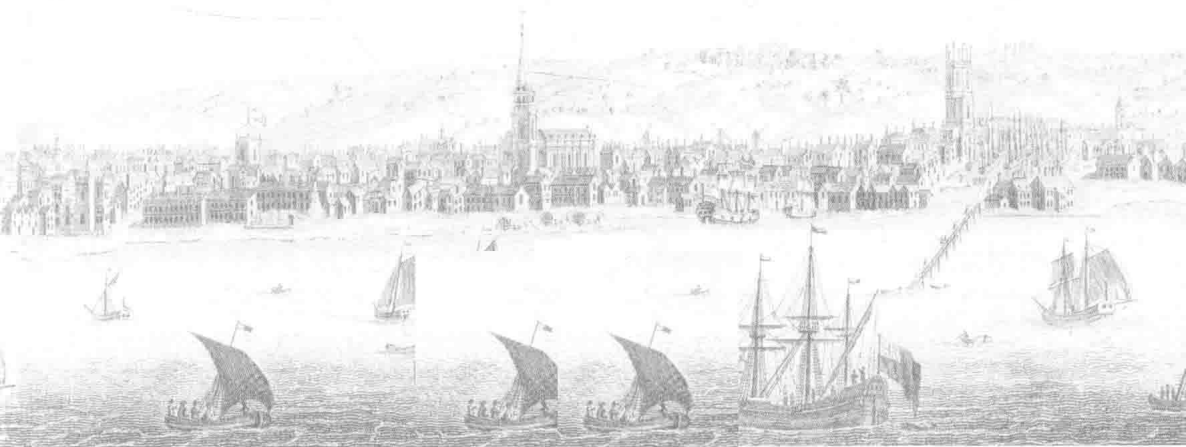


汤瑶 著

Transgression, the Other and Justice:
A Study on the Narrative Art of E. L. Doctorow



越界、他者与正义：
E. L. 多克托罗叙事艺术研究



厦门大学出版社 国家一级出版社
XIAMEN UNIVERSITY PRESS 全国百佳图书出版单位

前言

E. L. 多克托罗是一位在美国当代文坛有着举足轻重地位的犹太裔美国作家。他因在作品中勇于革新，敢于突破社会准则、美学分类等各种传统界限而被誉为具有“越界精神”。很多评论家认为多克托罗属于后现代主义风格小说家，他们普遍关注到多克托罗将历史事实与文学虚构相结合、将通俗艺术形式引入文学创作的越界特征，却很少有人因此结合他的越界创作手法来研究多克托罗作品中的他者问题。

本书选取多克托罗的八部小说作为研究对象，以福柯、沃弗雷等人的越界理论、列维纳斯的他者伦理以及巴赫金的对话研究作为理论依据，通过对多克托罗作品主题以及叙事上所反映的越界性进行系统详细的研究，旨在探索多克托罗文学创作主张所体现的伦理关注，尤其是对他者和正义的关注。每一章节将分别研究多克托罗两部小说在不同方面的越界特征。

在《鱼鹰湖》《比利·巴斯格特》中，多克托罗追溯了主人公乔和比利从少年到成年时期的成长历程，强调他者在主人公寻求自我身份过程中发挥的不可替代作用。作为未来的艺术家，乔和比利成了多克托罗的代言人，他们明白了在某种程度上，写作就是建构身份，写作是基于自我和他者的不断对话，身份也是在这种不断对话中逐渐形成的，这体现了一种身份上的越界。

在《但以理书》《供水系统》中，多克托罗塑造了两位充满质疑精神的主人公叙事者但以理和麦基尔文。出于对社会伦理系统“非此即彼”模式的不满，他们创作出了另外一种叙事，打破了社会单一规范和价值观的垄断。他们的书写对“善与恶”“正义与非正义”“真与假”等二元对立的伦理范式的合理性提出了挑战，构成了伦理上的越界。在这两部小说中，多克托罗通过审视并质疑道德界限建立的普遍性基础，展现了道德判断的模糊性、相对性，以及它们与政治权力的关联。

