



## **A Study of the Beginning in Iranian Short Stories (Based on Prominent Short Story Writers Before the Islamic Revolution)**

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### **Abstract**

Designing the beginning of a short story is difficult and requires great precision, given the size of the story and the limited time the author has to process it and engage the reader. On the other hand, analyzing and especially determining the boundaries of the beginning of a short story requires more precision and delicacy than a novel or a long story. Therefore, the author's goal in this study is to use a descriptive-analytical method to determine the boundaries of the beginning of 224 short stories by eight famous writers of Persian literature before the Islamic Revolution, and in the next step, to determine the mechanisms of the writers in the field of beginning and ending the beginning of stories and also to examine their skills in this field. The results show that the prominent short story writers of Persian literature have had a special view of the combined beginning and then the setting and characterization. Beginnings independent of the body of the story (irrelevant) and half-scenes are among the mechanisms that have rarely been used by them. In terms of how to end the beginning, they have also widely used the method of detailing the story, drawing the attention of the main character to something, the entry of the main/new character into a new scene or place, and the conversation and encounters of the characters with each other. In addition, most of their beginnings and endings are designed with sophisticated and

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skillful techniques and indicate the reader to other parts of the story and connect to the middle part of the story without drawing his attention

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## 1. Introduction

The plot of a story is the framework of the story and a map of the ups and downs of events and the character's interactions with them, which is based on cause and effect relationships, and its components affect each other. Therefore, the structure of most plots (simple and complex, open and closed) consists of three parts: the beginning, the middle, and the end. The entrance that opens the way for the reader to enter and be attracted to the imaginary and unique world of the story is the "threshold". The threshold of the story includes various parts of intratextual and extratextual factors, including the cover design, preface, title, beginning, etc. In the present study, of the totality of the extratextual and intratextual factors of the threshold of the story, attention has been paid to one of its most important parts, namely the "beginning", which plays a more active and effective role in developing and understanding the meaning of a story. The beginning of a short story is the entrance through which the reader passes and enters the main body of the story.

In fact, the beginning of a short story has the same function as what the ancients called "bara'at isthlal"; that is, it indicates the basic elements and structures of the story. Therefore, this section must be a necessary part of the story in the true sense of the word; especially since in the short story, due to the short nature of this type of fiction, words must be used "economically" and "functionally" and the reader must be given the greatest meaning in the least number of words. Therefore, designing the beginning of a story is much more difficult and time-consuming than other parts of it; as many of the world's great storytellers such as Márquez, Borges, Camus, Zola, Faulkner, etc. have always reminded us of this point.

### Research Question(s):

In the first step, one should seek to answer the question of where the beginning and end of each story are, and then how and in what way the beginning of the story ended, as well as what were the mechanisms for

starting the stories; finally, one should seek to determine what the author's art is in this field and to what extent he has been able to write an artistic beginning that is connected to the other parts of the story.

## 2. Literature Review

Researchers have proposed various theories in the field of story opening design, which mainly fall into two general categories: the first category is about determining the boundaries of the story's beginning and how it begins and connects to the middle, and the second category is about theories that focus more on the function and methods of the beginning. Below, we will discuss a few of the theories that fall into the first category.

**First Theory:** According to Propp, the beginning of the story is the same initial stable state and the initial equilibrium of the story, which is then disrupted by force(s) and an unbalanced state occurs (cf. Propp, 1989, p. 183). At the end of the story and after the resolution, a secondary equilibrium is created. Propp's theory is similarly stated in the theories of other structuralists such as Claude Bermon, Tzotán Todorov, Paul Larieu, and Roland Barthes, and those such as Frank O'Connor and Guy Michaux. Regarding this theory, it can be said that not all short stories necessarily begin with a state of initial equilibrium or a logical continuity of the five stages of Todorov's or Larieu's theory; rather, a short story may begin with various conflicts or the story may begin with a final scene, in which case the state of secondary equilibrium is at the beginning of the story, or the threshold of the story may represent an unbalanced state and begin at stages two or three.

**Second theory:** According to Robert Funk, the narrative consists of several stages, the first of which is centralization, which is the beginning of the story. In this stage, the narrator gathers a number of people around him in a specific place and time based on "narrative centralizers." A focalizer is a person or device that guides the reader to where to look for an event. Funk divides these focalizers into three categories: 1- Entry: A person or people enter or leave the scene of the story, thus initiating the action of the story; 2- Expository focus: The narrator causes one of the characters in the story to pay attention to something, thus indirectly drawing the reader's attention to the story; and 3- Dense Expository Focus: Sometimes the expository focus and focus are so intense that they capture the entire scene and completely overshadow subsequent actions (cf. Funk, 1988, p103-106). This theory does not specify which of the narrative focalizers should be

considered the last to determine the threshold of the climax if there are multiple instances of narrative focalizers in a story.

