

Metafictional Dialogism in O. Henry's Short Stories

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Abstract

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, language is ideologically saturated. The verbal constructs—novelistic discourses as “hybrid constructions” here—are loci where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide. Authorial speech, narrator’s speech, and also characters’ speech are interwoven in the text to exhibit diverse ideas, and to disclose polyphonic textualities. In light of Bakhtin’s aforementioned idea, this paper will discuss O. Henry’s attempts to orchestrate “the voices of the city” in four short stories: “The Gift of the Magi,” “An Unfinished Story,” “Mammon and the Archer,” and “An Unfinished Christmas Story.” New York is portrayed as an ambivalent setting of prosperity and poverty, of dreams built up and broken. Literary devices such as twist endings, parodic adaptations and incorporated genre not only lay bare the textual fictitiousness, but question the permanency of social systems such as capitalism. In addition, the narrators’ descriptions evoke concerns for the exploited within the text, while the self-reflexive authorial intrusions make comments on the hegemonic capitalism with-out. O. Henry, who “speaks through language,” does succeed in creating texts of heteroglossia. Humanistic compassion for the exploited proletariat and social censure against capitalist violence are both displayed.

Keywords: authorial intrusion, dialogism, heteroglossia, metafiction, parody, twist ending

1. Bakhtin’s Dialogic Heteroglossia and the Genre of Metafiction

All language is ideologically saturated and thus unlikely to be monolithic—this is M. Bakhtin’s prerequisite for discussing utterances and discourse. In this study, I plan to incorporate Bakhtin’s discursive theories with O. Henry’s short stories so as to display the authorial intention to criticize the capitalist exploitation as well as the class stratification inherent in the underprivileged characters. Based on Bakhtin’s *heteroglossia* in novelistic discourse, postmodern study of metafiction, and Marxist attack against capitalism, I intend to exhibit these qualities and missions found in O. Henry’s four short stories from *The Four Millions* published in 1906: “The Gift of the Magi,” “An Unfinished Story,” “Mammon and the Archer,” and “An Unfinished Christmas Story”.

In view of the qualities of language—i.e., being stratified and socio-ideological—lingual dynamics and instability are ensured, signifying that “alongside [any] verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272). Utterances thus become the locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide, through which conflicts appears, referring to “a matrix of forces ... impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 428).

According to Bakhtin, novelistic discourse offers writers the greatest likelihood of raising double-languageness. In fiction, the decentered, non-monolithic language delivers “its fullest and deepest expression in the novel” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 275). In other words, “diversity of voices and *heteroglossia*” exist in “a structured artistic system”—novelistic discourse (ibid). Bakhtin continues to propose that novel “as a whole is a phenomenon *multiform in style and variform in speech and voice*” (261 emphasis mine). The former [multiform in style] refers to the adaptation of parody and genres in novel, while the latter [variform in speech and voice] includes the authorial voice, narrator’s narrative, and characters’ speeches standing on different horizons, disclosing respective ideas, and displaying “internal dialogization” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 284).

Due to the potential dialogic discourse in fiction, contradictory/complimentary concepts/ideologies intersect, coexisting *with-in* and *with-out*, in the text and in the context as well. Specifically speaking, according to Bakhtin, a language in a novel “is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance” (1981, p. 333). Therefore, the speaker in a novel, be it characters, narrator, or the author, is, “to one degree or another, an ideologue, and his words are always ideologemes” (ibid). Such *heteroglossia* denies

permanency or consistency in any textual/contextual phenomena, which are characterized by provisionality and non-finality. Deprived of permanency, the constructed realities of texts are deconstructed due to their inherent provisionality and fictionality.

Metafiction, owing to its generic/rhetoric dynamic, presents such indeterminacy too. To put it in details, as a self-conscious narrative, metafiction lays bare the process of creating, and furthermore questions the realities built up in text and out of text. It connects *the discourse with-in* with *the social concerns with-out*; its narrative indeterminacy and incoherency “pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh, p. 2), challenging social constructions and ideologies rather than permanently embracing them. Echoing Bakhtin’s assertion that any language stratifies itself, metafiction, on account of the discrepancy among authorial intrusion, narrators’ statements and characters’ speeches, exhibits such linguistic indeterminacy and ideological stratifications. The diversities of, and contradiction between, these voices appear in the narrative arena, making the discourse double-voiced and internally dialogized (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324).

