

“MARRIED FOLKS THEY ARE: AND FEW PLEASURES THEY HAVE”:
MARRIAGE SCENES IN O. HENRY’S SHORT STORIES

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“Every house has a drama in it”, O. Henry is reported to have said once (qtd. in Current-Garcia 1965:115). Although most of his stories deal with public life – shops, restaurants, parks – some like the renowned “The Gift of the Magi” and “A Service of Love” depict the life of young married couples in a sentimental light. On the other hand, the images of marriage in stories such as “The Pendulum” strike us as quite somber, whereas, objectively considered, the circumstances in “A Harlem Tragedy” and “Between Rounds” would in modern times be considered reportable cases of domestic violence. This paper intends to discover the narrative strategies that make us question whether O. Henry’s idealistic descriptions of married life are in fact so, and allows us to perceive the voice of William S. Porter the husband beneath that of O. Henry the narrator.

The narrative style of William S. Porter, alias O. Henry, is characterized by the use of an intrusive narrator (Aguilera Linde 2010:583), a penchant for “satire, humor, romance” (Werlock and Werlock 2010:320), and the surprise ending (Hollander 2005:7). In an appreciative essay,¹ Boris Ejxembaum (1968:255-257) studies the story “A Night in New Arabia” (from the collection *Strictly Business*) as the perfect example of O. Henry’s customary use of literary irony and estranging strategies. At the same time, Ejxembaum uses this text to argue that O. Henry relegates love to the background of his stories as a mere initiator of the intrigue because “the stereotype of the love story built on ‘psychological analysis’ revolts him” (1968:257). He cites an excerpt of the story as an illustration of the author’s reticence to describe the process of courtship:

1. Ejxembaum’s article was first published in Russia in 1924, when O. Henry’s literary reputation in the US had already begun to decline under the charge that he “sacrificed everything for entertainment” and did not provide his characters with enough psychological depth (Scofield 2006:116). For the formalist Ejxembaum, this was far from being a critical flaw.

The processes of courtship are personal, and do not belong to general literature. They should be chronicled in detail only in advertisements of iron tonics and in the secret by-laws of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of the Rat Trap. But genteel writing may contain a description of certain stages of its progress without intruding upon the province of the X-ray or of park policemen. (O. Henry 1953:1588)

It is indeed ironic that the narrator should make this claim in a story that devotes its core to the description of the courting of a millionaire's daughter by a humble grocery man. Yet it may not be coincidental that such a sentimental rags-to-riches tale – obviously, the poor suitor is discovered to be the heir to a fortune and ends up marrying the girl – serves at the same time as a paradigmatic example of O. Henry's "incessant ironic play and underscoring of devices" (Ejxembaum 1968:256).

Despite Ejxembaum's claim, we can find that many of O. Henry's stories feature a love relationship on the foreground. Some of them deal with the stages previous to marriage – such as the aforementioned "A night in New Arabia" or "The trimmed lamp", of the eponymous collection – or with couples that have just walked down the aisle, like those in "Sisters of the golden circle" or "The romance of a busy broker" in *The Four Million*. Others even mock the whole institution directly – take for instance "The exact science of matrimony" (in *The Gentle Grafter*). There are, nevertheless, only a few stories that pay attention to what happens after marriage is attained. It is in those representations of domestic life where we can most clearly trace the existence of a *marriage*, as it were, between O. Henry's use of metanarrative intrusions and his treatment of romantic relationships, especially those which reach the state of matrimony. For, although the impression after the first reading of rosy stories like "The gift of the magi" and "A service of love" may be that their writer should be a fervent advocate of marriage, the narrative strategies constantly undermine the optimism of these tales.