在《上帝之城》《大进军》中，多克托罗将目光聚焦于社会话语的等级结构。他尤其批判了坚持自我绝对权威地位、拒绝他者声音的高位话语（宗教话语、官方历史）。在《上帝之城》中，他质疑了基督教经典《圣经》以及奥古斯丁同名作《上帝之城》坚称真理的合理性。多克托罗通过主人公佩姆和艾弗瑞特的追寻历程表明，作为宏观叙事的宗教话语根本无法解释二十世纪面临的重大问题，而且不论是在宗教或世俗领域，他们都无法维持自身的权威。《大进军》叙事则解构了官方历史的客观真实性。在这两部作品中，多克托罗实际上创作了一种碎片式、自省、具有多重叙事声音的叙事，采用边缘视角，提供了不同意见，构成了小叙事（或者称位话语），以抵制高位话语的垄断。可以说，多克托罗的叙事是一种话语上的越界。

《拉格泰姆时代》《欢迎来到艰难时世》两部小说充分体现了多克托罗在体裁和风格上的越界。在《拉格泰姆时代》中，多克托罗将拉格泰姆音乐、电影、新闻报道等流行文化元素引入小说创作，用它们来象征特定历史时期，也使这部小说的叙事结构充满了技术特征。在《欢迎来到艰难时世》中，多克托罗巧妙地融入西部体裁——一种根植于廉价小说、电影、电视剧以及商业广告等流行文化的独特美国体裁。严肃文学创作与流行文化相结合，增加了多克托罗作品的可读性，但并没有损害他的艺术成就。此外，通过在高雅与低俗之间的越界，多克托罗拷问了那些将文化分为三六九等、精英与大众的各种标准与品位，从而将公众注意力导向那些在社会话语中居于从属地位的亚文化。

总体而言，多克托罗的作品关注叙事和表征，并且强调创作过程中越界的重要性。因此，他的小说创作艺术可以被称为越界的艺术。在多克托罗笔下，越界是作为一种多变、不可控、颠覆性的力量存在的。它让作家可以用质疑的眼光来看待贯穿于社会话语和知识系统各个方面的西方形而上学中的本体论思维和独白式结构，并拷问这些系统背后权力操作的合理性。在多克托罗看来，作家在艺术创作中的越界行为源自于他对他的关注。这里的“他者”，是指那些社会上、话语体系中或文学系统里通常被忽视、被边缘化的对象。多克托罗希望，可以通过叙事的越界力量，给这些他者带来公平与正义。

Table of Contents

Introduction / 1

1. E. L. Doctorow's Life and Literary Career / 1
2. Critical Responses to Doctorow / 4
3. Theoretical Framework and Structure of the Book / 17

Chapter One Identity and Narrative: Transgression of A Unitary Self / 24

1. Transgression and Identity / 26
2. The Unfixed Nature of Identity in *Billy Bathgate* and *Loon Lake* / 27
3. The Constant Transgression of the Self to Reach the Other / 36
4. A Narrative of Multiple Voices / 47

Chapter Two Beyond Good and Evil: Transgression of Ethical Codes / 53

1. Ethical Boundaries in Question / 53
2. Justice and Truth on Trial: *The Book of Daniel* / 55
3. Evil and Otherness in *The Waterworks* / 73

Chapter Three From "High" to "Low": Transgression of Discursive Hierarchy / 90

1. The Hierarchical Structure in Social Discourse / 90
2. Failed "Sacred Text" in *City of God* / 93
3. Recomposed History in *The March* / 108

Chapter Four The Dialogic Voice: Transgression of Genres / 127

1. "The Great Divide" and Postmodern Transgression / 127
2. *Ragtime* and Popular Culture / 132
3. Western Genre in *Welcome to Hard Times* / 152

Conclusion / 167

Works Cited / 172

Acknowledgements / 185

Introduction

1. E. L. Doctorow's Life and Literary Career

On July 21, 2015, the American writer E. L. Doctorow passed away in New York at the age of 84. In response to this news, major media like *Time*, *New York Times* and *The Atlantic* all published articles in memory of him. Bruce Weber of *New York Times Book Reviews* wrote a long essay subtitled as “Literary Time Traveler Stirred Past Into Fiction”, proclaiming Doctorow’s achievement as a stylist and historical revisionist, based on an elaborate introduction to his writing career and literary works. Best known for such works as *Ragtime*, *The Book of Daniel* and *Billy Bathgate*, Doctorow was, as *Times*’ David Ulin points out, “perhaps the most important American novelist of his generation. More than Philip Roth or John Updike, more even than Norman Mailer, Doctorow created fiction that existed at the intersection of American myth and hypocrisy”^①. Even Barack Obama, the former American president, acknowledged Doctorow’s profound influence on his official POTUS twitter: “E. L. Doctorow was one of America’s greatest novelists. His books taught me much, and he will be missed.”^②

Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, the second child of David Richard Doctorow and Rose Levine Doctorow, was born in Bronx (New York) in 1931. He belonged to the third generation of this American immigrant family of Russian Jewish origin. The old Doctorow was the owner of a small music shop and Rose Doctorow, like other women in that time, was a housewife. During the Depression, the father failed in his business and he had to work as a salesman to keep the family fed. This low-middle family milieu made young Doctorow taste the bitterness of life at an earlier age; that’s maybe why most of his novels focused on characters from underprivileged social background, such as the homeless, the drunkard, orphaned youths, hapless

① From online *Los Angeles Times*, titled “Remembering E.L. Doctorow, great American mythologist”. <http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-el-doctorow-appreciation-20150721-story.html>.

② From online *New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/22/books/el-doctorow-author-of-historical-fiction-dies-at-84.html?_r=0.

immigrants, and working-class people, etc. The influences of family members on him were multifaceted. In his essay collection *Reporting the Universe*, Doctorow reminisced his family as a location of ideological tension. As he said, generations of men like his grandfather and father were liberal humanists and socialists. The women in the family, however, were pious followers of Jewish scriptures and rituals. The miraculous integration of socialism and Judaism made young Doctorow believe that the incompatible ideas could flow into one small world. It suffices to say that the ideological jumbling of his family endowed him with the spirit of freedom and creativity, which paves the way for his future career as a man of letters.

After graduating from Bronx High School of Science in 1948, Doctorow went to Kenyon College in Ohio with the expectation to study with the famous poet and essayist John Crowe Ransom. At that time of American history, it was McCarthyism that began to emerge and later permeated the American politics and society, with suspicious atomic spies arrested, writers interrogated and censored, and people living in white terror. In the chapter “Kenyon” from *Reporting the Universe*, Doctorow recalled his experiences on the campus where the atmosphere was quite idyllic. Despite the cruel external environment, the students of Kenyon College were provided with courses like “Roman and Ancient Greek history” and educated in the stronghold of the New Criticism. In relation to the silence of the academia on the social turmoil, Doctorow commented that it is the “nature of a prevailing culture not to appeal ideologically, especially to its executors” (Doctorow, 2003: 48). As a Jewish American, the sensitivity to justice and a highlight of individual’s responsibility for the whole community has always been with Doctorow. The Jewish heritage led to his contemplation on E. M. Forster’s well-known saying “Only connect”^①, a great inspiration for his thinking at that time. Majoring in philosophy in the undergraduate years, Doctorow developed the metaphysics of connection, by which he intended to connect everything, from the top to the bottom, from the outside to the inside, with the insight of a storyteller rather than a God-believer.

After his graduation from college, Doctorow undertook a variety of jobs. He went to the military for a few years. After that, he worked as a script reader and later as an editor. These jobs on language and words taught him how to structure a plot, and how to absorb elements of popular culture into serious literary creation to make them well received by the general market. The experiences of reading film

① “Only connect” is a sentence from E. M. Forster’s *Howards Ends* (1910) and one of his lasting thematic concerns in his works. Doctorow refers to this idea of Forster in his essay collection *Reporting the Universe*.

scripts and writing comments also aroused his desire to create stories of his own. He talked to himself that all was about lies and he could lie better than these people (the playwrights). In 1969, he left the publishing industry where he already worked as a senior editor, and became a professional writer as well as a faculty member in a number of universities.