On the other hand, the intentional display of narrative fictionality serves to invalid the fiction in the context as well as in text, so as to voice suspicion over societal hegemony (Note 1). According to Bakhtin, any voice in a novelistic discourse stands for “a particular point of view ... enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality” (1984, p. 47). When diverse voices enter the novel to invite *heteroglossia*, Bakhtin defines novelistic verbal discourse as “a social phenomenon” (1981, p. 261). Likewise, metafiction “explores the world of the fiction and the world outside the fiction” (Waugh, p. 3); textual dialogism launches a debate over the text and the context as well. Metafictional writing’s display of narrative indeterminacy contributes to the idea that all realities or histories are provisional—“no longer a world of eternal realities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structure” (Waugh, p. 7). To put it more specifically, metafiction and Bakhtin go hand in hand, collaboratively announcing the *heteroglossia* and ephemerality of verbal constructions, and proposing the fictionality of social realities as well.

As proposed by Marxist studies, culture is inseparable from the social realities and is closely related to economic base, so literary works are forms of perception—particular ways of seeing the world in which men create their material realities. In consequence, all forms of superstructure, including politics, laws, ideology, etc., will surely be conditioned by the “base” structure of socio-economic relations (Note 2). Literature, as a part of the superstructure, may reflect, legitimate, and reinforce the interests and powers of the dominant class. However, although Marxist criticism espouses Henri Matisse’s announcement that “all art bears the imprint of its historical epoch (Note 3)”, literary works cannot be reduced to reflecting the state of the economy only. Louis Althusser, for instance, proposes that art is not merely a product of ideology; it has such a high degree of autonomy that it provides “detached perspectives” as well as “aesthetic pleasures,” exposing the contradictions inherent in ideology and therefore enhancing readers’ critical consciousness (Abrams & Harpham, p. 184). In a word, Althusser suggests that literature reflects the lived experience in the ideological content, and also possibly delivers the reader from the ideological illusion to challenge the real world—consequent changes are therefore expected.

Likewise, Pierre Macherey asserts that readers can find in texts “ideological repressions”; textual submersion may speak up to expose the ideological incoherence within (Abrams & Harpham, p. 184). Macherey’s assertion coincides with Bakhtin’s notion of novelistic discourse, in which “the internal dialogization ... becomes one of the most fundamental aspects” (1981, p. 284). Novelistic discourse is “heteroglot, .represent[ing] the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions ... between different socio-ideological groups in the present” (1981, p. 291). As words can never be deprived of “intentions and tones that are alien to him [the writer]”, so *heteroglossia* is likely to make novelistic discourse live beyond itself (1981, p. 298). In this sense, novel becomes “a means for refracting ... authorial intention” (1981, p. 309). In novelistic discourse, the author presents diverse speeches/voices to make possible *heteroglossia*, to avoid identifying with one or the other. No novelistic discourse is neutral; instead, it contains within certain subversive potentials.

Such subversive prowess can be found in literary works; in this study, O. Henry’s short stories are taken as an example. However, before discussing his short stories, the social reality—the monopoly of capitalism that O. Henry and Marxists vehemently attack, should be discussed. Capitalism as an economic mechanism develops the extreme social diversities within. The discrepancy and inequality between the poor and the rich degenerate the society into a site, in which individuals are likely to be exploited. Divisions of labor and the wage earning systems lead to class oppression, because workers are enslaved under a system of production. Deprived of knowledge, social status, and economic equality, the exploited are reduced to nothing. Marxists therefore oppose to the capitalist action which accelerates the enslavement and oppression of the working force—the proletariat. In O. Henry’s short stories, sympathy for the downtrodden is obvious, whose social being determines their

consciousness (Note 4); such concerns for economic exploitation parallel with Marxist castigation of capitalist encroachments in the metropolitan American city: New York.