"The Gift of the Magi", O. Henry's most famous story, and "A Service of Love" (both collected in *The Four Million* (1906)) share the same formula: a sacrificial act epitomizes the generosity and the overcoming of difficulties of two young couples in their first months of marriage. Their plot is modeled into what Karen C. Blansfield denominates a "cross-purposes" pattern (qtd. in Bloom 1999:27): a dilemma causes two characters to act along independent paths, unaware of each other's efforts; eventually they discover that their actions have been working against, or at cross-purposes to, the other's actions. In "Gift"² the protagonists sell their most precious possessions in order to buy each other Christmas gifts; only too late will Jim Dillingham discover that his wife Della won't be able to use the set of combs he got her, because she has already sold her hair to buy him a chain for his watch – the very watch he has already sold to buy

2. For future references and simplicity's sake, I will refer to the stories using the following abbreviations: "Gift" ("The Gift of the Magi"), "Service" ("A Service of Love"), "Pendulum" ("The Pendulum"), "Tragedy" ("A Harlem Tragedy"), and "Rounds" ("Between Rounds").

the combs. In “Service”, it is their dream that the protagonists sacrifice for each other, secretly dropping their art and music lessons and working in menial jobs to provide for the household and prevent their partner from having to drop their own lessons. The couples are not only alike in altruism and marital status: the two perky wives are named the same – Delia and the derivation Della – whereas the husbands also share very common similar names, Jim and Joe. This repetition of the names (Jim and Delia reappear in other stories about – eventually happy – married couples like those of “Dougherty’s Eye-Opener” in *The Voice of the City*) is the first hint so as to convert these protagonists into type-characters whose early marital experiences seem more intentionally symbolic than real. Moreover, it is quite significant that the Greek name “Delia” links these wives to Zeus’s daughter Artemis, born in the isle of Delos and represented as the virgin hunter (Rose 1973:116). This inherent opposition between their married condition and the vow of chastity makes O. Henry’s wives into oxymoronic archetypes, and already announces the fact that his scarce stories about domestic affairs really signify “a universal yearning for an unattainable ideal” (Current-Garcia 1965:116).

We can find in “Service” an enumeration of those “ideal” elements of domesticity that make these couples enjoy their (still) happy marital life:

But the best, in my opinion, was the home life in the little flat – the ardent, voluble chats after the day’s study; the cozy dinners and fresh, light breakfasts; the interchange of ambitions – ambitions interwoven each with the other’s or else inconsiderable – the mutual help and inspiration; and – overlook my artlessness – stuffed olives and cheese sandwiches at 11 p.m. (O. Henry 1953:25)

Although the enumeration takes the disguise of a sincere commentary on the narrator’s part, its closing metanarrative excuse (“overlook my artlessness”) and contrasting prosaic element (“stuffed olives and cheese sandwiches at 11 P.M.”) – both typically O. Henryesque features – present us with the ironic, detached position O. Henry holds in his stories. The narrator’s remarks in the course of the narration of “Gift” and “Service” insert a note of skepticism that is out of tune with the idealism he himself describes. For example, when introducing the Dillinghams’ difficult financial situation, the narrator counterbalances all hardships with the fact that:

Whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called “Jim” and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good. (*ibid.*:7)

The final, unnecessary aside openly questions the belief that such immaterial reward is enough to compensate for Jim’s preoccupation about money. This undermining of sentimentality is stressed shortly thereafter: “Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are” (*ibid.*:8). This concise statement and its change of verb tense have two effects: first, to affirm that the situation of the characters is a habitual one and so generalize their story as an

example; and secondly, to diminish the importance of such trouble and undervalue the distress it entails for the characters. A much clearer example appears in “Service”, where the narrator himself recognizes his sarcastic vein: “They were mighty happy as long as their money lasted. So is every – but I will not be cynical” (*ibid.*:25). Once and again, O. Henry points at the existence of a double discourse that simultaneously builds up and dismantles the reader’s suspension of disbelief.

This becomes most clear by means of the characteristic “underscoring of devices” mentioned above by Ejxembaum (1968:256). Intermingled with the narration are remarks that call our attention towards its literary conventions and produce a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*: “the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim’s present” (O. Henry 1953:8); “Joe and Delia became enamored one of the other, or each of the other, as you please” (*ibid.*:24). A number of interruptions interfere with the story in progress and seek to engage the reader in the same detached perspective that the narrator displays, unfolding a “literary conversation, [and] turning the story into a feuilleton” (Ejxembaum 1968:255). “He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction,” bids the narrator in “Gift” (O. Henry 1953:10). In “Service”, Delia’s relatives help her follow her dream “to go ‘North’ and ‘finish’. They could not see her f– , but that is our story”, the narrator concludes (*ibid.*:24). That the omission of the “f–“ word should be a circumvention of a proleptic allusion to Delia’s eventual *failure* we really cannot tell, but the inverted commas that qualify her objectives cast a serious doubt on the success of the plan.