Doctorow's writing career started off in the early 1960s. *Welcome to Hard Times* (briefly as *Welcome*), his first novel in 1960, told an unconventional story of western town named "Hard Times", a dark version of the American frontier myth. In the following years, Doctorow published a series of gradually mature works. It is noteworthy that *The Book of Daniel* (1971) (briefly as *Daniel*), an effort to reexamine the Rosenberg Case that happened in McCarthy era of 1950s, was generally considered to be Doctorow's most compelling work. Four years after *Daniel*, Doctorow created *Ragtime*, an immediate and huge success, "greeted by both popular and critical acclaim" and named by the Modern Library Editorial Board one of the 100 best novels of the 20th century (Rogers, 1975: 134). *Loon Lake* (1980), *World's Fair* (1985), *Billy Bathgate* (1989), the three novels sequentially appearing in the 1980s, were all set in the depression era of the 1930s, a period which fascinated the author greatly, with its poverty, corruption and unprecedented scale of socialist movements. In 1984, Doctorow published *Lives of the Poets*, a story collection consisting of six short stories and a novella, a new attempt for the writer both in theme and genre. In this work, Doctorow addressed the fundamental issues of the nature of writing and the function of writers. *Waterworks*, a novel in 1994, unraveled a Hawthornian story of crime and evil, committed by the corporation of industrialists and a cruel scientist. Set in the postbellum New York, it exposed the bleak side of American society presumably stigmatized by the prosperity and progress at the end of the 19th century.

Entering the new century, Doctorow continued to explore new territories, and his achievements gained more widespread attention than ever from the international society. In his millennium work *City of God*, he examined many essential issues of the twentieth century, such as religion, language, ethics, narrative, etc. His intention, with deliberate use of different voices and genres, was not to generate the linear history of the whole century, but to pose question to the established faiths and institutions. In 2005, Doctorow returned to the subject of history in *The March*. Named after the famous event in American history, *The March* was Doctorow's attempt to reconstruct the famous March of the Union Army led by William T. Sherman from Atlanta to Savannah toward the end of the Civil War. The work

following *The March was Homer & Langley*, Doctorow's adaptation of the life stories of the Collyer brothers, a sensational piece of news widely covered in the newspapers. The writer's most recent book was *Andrew's Brain*, a novel set in the 9/11 event and centered around a mentally troubled neurologist Andrew, through which Doctorow explored the world of mind, trauma, and the blurred boundary of illusion and reality in a media society.

Till his death in 2015, Doctorow had published twelve novels, three volumes of short fiction, a stage drama and three collections of essays. His literary achievements won him popular success as well as numerous academic awards, among which are National Book Critics Circle Award (1975, 1990 and 2005), National Book Award (1986), PEN/Faulkner Award (1990 and 2006), National Humanities Medal (1998), Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters (2013), etc. Some of his works had been adapted for screens and turned into films and musical plays, causing great sensation among the public. Many well-known contemporary writers such as John Updike, Carol Joyce Oates, Don DeLillo admitted the enormous influence of Doctorow's works on American literature. In terms of theme, Doctorow's works touched upon the very details of American scenery and life. He inherited the great tradition of historical romance of Walter Scott and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Most of his novels were historical fiction kindled with bold fabrication, which covered a wide range of historical period from the middle 19th century to the early 21st century. Different from some of his contemporary counterparts who turned their eyes to the private inner world for inspiration, Doctorow always had a strong sense of responsibility toward writing, investing his work with concern for social problems. In terms of form, Doctorow was a bold experimenter. He was never bored of introducing new elements into his novels, from shifts in perspective and voice, to the breaking of chronology, to cinematic montage and collage, to the blurring boundary of fiction and reality. In this sense, he was simultaneously a conscientiously realist writer as well as a postmodernist stylist. It was success on both fronts that elevated Doctorow to the ranks of the most entertaining and most important writers in the American literary scenery.

2. Critical Responses to Doctorow

Generally speaking, Doctorowian criticism did not prosper until the late 1970s when poststructuralism came to the public view and gained momentum. Entering the 1980s, Narratology and cultural criticism appeared in the view of Doctorowian

criticism while the poststructural and deconstructive perspectives remained on the way. Since then, reviews, essays, and monographs on Doctorow's works have become increasingly various and innovative on perspective and methodology. During that period, a series of influential critics appeared with their monographs on and interviews with Doctorow, such as Harold Bloom, Paul Levin, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Carol C. Harter and James R. Thompson, and John G. Parks, to name just a few. Their works included systematic analysis of Doctorow's major works from *Welcome to The Waterworks*. The fact is no matter how divergent critical perspectives seemed to be, critics' treatments of Doctorow's works generally fell into two categories—the realistic and the postmodernist. The former category tended to approach the author from his involvement with politics, history, philosophy and other aspects, and saw his works as the mimetic mode of the outside world; the latter based its analysis on the assumption that literature cannot reflect any extratextual presence, and that its existence only pointed out the fictionality of texts and our illusory dream of representation.