In the study, the four stories discussed respond to Deming Brown's primal reason for O. Henry's popularity: textual focus on "the effects of urban life on little people" (p. 253). Indeed, the dialogues in the texts, whether between characters or among narrators and the author, invite in the texts *heteroglossia* and launch a vehement critique on capitalism. Moreover, Bakhtin's call for "multiform in style" leading to internal dialogism is realized in these stories; the twist endings and parodic adaptation, together with the self-reflexive authorial intrusions, lay bare and furthermore ridicule the provisionality of social systems. The inequity and dehumanization of capitalism are questioned and objected to. In this sense, social satire is the hidden mission of O. Henry's short stories, which are characterized by textual polyphony occurring among characters, narrators, and the writer, and by breaking down the permanency of textual/contextual construct. Social class inequalities, and hegemonic exploitation, are addressed to call for public attention and consideration.

2. Brief Introduction to O. Henry's Short Stories

The American dream is an illusion of a social ideal, in which everyone shall be able to attain the fullest stature, regardless of birth, position, or unequal opportunities. In the early 20th century, however, American society underwent *fin-de-siècle* disappointment, with the American dream itself cast into doubt. O. Henry enjoyed seeing and talking to people in urban cities. As his characters derive from real daily life, such human interaction initiated him into laughter through tears in class-stratified, capitalism-suppressed metropolitan New York.

In fact, O. Henry's stories are mostly about the lives of poor people in New York. His keen observation presents even tramps and the homeless in order to evoke public concerns and empathy. He shows sympathy for poor social underdogs, attempting to point out the cruelty and ambiguities, ridicules and vanities, of the American dream. Capable of amusing his readers through dramatic plotting, O. Henry enables the readers to laugh at their own follies, and also to criticize the inequality and oppression in society as well. O. Henry's stories often express a canny awareness of class conflicts through social satire and irony.

Several of his stories are to be mentioned and discussed here. "The Gift of the Magi" is a story about a poor, unlucky couple—Della and Jim. They plan to buy a Christmas gift for each other, but feel upset over their lack of money. The theme of ordinary, sincere love between is explicit, which serves to illuminate human nature and, ironically, to portray the hopeless economic fragility of ordinary men and women suffering in capitalist society. The same economic depression can be found in "An Unfinished Story," a story about a department store saleslady, Dulcie. Making and living on six dollars a week, Dulcie lives alone in a furnished room. Her romance never starts simply because of her anxiety over the possible spending on dates to come. To Dulcie, what remains stable in her life are her treasured posters and daily routines, in which financial insufficiency is threateningly omnipresent and insurmountable.

In addition to those economically exploited, O. Henry also tries to pinpoint the ridicule and aimlessness of capitalist beliefs and searches. "Mammon and the Archer" is about a tycoon, Anthony, who believes in "great god Mazuma"—money (p. 44), asserting that money can fulfill any wishes and dreams. The story ends with Anthony's payments for a severe traffic jam caused the day before. The jam turns out to have been Anthony's secret assistance to make his son's romance come true; the sudden flood of traffic render the motionless and allows sufficient time for Richard to offer his proposal. The twist ending guarantees Anthony's firm belief in the omnipotence of money.

"An Unfinished Christmas Story" is experimental in content and form. The searching plot, though abortive by the end, echoes the shepherds' search for baby Jesus on Christmas Eve. To look for "Parley," the narrator wanders among three adjoining houses, only to be greeted by the same landlady and scared by such an inexplicable event. The narrator by the end talks to "Stickney," another unknown person, for unknown reasons; this signifies man's meaningless, aimless and even ridiculous searches in life, which, ironically set on Christmas Eve, constantly occur in this mundane world. This contemporary search, a parody of the shepherds' search in the New Testament, is questioned and even pitied through the casual description of the capitalist society in the story.

B.M. Ejxenbaum finds "irony" pervading O. Henry's short stories (p. 4). In the aforementioned four short stories, twist ending, parodic adaptation and incorporated genre make possible Bakhtin's call for *heteroglossia* through "multiform in style" (1981, p. 261). In addition, authorial intrusion launches the textual polyphony as its diverse opinions from characters, and its attempt to break down the textual/contextual constructs through narrative digression. Bakhtin's demand for "variform in speech and voice" is reached through such "internal dialogization" (1981, p. 261). Textual *heteroglossia*, as well as the indeterminacy of the text/context, render these stories subversive.

