where the typical man is often inclined to close his eyes to the norms and conventions and to peruse his salvation in a peaceful situation which goes on the hinge of mutual agreement through negotiation with the ‘other’ who is on the same boat with himself. This documentation of the experience of the other is the means of a politics of difference which is itself a guarantee not only of the evolution of the modern man’s consciousness but also his spiritual sanitation through interpretive analysis of the modern knowledge. At the same time,

the in-between space of semantic cognition in fiction makes experience into a phenomenological relative entity which is often prone to renovation in a process of revisionism.

In *The Ambassadors*, James exposes an American intellectual to the Paris culture to observe how he hugs “the evidence of experience” for the transcendence of his consciousness. Unable to easily free himself from the impacts of his Woollettian conventions, his consciousness firstly lingers a whole time on the borderlines of the two cultural spaces. Then, when he digs deep enough into the under-layers of Parisian language, he uses both the dialogic privileges of language and the operations of its structures for the intensity of his consciousness.

However, when James’s character realizes that not all experiences can emerge from language, it seems that the function of language gets nullified in his consciousness. Thenceforward, as he will be attempting to make direct connections with the nature of things, he will gain thorough happiness through an artistic objectification of his theme of life. Toward the end of the novel, his close friend Maria Gostrey offers herself to him hoping that he will continue living there to esteem her pure affection. But when he decides that he will go back home (perhaps) to proceed with the outcomes of his European mission in search of cultural transcendence in art, we realize that the form and meaning of life have gotten embedded in him to let him touch the bottom of it, to stand in direct connection with creation itself.

REFERENCES

- [1] Booth, Wayne C. (1961). *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- [2] James, Henry. (2003). *The Ambassadors*. Ed. with Intro. By Harry Levin. Preface by author. London: Penguin Classics. Originally published by Methuen in 1903.
- [3] Jordan, Glenn. (2014). “On Stuart Hall: An Engaged Politics of Humility.” in *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, 14 (2): 174-178.
- [4] Miller, J, Hillis. (2005). *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James*. New York: Fordham UP.
- [5] Milner, Andrew and Jeff Browitt. (2002). *Contemporary Cultural Theory* (3rd edition). NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- [6] Moseley, James. G. (1975). "Conversion through Vision: Puritanism and Transcendentalism in *The Ambassadors*." In *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 43 (3), 473-484.
- [7] Scott, Joan W. (1991). “The Evidence of Experience.” in *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (4), 773-797.
- [8] Stevenson, Lionel. (1960). *The English Novel: A Panorama*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- [9] Watt, Ian. (1957). *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: Cahto and Windus, Ltd.

Ali Taghizadeh is an assistant professor at the English Department of Razi University of Kermanshah, Iran, where he has taught English Literature at graduate and undergraduate levels for 16 years. He has got a B. A. in English from Shiraz University and an M. A. in English from Tehran University. The title of his M. A. thesis is "The Archetypal Theme of Expiation in Six Major Novels of Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner: A Comparative Analysis." He has also got a Ph. D. in "American Studies" from John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies of Free University of Berlin. The title of his doctoral dissertation is "Structuralism and Its Aftermath in the Fiction of Henry James." „Novel“, „Literary Theory“, „A Survey of English Literature“, and „Literature in Linguistics“ are among the courses which he has usually taught. In the winter semester of 2014, he will start teaching a doctoral course: „Contemporary English Fiction“, while in the semester next to that he will start teaching, jointly with a colleague „17th-Century Poets“ as another doctoral course. The main research interests of Ali Taghizadeh are fiction, literary theory, narrative studies, literature in language, cultural studies. He has translated J. Hillis Miller’s *On Literature* into Persian, and has published some research articles both in English and in his mother tongue. He is the English editor of *Narrative Studies*, which is a research journal published by the Department of Persian Language and Literature of Razi University.