The first category starts with Doctorow's concern with politics. Some of the conservative critics such as Hilton Kramer, Perl Bell and Joseph Epstein considered Doctorow a representative writer of leftist ideas. They critiqued his novels as propaganda of political views, grotesque distortions of facts and truth. Attacking the initial reviewers of *Ragtime* of their blindness to the novel's ambitious political objective, Hilton Kramer, for instance, thought it "distort[ed] the actual materials of history with a fierce ideological arrogance" (Kramer 1975: 79). However, Harter and Thompson, devoting a monograph to Doctorow, acclaimed Doctorow's social commitment precious and unique, "a rare phenomenon" in the contemporary American literature. They thought that Doctorow, influenced by such writers as John Dos Passos and John Steinbeck, held "the passion of our calling" rooted in the belief that "writing matters, that there is salvation in witness and moral assignment" (Doctorow, 1985a: 23). John G. Parks shared a similar idea with Harter and Thompson, lauding Doctorow as a writer of "engagement", different from lots of contemporary writers "who have largely abandoned the social and political realm for the exploration of the self" (Parks, 1991a: 454).

Critics such as John Clayton and Paul Levin tried to connect Doctorow's concern for politics with his Jewish roots. Paul Levine, in "Politics and Imagination", analyzed Doctorow's political commitment to social justice and his radical skepticism toward all established institutions, attributing these to his family influences as well as his growing up along with the silent generation of the

1950s. Jewish radical humanism, as John Clayton elaborated, was Doctorow's most important emotional and intellectual ethos. Summarizing Doctorow's Jewish heritage, Clayton observed that "caring and doing for other people and a critical attitude to contemporary myths" were what Jewish culture insisted (Clayton, 1983, 119). The themes of suffering, social injustice and community which frequently appeared in Doctorow's works were what the Jewish writers often dealt with. Harold Bloom also thought that Doctorow was, by temperament, "closer to the central Jewish traditions than are Philip Roth or Cynthia Ozick" (Bloom, 2002: 4), and Jewish traces abounded in his works.

Many other critics noticed Doctorow's criticism on capitalist exploitation and corruption in the process of industrialization. In their essays, Marxist and Post-Marxist criticism including class conflicts, economic exploitation, and power struggle became the key words. Based on the Marxist-psychoanalytical method and a detailed examination of the economic power in Doctorow's novels, David S. Gross's perspective on the money image in several Doctorow's novels was innovative and insightful. He elucidated that modernist writers like Doctorow employed "formal strategies which seem[ed] designed to distance and protect the author from responsibility" of speaking unpleasant truth on money (Gross, 1983: 128). The result was that the "connections among money, excrement and power" were established with ambiguities and biting ironies (128). But Gross's essay, as John Williams suggested, was not so much about Doctorow's works as a use of Doctorow's works in combination with Marx and Freud to speculate on the issue of "literary modernism and American history" (Williams, 1996: 49). Despite Doctorow's deep involvement with politics in his works, some critics thought that it was improper to label Doctorow as a political novelist. To John G. Parks, such a labelling was "simplistic and misleading", for it implied that the author had "an agenda, a program, or an ideology to promulgate in fiction" (Parks 1991a: 11). Paul Levine supported his argument. According to him, Doctorow, though a relentless critic of "America's failures to fulfill its dreams and founding convictions", did not advocate new political system in place of the current one (Levin, 2002: 56). Levine thus realized that Doctorow did not belong to those political writers who wrote to promote certain ideology since he was "aware of the dangers of ideology for art" (59).