These two idealistic stories share a didactic tone that makes them seem a parable instead of an account of actual facts. “Service” overtly exposes its utilitarian function at the very beginning: the narrator sets off from a “premise” that will end up being refuted after the narration concludes, so that the story is a mere excuse to show that “the premise is incorrect” (*ibid.*:24). Hence the repetition of that premise throughout the text, in the form of the motto: “When one loves one’s Art no service seems to hard” (*ibid.*:24,25,26,28). Furthermore, the narrator compares the purpose of his work with “a feat in story-telling somewhat older than the great wall of China”, which links it with the fable and the tale rather than with the naturalist conventions of 19th century literature. Although more subtle at its start, “Gift” also includes the narrator’s instructive asides to the reader, which again present the story as an example to generalize: “She [...] went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends – a mammoth task” (*ibid.*:9). The story’s didactic purpose is heralded by a number of such intrusions in the text:

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. (*ibid.*:10)

In fact, O. Henry expands the narration beyond his typical surprise denouement – Jim’s last remark: “I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on” (*ibid.*:11) – and includes an additional moral in the last paragraph that renders the preceding story a constructive legend to substitute an older one:

The magi, as you know, were wise men – wonderfully wise men – who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. [...] And 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. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi. (*ibid.*)

Yet the doubt remains whether we as readers should *really* follow Della and Jim’s example in this “*uneventful* chronicle of two *foolish* children in a flat who most *unwisely* sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house”. Such an array of negative terms comes straight from the narrative “I” whereas the seemingly uplifting finale that hails the protagonists as present-day magi is introduced by an impersonal “let it be said”. Also, the patronizing appellation “foolish children in a flat” reflects a belief on their possessing an innocence and ignorance that will be lost with the passing of time, just like that first ideal state in which matrimony begins will hopelessly crumble later on due to routine and economic problems.

THE C(O)URSE OF DOMESTICITY

The couples in the stories “The Pendulum” and “A Harlem Tragedy” (both in *The Trimmed Lamp* (1907)) represent that later stage in marital life, when routine has already made its appearance and little excitement is expected in the daily cohabitation after “one year” (O. Henry 1953:1437) or “two years of matrimony” (*ibid.*:1385), respectively. Although their main narrative voice is again that of the omniscient narrator, these stories offer complementary points of view: it is the husband’s reflections what we discover in “Pendulum”, whereas “Tragedy” shows us the wife’s perspective. In both examples, however, the underlying problems seem to be the same: the lack of show of affection and the monotony that progressively pervades married life. The idyllic view of home life, those chats, dinners and mutual support and communication we encountered in “Gift” and “Service” – all have been drowned in the current of routine.

“The Pendulum”, a re-elaboration of the earlier “Round the Circle”,³ describes the inner process of realization that John Perkins suffers when facing a

3. Although published in the posthumous collection *Waifs and Strays* (1917), this story belongs to O. Henry’s earliest writings (Current-Garcia 1965:43).

little alteration in his routine: the unexpected absence of his wife Katy makes him feel “as if the very hand of death had pointed a finger at his secure and uneventful home” (*ibid.*:1385). Since he “was not accustomed to analyzing his emotions”, this is the first time he becomes aware of his need for Katy and acknowledges all the neglect he has inflicted on her:

Off every night playing pool and bumming with the boys instead of staying home with her. The poor girl here alone with nothing to amuse her, and me acting that way! John Perkins, you’re the worst kind of a shine. (*ibid.*:1386)