**Third theory:** According to Boris Uspensky, the great Russian formalist, "As readers, we are strangers to this world at the beginning of the story, and the narrator is an external element to us. But with the help of the narrative framework, we enter the story and the world of the narrative slowly becomes internal to us. At the beginning of the story, our point of view and point of departure is external; but at the end of the story, everything becomes internal to us; therefore, the story moves from an external to an internal perspective" (Uspensky, 1973, p137).

Regarding this theory, it can be said that Uspensky based his criterion on the distance or proximity to the story or the character of the story, in other words, the point of view, and this has limited and determined it, and a number of stories, especially modern and postmodern stories (such as psychoanalytic stories), can be excluded from this definition.

**Fourth theory:** Boris Tomashevsky believes that the beginning of the story begins with opening motifs, which are of two types: "delay motifs: sometimes, for various reasons, the story uses delay motifs and does not allow the story to reach the body of the story from its initial stage; and delay motifs: sometimes, in folk tales, and even fiction, because one of the characters in the story does not want the story to reach its end for various reasons, he tries to maintain the initial conditions of the story through various tricks" (cf. Tomashevsky, 2006, p. 295). This theory can often be useful for the literary type of story and not for modern and postmodern short stories in which no lines or boundaries can be specified, and that, in the threshold of a short story, unlike a story, the plot and action of the story should progress and expand, and not consist of parallel and static events, and that this method is less applicable to adventure stories; Because delaying the course of events disrupts the flow of the story and confuses the audience's mentality.

**Fifth theory:** "According to interpretologists and semioticians such as Kohler, Iser, Eco, and Fish, the beginning of the story has an effect on the reader that affects his reading process. This effect is called the initial effect" (cf.: Ahvot, 1992, p. 241). According to Menachem Peri, this effect

"Depends on the amount of information that the narrator provides to the reader at the very beginning of the story: whether the narrator provides the reader with important and key information at the

beginning of the story or withholds it for some reason” (Perry, 1979, p 48).

The most important issue in this theory is that it is fundamentally dependent on the reader’s taste for fiction and the level of his understanding and reaction to reading the text, and the initial impact of a story on different people based on different times, places, and circumstances, in different forms and degrees; as a result, this theory is very relative.

### **3. Methodology**

In this study, using a descriptive-analytical method and a library and document research method, after studying 224 short stories from eight prominent Iranian short story writers, as well as after studying and reviewing reputable research and research books in the field of fiction literature and reading related articles and theses, the desired information and data were collected. After that, by criticizing and evaluating existing theories about the boundaries of the beginning of a short story and comparing and matching them with each other, a new theory was designed and a new look was taken at the way of beginning and the mechanisms involved in designing the beginning of a story, as well as how to exit from the beginning of a short story. In the last step, the degree of significance and connection between the beginning section and other parts of the short story, namely the middle and the end, was examined, and the strengths and weaknesses of each short story were stated.

### **4. Results**

Because in a good short story, the narrator penetrates the body of the story without the reader noticing, researchers have proposed various theories in this area. In most of these theories, the multiple parts of the story and the distinction of the narrator from other parts are not clearly specified, and only information about the characteristics and quality of the narrator and its types is provided. Therefore, after examining 224 short stories from eight prominent writers before the Islamic Revolution, the author has concluded that among the opening mechanisms, they often paid attention to combined beginnings, setting, and characterization, and they use other techniques in special cases and often in combination with other elements. Beginnings independent of the body of the story (irrelevant) and half-scenes are among the mechanisms that have rarely been used by the aforementioned writers; Because short story writers, especially the prominent writers present in

this study, knowing the small volume of the story's content and the lack of opportunity to compensate for mistakes and slips in the short story, try to present meaningful and artistic sentences and scenes that initially attract and attract the reader's attention and, in the later stage, are linked to other parts of the story, such as the body and conclusion. On the other hand, writers such as Alavi, Hedayat, Golshiri, Jalal Al-Ahmad, and Sadegh Chobak have often used the method of "describing and detailing the story" to end the content of their stories; with the explanation that the intensity of separation and blending of the end of the content with the beginning of the middle of the story differs among these writers; Alavi has established the least and Golshiri the most degree of correlation between these two parts, and others are in between these two ranges. In general, the eight authors mentioned above have made adequate and appropriate use of the following methods of ending the story: "description and elaboration of the story", "attracting the attention of the main character to something", "entering the main/new character into a new scene or place", and "conversation and interaction between the characters". Based on these components, it can be said that the aforementioned authors often seek to demonstrate the attractiveness, excitement, and suspense of their stories to the reader from the very beginning of the story, thereby arousing the reader's curiosity and encouraging him to continue reading the story.

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