3. Theoretical Analysis of O. Henry's Short Stories

O. Henry's short stories, often degraded as column-writing only, cannot be dismissed as low-brow mass culture only. His writings oscillate between two extremes: well-constructed plots and plotless stories. The former contain elements such as coincidence, irony and parody which culminate in twist endings, while the latter are intruded upon by an authorial voice with a reflexive tone. The following is to discuss the two venues to textual *heteroglossia*: multiform in style and variform in speech and voice.

3.1 *Multiform in Style: Twist Ending, Parody and Incorporated Genre*

O. Henry's rhetorical skills are most characterized by twist endings. A twist ending is contrary to readers' expectations, but its plausibility is never sacrificed. This skillful interlocking rhetoric discloses the intentional construction of the fiction, adroitly perpetuating O. Henry as a short story writer-king. The ending of the short stories surprises the reader, but never fails to associate the reader with the previous plots/happenings. Before all the events converge in the unexpectedness of the ending, several ironic coincidences have been manipulated through the development of the plot. In his slice-of-life stories, O. Henry satisfies Edgar Allen Poe's notion regarding the use of an intense plot for a short story, one which has "all the details ... gravitate and ... account for everything that precede" (qtd. Ejxenaubum, p. 6). O. Henry follows such demands for structural centrality, with his twist endings serving as the convergence points for all the preceding coincidences.

Coincidences actually act as a kind of warm-up to the twist endings of the stories. In "The Gift of the Magi", Della and Jim constantly struggle for survival. On Christmas Eve, they respectively sell their most beloved treasures to fulfill each other's desire: Della cuts and sells her beautiful long hair to buy her husband a platinum fob chain, while Jim sells his watch to purchase for Della a set of combs with jeweled rims. Such a coincidence turns out to be a vain effort in view of the gift-exchange. In "Mammon and the Archer," coincidences push the story forward to the end. In the beginning, Aunt Ellen expresses her disagreement with monetary omnipotence, considering true love the only key for romance. Richard, Anthony's son and Aunt Ellen's nephew, holds within a secret love for Miss Lantry, whereas limited time makes this romance almost impossible. Aunt Ellen gives Richard a ring as a token of good luck in love. Then a series of coincidences occur, with the ring lost and retrieved, the traffic jam caused and solved. These coincidences lead to a happy ending, making possible Richard's proposal to Miss Lantry.

These coincidences, though dominating the short stories, are pervaded with sardonic irony in respective twist endings. The contrasts between the proletarian helplessness and capitalist omnipotence are starkly displayed. Della and Jim's gift-exchange exposes the financial embarrassment some people suffer in capitalist society. In addition, the omnipotence of Anthony the tycoon in "Mammon and the Archer" substantiates the menace of wealth. An age of extremes—of poverty and dazzling wealth, of hopeless decline and potential advance, is displayed. In ironic twist endings to challenge social inequalities.

Ke Ling-ling contends that such twist endings serve to "light up the humanity of characters ... to arouse the reader's sympathy ... [and] to awaken people's conscience and their deepest desire for all the good things" (p. 10). However, when all the coincidences converge by the end, the ending serves not only as a denouement, but "discloses the true nature of the intrigue, [and] the real meaning ... that has occurred" (Ejxenaubum, p. 21). In other words, the twist ending is more than a literary technique; it contains political purposes. By breaking down and reversing regular conventions, this abrupt discontinuity of expectation makes possible the genuine dialogue between the text and the context. O. Henry's twist ending displays "how the consumption culture exerts its impact on people's attitude", with social inequality as the byproduct of the prosperity of "the gilded age (Note 5)" (Ke, p. 11). For instance, Della's and Jim's deep love for each other leads to an abortive usage of the gifts; Dulcie's excitement and expectation for romantic dating is denied by her financial anxiety; Anthony's secret assistance secured by money leads to Richard's successful proposal; and, in "An Unfinished Christmas Story," the narrator's man-hunting comes to an abrupt end. All the unexpectedness in these endings instills in readers pity and sympathy, and also triggers comments against capitalist hegemony and exploitation widely spreading in contemporary society. The fictional construction of the capitalist hegemony is displayed, cast into doubt, and further denied in this way, too.