Besides politics, history was another field that had become the object of Doctorow's obsessive attention and meditation. In fact, like his political stance, Doctorow's imaginative manipulation of history gave rise to hot debates. A noticeable fact is that most of critics' research on Doctorow's treatment of

history was based on a New Historicist perspective. "All of Doctorow's fiction is an engagement with crucial moment in American history" (Parks 1991b: 16), Parks suggested, but his method of using history was not the conventional one (realistic reflection). Instead, Doctorow subjected history to ambiguity and plural interpretations. Parks' study on Doctorow's plural interpretation of history was significant in that he linked narrative to social power. He pointed out that the "dialogic or polyphonic" narrative of Doctorow disrupted or even subverted "regimes of power" and restored the "neglected or forgotten or unheard voices" (19). Carol C. Harter and James R. Thompson's monograph *E. L. Doctorow* discussed a great deal on Doctorow's treatment of history. They thought, in his novels since *Ragtime*, Doctorow not only "repeatedly invoke[d] history by employing actual events but, more importantly, he fictionalize[d] a number of historical personages in unverifiable ways" (Harter & Thompson, 1990: 10). This led to their conclusion that reiterated Doctorow's famous claim that all history was composed and there was no distinction between fiction and nonfiction. Tokarczyk's analysis of Doctorow's historical consciousness cited Frederic Jameson's idea on the "crisis of historicity". Doctorow's distrust of official history and historians' role as faithful recorders of the past penetrated all his works, Tokarczyk suggested, "the uncertainty about history and interpretation is a key component of skepticism" that marked Doctorow's skeptical commitment (Tokarczyk, 2002: 9). Linking Doctorow's historical consciousness to that of John Dos Passos, Barbara Foley made a detailed comparison between their representative works *Ragtime* and *U.S.A.* He came to the important statement that both works "represent[ed] a significant departure from the form and outlook of classical historical fictions" (Foley, 1983: 168). The difference of the writers lied in that Dos Passos "subordinate[d] the fates of his invented characters to the 'plot' of history itself" and framed his narrative around facts that were held to be true and verifiable while Doctorow "treat[ed] with equal aplomb facts that are 'true' and those that are 'created', thus calling into question our concept of factuality and, indeed, of history itself" (Foley, 1983: 168).

Poststructuralist approaches especially Roland Barthe's and Foucault's theories on myth were also used to analyze Doctorow's historical consciousness. In his monograph *E. L. Doctorow's Skeptical Commitment*, Tokarczyk referred to Roland Barthe's famous discussion on the relationship between myth and history to explain how Doctorow's first novel *Welcome* debunked the myth of American west. *Ragtime*, according to the analysis of David S. Gross, demystified "the nostalgic view and simple America at the turn of the century by exposing the lies that seek to conceal

the realities of class and racial oppression and its support of money complex”(Gross, 1983: 133). Among numerous American myths, American Dream, a motif recurrently appearing in great literary works since Benjamin Franklin, was one of the most influential ones. Critics like John G. Parks, Arthur Saltzman, Harter and Thompson, specifically analyzed Doctorow’s refutation of different aspects of American Dream in his various works. Considering *Welcome* as a rework of American west formula, Parks remarked that Doctorow’s narrative actually “raise[ed] serious questions about the nature of American Dream.” (Parks, 1991a: 28). Parks’ comprehensive and penetrating analysis on Doctorow’s skepticism of the nature of American Dream could be applied to all of Doctorow’s novels. *Daniel*, according to Tokarczyk, “critique[d] American Dream of upward mobility and certainly criticize[d] the reality of American justice under the law”, but more than that, it also “fault[ed] groups associated with the left” and questioned the possibility of drastic social revolution as well (Tokarczyk, 2002: 74). Arthur Saltzman thought that, in novels such as *Loon Lake*, *Billy Bathgate*, and *Waterworks*, Doctorow suggested the “relationship of criminality and American Dream” by revealing the fact that “[t]oo often it is greed and ruthlessness rather than virtues that bring success” (Saltzman, 1983: 134).