Despite John’s determination to make it up to her and make things different, the omniscient narrator deals with this process of remorse and repentance in a very cynical way, so that his comments prevent the reader from believing in the success of the protagonist’s contrite conversion. First, there is an excessive repetition of the protagonist’s full name throughout the story (“John Perkins” appears thirteen times) instead of only his first name or the pronoun “he”. That reiteration suggests an estrangement from the character on the part of the narrative voice that will be reinforced by its linguistic choices when presenting Perkins’s thoughts. The narrator does not trust the supposedly repentant husband, nicknaming him satirical epithets like “Perkins the bereft” and “Perkins, the remorseful” (*ibid.*:1386). What is more, when John compares himself with “a certain man named Adam”, this biblical reference implies that, just like Adam was “bounced from the orchard” as a result of Eve’s temptation (*ibid.*), John considers himself *punished* with the loss of his stability on account of his wife, which in fact does not seem a very sorrowful reflection but an incriminating one.

In addition, the narrator’s incredulous remark “Tears: – yes, tears –”, and the description of Perkins’s feelings in terms that remind of a child’s tantrum (“The thing that was his, lightly held and half scorned, had been taken away from him, and he wanted it” (*ibid.*)) are enough to make the careful reader realize that there is no chance of Perkins really varying his attitude, so that the surprise ending is not very surprising indeed. The repetition of exactly the same habitual dialogue between husband and wife – “Now, where are you going, I’d like to know, John Perkins?” [...] ‘Thought I’d drop up to McCloskey’s [...] and play a game or two of pool with the fellows” (*ibid.*:1384,1387) – signals their return to the initial position after the oscillation of the pendulum, and invalidates any hope of a change for the better. Unlike the metanarrative comments in “Gift” and “Service”, the narrator in “Pendulum” does not call into question the actuality of the events, as the irony here centers not on the story in its entirety but on the remorseful attitude of the protagonist, which is eventually discovered to be a sham.

“A Harlem Tragedy” presents a similar situation but this time from the wife’s point of view. Mrs. Maggie Fink feels so ignored by her husband that she even envies the bruises her neighbor Mame flaunts as a result of her conjugal brawls. Notwithstanding the thin line that prevents this story from being an apology of

domestic violence,⁴ we can understand Maggie's feelings better if we observe the emphasis on words related to the concept of *showing* throughout the text. Right from the beginning, we find that Mame, "with the air of Cordelia exhibiting her jewels", turns "for her friend Mrs. Fink to see" her bruises, and Maggie, "concealing her envy", eventually acknowledges that "she could not put on airs with Mame" (*ibid.*:1437). If Mame's contusion "shows [your husband] thinks something of you" (*ibid.*) – however outrageous this sounds nowadays –, what Maggie feels lacking is that (or any other) evidence of her husband's feelings. Her tragedy, therefore, is the loss of those "voluble chats" and "the interchange of ambitions" that characterized the early stage of marriage. She needs her husband, who "reposed in the state of matrimony like a lump of unblended suet in a pudding", to "prove his manhood, his prerogative and his interest in conjugal affairs ... just to show that he care[s] – just to show that he care[s]!" (*ibid.*:1440).

O. Henry's choice of names in "Tragedy" is again not capricious. Though different in spelling, it is impossible to ignore the similarity between the name of the (apparently) contented yet abused wife, Mame, and the verb "to maim". Also fitting is the surname Fink because the colloquial meaning of that word, "strikebreaker" ("Fink"), perfectly defines Maggie's position in the story, taking the reins in order to awaken her husband from the marital stoppage in which he lives. In order to do so, she starts a quarrel over the dirty clothes in the hope of rousing his temper but, as "she feared that he would not strike" anyway (*ibid.*:1440), she strikes him first. Nevertheless, Maggie's provocation to break her husband's indolence does not work as intended: rather than returning the blow, Mr. Fink sheepishly starts to wash the laundry himself. This unexpected reaction does not offer Maggie the kind of demonstration she needed, especially to show it off to her chum – "For God's sake don't open that door, Mame [...] and don't ever tell nobody", the humiliated wife bids her neighbor (*ibid.*:1441).