The fictionality of textual/social systems is displayed and doubted when social realities are exposed and criticized in the twist ending. The twist ending as a rhetoric device actually develops heteroglossia, which presents diverse contrasts of silent acceptance and reconciliation vs. potential rebellion by the end. Another device that makes heteroglossia possible is the "parody" adopted in the texts. In the four short stories discussed here, the parodic device gives rise to "literary allusion" and "official language substituted for literary description" (Ejxenaubum, p. 15). Biblical allusions, such as the Magi's gift for baby Jesus (in "The Gift of the

Magi”) and the shepherds’ search for baby Jesus (in “The Unfinished Christmas Story”), illustrate some more serious themes: the original meanings of Christmas—joy for salvation, and adoration for the Savior—are all lost in the monopoly capitalism (Voss, p. 122). Another parodic discourse occurs in “Mammon and the Archer” when Cupid the mythic character is mentioned by the end of the story. Just after Anthony pays the fee for the traffic jam on the previous day, and the person in charge excitedly says that he “can lick the man that invented poverty,” Anthony mentions “a fat boy without any clothes on shooting arrows around with a bow” amid the heavy traffic (p. 46). The parody of the Greek God of Love is a device to cast a sharp contrast between supposed true love and monetary omnipotence, and to render a social criticism against capitalist monopoly. In a word, when the Magi (in “The Gift of Magi”), shepherds (in “An Unfinished Christmas Story”), and Cupid (in “Mammon and the Archer”) are all invited, they perform the parodic function as “a means for refracting new authorial intentions” because, according to Bakhtin, parody is capable of delivering *heteroglossia* by producing “parodic destruction” and carrying on critical missions (1981, p. 309). The parodic device is clearly intended for social criticism.

In addition, *heteroglossia* pervades in O. Henry’s short stories when various genres occur in novelistic discourse. Bakhtin finds that incorporated genres in novelistic discourse “preserve ... their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities ... [which] assimilate[e] various aspects of reality ... [and] refract, to one degree or another, authorial intention” (1981, p. 321). In “An Unfinished Story” and “The Gift of the Magi”, O. Henry interpolates wordings from checkbooks, which clash with the usual style of novelistic narrative.

... One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time ... Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. (“The Gift of the Magi”, p. 7)

... For the room, Dulcie paid two dollars per week. On week-days her breakfast cost ten cents; ... On Sunday mornings she *feasted royally* on veal chops and pineapple fritters at ‘Billy’s’ restaurant, at a cost of twenty-five cents—and tipped the waitress ten cents ... She had her lunches in the department-store restaurant at a cost of sixty cents for the week; dinners were \$1.05. The evening papers ... came to six cents; and two Sunday papers ... were ten cents. The total amounted to \$4.76... (“An Unfinished Story”, p. 58 emphasis mine).

Such accounting statements display the financial anxiety that the downtrodden suffer in capitalist New York, and sharply rebuke capitalism for merciless exploitation. In this sense, incorporated genres can bring into the novel their own language, and thus “stratify the linguistic unity of the novel and further intensify its speech diversity” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 321). Authorial intentions may be *refracted* through such parodic use of incorporated genres in fiction.

As mentioned above, O. Henry manipulates lingual diversities—in the form of literary allusions and accounting statements, so as to call attention to the financial problems the protagonists encounter. The idea is insinuated that capitalist consumerism strangles the proletarian class. People in O. Henry’s stories—Jim, Della and Dulci, for example—are deprived of their rights to choose their production mode or to better their economic status quo. Their life determines their thinking, just as the Marxist proposition of the Marxist base-superstructure formula, wherein one’s social being is said to determine his consciousness. But O. Henry’s stories trigger potential subversiveness on account of the narrative instigation against capitalist exploitation.