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua successively contributed three important essays discussing history and narration in Doctorow’s three novels, *Welcome*, *Ragtime*, and *Daniel*. Her study covered various aspects of the New Historicist and deconstructive approaches to Doctorow’s novels. In her essays, she argued that Doctorow’s works subverted the assumptions about classical historical novel as outlined by Georg Lukacs as he presented history in a self-reflexive style rather than the detached omniscient style, which exposed the subjectivity of historical representation. Bevilacqua further pointed out, the three novels of Doctorow all shared a sense of the fictiveness of all discourse about reality and history; they deconstructed the stereotypical pictures of history so that readers were left to rethink why certain groups had been at the center stage and others marginalized. In this respect, Bevilacqua had something in common with Parks as both of them related Doctorow’s historical consciousness and narrative to his moral concerns.

Although much Doctorowian criticism focused on his social views and treatment of history, a series of significant essays were devoted to the existentialist strain in his works. David Emblidge, in his study on Doctorow’s three earlier novels, claimed that a central motif penetrating *Welcome*, *Ragtime*, and *Daniel* was “the idea of history as a repetitive process, almost a cyclical one, in which man is an unwilling, unknowing

pawn, easily seduced into a belief in ‘progress’” (Emblidge, 1977: 397). Harter and Thompson expressed a similar opinion in their monograph *E. L. Doctorow*: “Doctorow’s vision is repeatedly of a universe where meaninglessness and absurdity are at the center of things and lead to unending and inescapable repetitions of human failure” (Harter and Thompson, 1990: 10). John McGowan made a comparative study of Hannah Arendt and Doctorow’s existential thoughts (mainly based on his essays and interviews while partially based on his novel *Ragtime*) and his research provided another way to study Doctorow’s writings. To McGowan, Doctorow shared much in common with Arendt’s philosophy since both intellectuals agreed that freedom came from “the collective creation of a common world” where “individual actions” could “acquire meaning through their being witnessed and narrated by others” (McGowan, 2011: 168). For both, the prime political virtue was “taking responsibility for the world, acting with others to maintain it” (168). In this sense, Arendt’s existential philosophy was illuminating in researching Doctorow’s works.

Despite his inheritance of the realistic tradition, most of the time, Doctorow was viewed as a great postmodern stylist. In Larry McCaffery’s *Postmodern Fiction*, David Gross, author of the entry on Doctorow, claimed that the novelist earned the label “postmodern stylist” chiefly by inventing a form of historical fiction that, through its pastiche and self-reflexive qualities, made readers aware of both the American past and the ideological account of it (Gross, 1986: 339). But Doctorow’s reputation as a postmodern stylist, according to Tokarczyk, mainly lied in his skeptical attitude toward all kinds of grand narrative, and his determination to demystify the dominant social discourses that constructed commonly held values, norms and knowledge. In this sense, the author’s practice was a version of “micropolitics” with action that was “local, situated in the community, in individual deeds and work on the self” (Tokarczyk, 2002: 23). Among all monographs on Doctorow, Christopher D. Morris’ *Models of Misrepresentation: on the Fiction of E. L. Doctorow* was the most complicated and obscure one. Essentially, the whole book was a long deconstructive reading of Doctorow’s fictional and non-fictional works under the philosophical framework of five writers: Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Derrida, Paul De Man and J. Hillis Miller. According to Morris, the five writers had a common denominator in their thoughts: “a refusal to presuppose that texts necessarily represent a signified, extratextual presence” (Morris, 1991: 13). Doctorow’s works, with their intention to demystify writing as a faithful representation of reality, shared this refusal. Most of criticism on Doctorow’s works, in the eyes of Morris, was hermeneutic in regarding his works as representations

of particular ideas (such as Jewish humanism, radical socialism, existentialism, or criticism of official history and capitalism). However, argued Morris, the so-called political satire was only “a seeming demystification, since the novels never rest in any ‘truth’ that might serve as the alternative to the political illusion they condemn” (13). In all, Morris’ study was innovative in some way but it carried the skepticism of postmodernism to the extreme since it denied the ability of literary works to reflect any reality. His assumptions thus reduced literature to empty language games without any referential significance—a common sin postmodern literary works were accused of.