The narration in "Tragedy" acquires a different tone from that of "Pendulum". Instead of using irony and estrangement, it dwells on Maggie's feelings more directly by means of dialogue, and more profoundly through free indirect speech, which reproduces rhetorical questions and exclamations on the protagonist's part without discrediting the sincerity of her feelings. Her jealousy and envious admiration, and obviously her despair when contemplating her "chair-warmer" husband (*ibid.*:1438), outdo John Perkin's bathos. Besides a brief metanarrative comment and a short invective ("Arise, some new Dante, and sing me the befitting corner of perdition for the man who sitteth in the house in his stocking feet"), the narrator's voice does not interfere so directly (*ibid.*:1439). The use of metaphor is accentuated, however, which allows for a figurative reading without presenting the story as a plain allegorization like "Gift".⁵ The master metaphor that "Tragedy" introduces is the boxing metaphor:

4. Serve it to partially exonerate O. Henry the fact that his stories "are marked with the manners of the decade in which they appeared" (Hansen 1953:ix).

5. See for instance the paragraph that begins "Mrs. Fink's ship of dreams was becalmed" (O. Henry 1953:1439).

“she was ready to throw up the sponge, tired out, without a scratch to show for all those tame rounds with her sparring partner” (*ibid.*:1439).⁶ The idea of married life as a cyclic repetition of habit, as a series of tedious rounds which each partner endures, was already present in “Pendulum” – where John’s feelings are “lulled unto unconsciousness by the dull round of domesticity” (*ibid.*:1386) – and will find its utmost example in the story “Between Rounds”, as we will see. If “O. Henry [was] profoundly interested in the possibilities of relapse” (Smith 1916:208), marriage offered him the perfect context for experimentation.

It must be first noted that O. Henry mostly puts the blame for this monotony and need for communication on the masculine member of the couples, suggesting that the women’s fate could be bettered by “changed attitudes in their fathers, lovers or husbands” (Scofield 2002:118). This does not mean that the wives are not to be held a bit responsible too: notice, for example, that Katy shares the habitual schedule and always repeats the same questions. Nonetheless, it is the husbands who are hopelessly “permeated with the curse of domesticity” (O. Henry 1953:1439), whereas the wives are those who (though unsuccessfully) provoke a rupture with the quotidian. John Perkins and Martin Fink are described similarly as individuals unable to express their feelings, drifting passively like “the man who had caught the streetcar” (*ibid.*:1439). Two suggestive animal metaphors underpin this idea: John is a “citizen sheep” following the flow and feeling lost when something disturbs the expected path (*ibid.*); Mart is “the anaconda that has swallowed its prey”, and as such he spends his time at home just eating and resting between meals, amid the “agreeable smell of breakfast dishes departed and dinner ones to come” (*ibid.*:1439-1440). Shared meals, once one of the main elements that make up matrimonial life, turn now into a symbol of the overall decay of the relationships. The detailed description that prophesizes the exact menu that is to be expected every evening at the Perkins’, as well as the indifference with which Mart Fink gulps down the supper that Maggie had striven over, prove that monotony has also affected this aspect of cohabitation. Two new props appear to characterize these husbands: the socks and the newspaper. Socks and “stockinged feet” help to connect husbands transversally by means of metonymic transposition: be it “silk, yarn, cotton, lisle thread or woollen”, “stockinged” husbands are to be endured by wives of every social condition (*ibid.*:1439). The newspaper is the means of just contemplating life without taking active part in it, an escape and refuge to isolate oneself while at home. The different masculine roles that Scofield mentions are united via this symbol as equally inoperative: in the story “The Guilty Party” (also in *The Trimmed Lamp*), it is an indifferent newspaper-reading father that neglects his daughter, who will end up committing murder and suicide as a result of the insufficient attention received as a child.

6. Besides this one, we find other references to boxing at other points in the story: at the beginning, Maggie says that her husband does not use her as a “Steve O’Donnell”, who was an Australian boxer (“Steve”), and at the end Mr. Cassidy wonders whether he should go up and be the “sponge holder” in the domestic conflict of the Finks (O. Henry 1953:1437,1441).