3.2 *Variform in Speech and Voice: Authorial Intrusion*

Twist endings and parodic devices lead to heteroglossia in the text. Another device often adopted by O. Henry is authorial intrusion in the text. It breaks down textual verisimilitude, and invites further interpretation of social inequalities. Authorial intrusion makes the narrative inconsistent, incoherent, and indeterminate. Metafiction studies consider this rhetorical device subversive because, by laying bare the writing process, the author’s intention is refracted, the textual illusion is broken, and all certainties are denied. Patricia Waugh goes on to point out the subversive potentials of authorial intrusion, considering it as “a construction of a fictional illusion ... to show the [contextual] illusion ... characterized by culturally pluralistic instability” (p. 6). So-called authorial intrusion is the author himself stepping to the forefront to destroy the illusion of the genuineness and seriousness of the story. This device makes the whole fictitious construction ironic, in that the author keeps reminding the reader of his presence, and also discloses the illusion of the characters merely being his “marionettes” (Ejxenbaum, p. 9). The author’s omnipotence may be in sharp contrast with the characters’ helpless dilemma—in view of plot, and of real life, too.

In fact, O. Henry is often blamed for being a “slave of the bourgeois milieu ... accept[ing] its standards and ha[ving] no intention of objecting to them” (Brown, p. 255). Indeed, his characters are often trapped in capitalist

dilemma: some suffer from its exploitation while others benefit from its omnipotence. Deming Brown claims that O. Henry “touched] upon situations of social pathos ... concentrated on small tragedies in the lives of ordinary people ... and showed ... individual caught in the web of adverse economic circumstances” (p. 255). His stories are criticized as sentimental ones, into which the reader retreat to find solace from puny happiness. Therefore, Jim is described to “tumble down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and *smile*” (“The Gift of Magi” emphasis mine); Dulcie, after declining the coming date, “turns out the light and skips into bed... feel[s] lonelier than usual” (“An Unfinished Story”). Likewise, in “Mammon and the Archer,” Richard is still ignorant of his success at proposal assisted by Anthony’s money. In “An Unfinished Christmas Story,” the anonymous searcher reminiscent of the shepherds in search of Jesus the baby “cannot accept charity ... cannot borrow ... [and] knows no one who would invite him to dinner”. No changes occur to these characters stuck in capitalist dilemma, let alone initiation and revolution.

Bakhtin, in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, considers the character in novelistic discourse as “a particular point of view on the world ... the position to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality” (47). We may find that O. Henry’s characters indeed stand for a “position,” which, however, fails to deliver “self-consciousness as the dominant in the construction of a character’s image” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 64). Bakhtin proposes changes in a characters and conflicts between characters to be ingredients for textual polyphony. O. Henry’s characters, however, lack such characteristics as changes or conflicts; Deming Brown thus denies O. Henry any social value; he criticizes O. Henry for offering only the final illusion of a beautiful life in spite of capitalist exploitation. However, my opinion is that O. Henry is not insensitive to social inequity; his characters do stand for a “position”—a thorny dilemma that the social downtrodden confront and the capitalist traps they get stuck; the unchangeness even implies the entailing paralysis and unlikelihood of change in face of capitalist hegemony.

As mentioned above, O. Henry achieves *heteroglossia* not through characters’ “unfinalizability and indeterminacy” proposed by Bakhtin (1984, p. 59); instead, O. Henry operates dialogized *heteroglossia* through authorial intrusion to refract authorial intentions. “Double-voiced discourse”, or “internal dialogization”, lead to textual *heteroglossia* by presenting “the heteroglot sense of the world and of society ... through the embodied image of a posited author, or narrators, and characters” (1981, pp. 331-332). In fact, in O. Henry’s stories, such authorial intrusions break the objective illusion of the realistic narratives, and furthermore cast doubt over the beliefs in capitalism upheld by common people within and without the text. Besides, as the author directly launches a conversation with his reader, the story shifts from the narrator’s objective, impersonal statement to authorial comments. The narrator tries to mirror a real life by describing the realities with detachment, objectivity and accurate observation, while the author engages the reader in literary conversation, challenging the general silent reconciliation with capitalist monopoly. Dialogic phenomena thus arise.

In “The Gift of the Magi,” the narrator’s pseudo-objective statements are continually interrupted by the abrupt authorial intrusions. The narrator describes in detail the impoverishment that Della and Jim live in, ironically proclaiming “two possessions ... which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim’s gold watch that had been his father’s and his grandfather’s. The other was Della’s hair” (p. 8). The narrative description for their financial difficulty is suspended by the authorial direct address to the reader: “She [Della] got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages ... *which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task*” (9 emphasis mine). This direct address to the reader shifts back to an objective description in the following passage, but before long the text reverts to a direct address to the reader again:

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. *For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on* (9 emphasis mine).

Here the authorial voice invites the reader to think of the value of money, and of gifts. By directly talking to the reader, O. Henry states the crucial issue underlying the story—that is, capitalism leading to cultural shallowness and urban poverty. The story ends with another authorial intrusion by claiming: “... here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house ... of all who give gifts, *these two were the wisest* ... Everywhere *they are wisest. They are the magi*” (10 emphasis mine). The authorial intrusion obviously voices his preference for love over the monetary value inherent in the gifts. However, such an authorial intrusion is “a frame-breaking”, which aims at “construction and deconstruction of illusion” in the story (Waugh, p. 14). This metafictional element is never purely rhetorically oriented, but is subversively directed toward “understanding the

contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice” (Waugh, p. 9). In “The Story of the Magi,” the narrator’s objective description of the protagonists’ predicament and the sharp comment of authorial intrusion launch “*heteroglossia*” in the text; the frame-breaking device actually blames capitalism for people’s exploitation and struggles at the fringes of prosperous cities like New York.

Another example of authorial intrusion can be found in “An Unfinished Story”. It starts and ends with authorial intrusions unrelated to the story of Dulcie situated between. At the beginning, the author talks to the reader about his dream of being an angel in a heavenly casino who is caught by a cop—an angel policeman. The dream statement is suspended because the author tells the reader that “... this irrelevant stuff is taking up space that the story should occupy” (p. 89). Then comes the story about Dulcie, whose tough life and excitement for coming romance are portrayed in detail. But all of a sudden, the narrator’s objective description is disrupted again by direct authorial complaint:

“I give it up. I hear of wonderful bargains in fabrics and of miracles performed with needle and thread; but I am in doubt. *I hold my pen poised ... when I would add to Dulcie’s life some of those joys that belong to woman ...* It is a weary thing to count your pleasure by summers instead of by hours” (91 emphasis mine).

This intrusion displays the author’s sympathy for Dulcie, for those deprived of happiness in the capitalist society. The self-reflexive statement of laying bare the writing process does not target rhetorical goals only. Instead, with the realistic verbal construct broken, capitalism as a societal construct is also interrogated for its validity, its permanence, and its idealization. As may be found in “An Unfinished Story,” after the authorial voice comes Dulcie’s story—mainly about her romance broken by her tough financial situation. However, the denouement of the story again presents another authorial intrusion, in which the dream mentioned at the beginning is taken up again. Here the authorial voice relates the dream-dialogue between him and the cop in heaven, with the cop asking him whether or not he is “one of the men who hired working-girls, and paid ‘em five or six dollars a week to live on” (p. 95). The author’s reply in the dream mentions himself to be “*only* the fellow that set fire to an orphan asylum, and murdered a blind man for his pennies” (95 emphasis mine). Such an ironic tone in the authorial intrusion exposes the hegemonic violence over the exploited in capitalist society, and to accuse it of its essential hypocrisy and oppression.

“Mammon and the Archer” also contains within an authorial voice: “The story should end here. *I wish it would as heartily as you who read it wish it did. But we must go to the bottom of the well for truth*” (46 emphasis mine). After the authorial intrusion comes the unexpected consolidation of money’s capability of purchasing happiness. When the author’s writing process is exposed, the reader launches an active interrogation against both rhetoric and social conventions—the former breaking down the illusion constructed by realistic narrative, the latter castigating the monetary omnipotence embraced by capitalism.