The final stage which the couples in “Pendulum” and “Tragedy” are heading to can be discovered in the story “Between Rounds” (*The Four Million*). The couple in “Rounds” has been married for the longest time (six years at least) and displays all the features of the previous stories at their peak: the monotony, the loss of those special moments during meals – Mrs. McCaskey complains about the “victuals cold” and her husband’s main concern is that she stops “insult[ing] his appetite” and “see[s] to the food” (O. Henry 1953:15-16) –, the lack of communication (beyond the mere exchange of reproaches and insults). Hence Mr. McCaskey’s surprise when receiving “oral substitutes for kitchenware” upon his arrival at home (*ibid.*:15). In “Rounds” meals and quarrelling are fused into a tedious custom that follows a strict sequence: the McCaskeys throw food and kitchenware at each other like items on a *table d’hôte*, entrée first, then coffee and even a flatiron as a cordial of sorts (*ibid.*:16).

Like “Pendulum”, “Rounds” presents a rather cryptic title – clearer now considering the boxing metaphor – and depicts a sudden break in matrimonial routine that interrupts a recursive structure. Both stories develop in a circular way around a fortuitous incident that causes the protagonists to momentarily adopt a different point of view and reflect about their situation. The disappearance of little Mike, their landlady’s son, brings about the McCaskeys’ armistice, since “no calamity so touches the common heart of humanity as does the straying of a little child” (*ibid.*:17). The reflection on their never-had child allows them a moment of closeness and mutual apology: “But there never was any children for us. Sometimes I’ve been ugly and hard with ye, Judy. Forget it”, concludes Jawn (*ibid.*:18). However, the story closes with a repeated sentence to signal the return to the accustomed routine: just like “Mrs. McCaskey arose heavily and went to the stove” to start the fight, she later “arose heavily and went to the dish closet” at the end of the story too (*ibid.*:16,19).

The narrator’s attitude, however, has changed greatly from that in the idealist stories and even from that in “Pendulum” and “Tragedy”. There is only one digression added to the narrative plot but it does not really deal with its topic but its setting (“Silent, grim, colossal, the big city has ever stood against its revilers”, *ibid.*:17). The culinary metaphors used during the “kitchenware battle” are not actually loaded with any kind of disapproving significance, but rather they diminish the gravity of the real confrontation. In addition, we get to know the characters mainly through direct reproduction of their dialogue, so that the narrator acts here as a mere onlooker of the events taking place at Mrs. Murphy’s boarding-house, just like the boarders themselves witness the fuss produced by the short disappearing of little Mike, or the McCaskeys contemplate the whole scene through their window. Without the typical comments that usually make O. Henry’s narrative voice ubiquitous, this comparatively neutral way of writing creates a more straightforward impression of reality, and for the first time it seems that the narrator has nothing to oppose, nothing to be cynical about. O. Henry’s voice does not frame the narrative with moralistic epigrams anymore, yet still may be heard through a spokesman that briefly appears both at the beginning and at the end of the story: Policeman Cleary, who overhearing the

McCaskeys' skirmish exclaims with indifference: "Married folks they are; and few pleasures they have" (*ibid.*:16).

CONCLUSION

In Alphonso Smith's laudatory biography of Porter, the circumstances of the author's first marriage are described as if they were part of the plot of one of his romantic stories: the elopement of the lovers, the parental opposition on her side, a secret wedding by a sympathetic minister (Smith 1916:121). "O. Henry found in his married life not only happiness but the incentive to effort that he had sorely lacked", Smith affirms (*ibid.*:122). Quite a differing perspective from Eugene Current-Garcia's account, which summarizes Porter's first marriage as "ten years of an increasingly tortured married life", and his second attempt as, "from almost any viewpoint [...] doomed to failure" due to the difficulty of both members of the couple "to readjust to each other's fixed habits" (1965:32,45).

In O. Henry's stories that deal with married couples, we find a similar divergence: some stories portray inexperienced yet happy couples, some reveal the ennui of long-term married life. However, analyzing O. Henry's narrative strategies in these texts allows us to discern the same ideological standpoint in both groups. On the one hand, the ironic gloss in the romantic stories casts a doubt on the credibility of their factuality and turns them into mere fables. On the other, we discover that the darker the depiction of marriage, the fewer intrusions and ironical interruptions on the narrator's part, so that the more pessimistic stories move closer to realist depiction. In both groups, we can perceive O. Henry's disillusioned vision of married life pervading the texts.

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