“An Unfinished Christmas Story” is a parodic allusion to the shepherds’ search for baby Jesus. In this short story, the authorial voice keeps intruding in the narrative to lay bare the author’s writing process, and to disclose his comments regarding social realities. In the beginning the authorial voice tries to delineate his Christmas story: “this is to warn you that there is no subterfuge about this story—and you might come upon stockings hung to the mantel and plum puddings and hark! The Chimes! And wealthy misers loosening up and handing over penny whistles to lame newsboys if you read further” (p. 800). However, in the following text, the Christmas story contains neither the typical Christmas decorations nor holiday charities mentioned above; instead, it’s about looking for Paley, an unknown man, for unknown reasons. However, this search is continually interrupted by authorial digressions directly addressed to the reader. Actually, these authorial intrusions elaborate on the consumerism of Christmas, and also illustrate the author’s viewpoints regarding social inequality:

There are some to whom Christmas gives no Christmassy essence. Of course, prosperous people and comfortable people who have homes or flats or rooms with meals, and even people who live in apartment houses with hotel service get something of the Christmas flavor. They give one another presents with the cost mark scratched off ... But, I’ll tell you to what kind of a mortal Christmas seems to be only the day before the twenty-sixth day of December. It’s the chap in the big city earning sixteen dollars a week, with no friends and few acquaintances, who finds himself with only fifty cents in his pocket on Christmas Eve. He can’t accept charity; he can’t borrow; he knows no one who would invite him to dinner ... (p. 802).

In the authorial intrusion/digression, O. Henry considers social inequalities, human isolation and dislocation as the by-products of capitalism; the narrator’s parodic story is often suspended, giving way to the authorial comments instead. The narrator and the author both fight for the right to speak in the text—the former to narrate a typical story of Christmas searching, the latter to break the traditional frame and convey his commentary on the capitalist structure.

4. Conclusion

O. Henry's short stories deliver *heteroglossia* through the two ways proposed by Bakhtin: one is multiform in style, and the other is variform in speech and voice. Specifically speaking, the twist endings, parodic devices, and incorporated genre are adopted to stratify and diversify textual implication. While following a conventional plot trajectory with interrelated coincidences leading to unexpectedness, the writer manipulates "ambiguities, half-statements or barely noticeable details which turn out at the end to have been highly significant" (Ejxenbaum, pp. 21-22). This manipulation of diverse rhetoric forms constructs a fictional world, in which exist the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language. On the other hand, authorial intrusions summon diverse voices into the novelistic discourse, conducting a social satire and presenting concerns over the sufferers of capitalism. The authorial voice intrudes into the realistic descriptions of the stories; narratives become incoherent and indeterminate; so does the discourse with-in and with-out the text.

O. Henry, in his writing, represents the voices of the city (New York) (Note 6). In the short story "The Voice of the City", the narrator asks people of various social strata what the city's voice might be, but gets no answers from any of them. The narrator finds the city, New York, beyond description on account of the urban life in haste and the indifference among its people. Contrary to the narrator's somewhat sarcastic viewpoint, O. Henry, the writer, orchestrates the voices of the city in his short stories. The narrator's descriptions of characters invite concerns for the exploited within the text; the author's self-conscious intrusions or digressions make comments regarding related systems with-out the text. The devices such as twist endings, parodic adaptations, incorporated genre and authorial intrusions all invalidate the fictionality of the verbal construct (text) and the social construct (context). O. Henry thus succeeds in creating a polyphonic, novelistic discourse. The heteroglot voices of the city are performed, inviting interpretations, elaborations, and potential transformations.

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Notes

Note 1. The Italian communist and critic Antonio Gramsci proposes the idea of "hegemony", claiming that a social class with predominant power can make its ideological views so pervasive and persuasive that the subordinate classes accept, even join, their ideological oppression unwittingly (Abrams & Harpham, p. 185).

Note 2. This famous architectural metaphor of "superstructure" resting upon the "base" structure is proposed by Marx, whose preliminary idea is that men's social being determines their consciousness, instead of vice versa (Selden, p. 24).

Note 3. Ibid.

Note 4. The terms are from a well-known statement by Marx: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (qtd. in Selden, p. 23).

Note 5. This term comes from the title of a Mark Twain’s novel title in 1873, and refers to an epoch of “gigantic spree, consuming with headless, vulgar abandon...a wholly materialistic age” (Day, p. 143).

Note 6. Judith Dunford, in *American Heritage Magazine*, even titles O. Henry as “the man who invented Manhattan”.

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