In the late 1980s, two important critics at that time, Frederic James and Linda Hutcheon, both started a discussion on the postmodern characteristics of Doctorow’s works. In his prize-winning study, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), James argued that Doctorow was the “epic poet of the disappearance of the American radical past” (James, 1991: 24). His impressionistic analysis of Doctorow’s *Ragtime* showed that the author actually aimed to reveal the hidden power system in the history of a capitalist society. However, produced in a postmodern era, the novel undermined its attacking force for its self-reflective qualities. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, tried to defend postmodern fiction from conservative critics’ general accusations. She thought their misgivings of the loss of reference were a little bit fussy. By dubbing postmodern fiction like *Ragtime* as “historiography”, a term indicating both a representation of history and its self-reflexivity, Hutcheon expressed her appreciation of this new category, especially its ability to interrogate and “problemize” a totalizing system and to open for new possibilities of understanding the world. James’s and Hutcheon’s contradictory perspectives made clear the contemporary concern for ethics and its quandary in the postmodern context. Anyway, their comments on Doctorow, representing two related but contrasted ideas of the postmodernist school, were frequently cited as the landmarks of Doctorowian research by later critics. Tokarczky, for example, quoted James’s words but considered Doctorow’s skeptical commitment to history, power, social myth and non-linearity an advantage often associated with postmodernism, since it gave a writer the power to interrogate and question conventional ideas and values. But his skepticism was not that of relativism or nihilism. Disagreeing on James’s idea that Doctorow’s technique undercut his

critique power, Tokarczyk categorized Doctorow's works into midfiction^① which lies in the middle way between "realism and reflexivity"—the two extremes of contemporary literature (Tokarczyk, 2000: 68). Therefore, they both kept the power to put almost everything under telescope as well as to reveal some truth.

Besides his skeptical spirit, Doctorow was labelled as a postmodern stylist also because of being a bold experimentalist on narrative form and style. Most of critics have mentioned that one of the distinctive features that marked Doctorow's narratives was a blurring of boundaries between fiction and other popular artistic forms. Commenting on Doctorow's resurrection of deserted materials (genres, plots, characters, etc.), Michael Wutz described Doctorow as "a Sartor Resartus gathering, snipping, pasting and stitching worn materials into novel textures of collage and montage" (Wutz, 2003: 511). Wutz's essay, though very complicated in views, covered multiple aspects of Doctorow's works as well as literary theories. It not only used the images of garbage, rags and recycling in Doctorow's works to confirm their subversive power against the capitalist consumer culture, but also pointed out the intertextual quality of Doctorow's works. Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua analyzed Doctorow's reworking of American west genre and his creation of a self-reflexive narrator-protagonist in *Welcome*. Fowler thought that Doctorow's pedantic and ironic style of *Ragtime*, with his deliberate mockery of the dry, objective voice of official history, made the work "sardonic and urbane and directed along a privileged wavelength of attitude and allusion" (Fowler, 1992: 57). A considerable number of critical essays were devoted to the intertextual quality of Doctorow's work. Lieselotte E. Kurth-Voigt's "Kleistian Overtones in E. L. Doctorow's '*Ragtime*'", for example, made a detailed comparison of the plot, characterization, and themes between Heinrich von Kleist's novella *Michael Kohlhaas* and *Ragtime*'s Coalhouse episode. He suggested that despite the different time and settings, the Kohlhaas/Coalhouse tragedy indicated the universal pattern of disorder individuals often encountered. Thus, Doctorow's adaptation of the Kleist story showed the recurrence of historical processes.

Narrative was another arena where Doctorow's postmodern experiments took place. Most critical approaches have mentioned the indeterminacy of the narrative discourse, the shifting voice and perspective, and the self-reflexive quality of the

① Midfiction is a term coined by Allan Wilde in *Middle Grounds* (1987) to refer to fiction that "situates itself between mimetic and metafictional forms of writing and uses both realist and self-reflexive modes of expression without privileging either of them." Quoted from Fran Mason's *Historical Dictionary of Postmodernist Literature and Theater*, Scarecrow Press, 2007: 300.

narrators in Doctorow's fiction. Early critical voices of *Ragtime* were focused on the anonymous and unidentifiable narrative voice. Christopher D. Morris, for instance, thought that the undecidability of the narrator was mainly caused by "the generic names" assigned to the primary families in *Ragtime*. Charles Berryman, on the other hand, identified the little Boy from the WASP family as the narrator. Berryman also linked images like the mirror and film to illustrate the relation between reality and the artistic world. But Morris pointed out some problems behind this kind of assumption. Interestingly, he proposed another bold assumption that the narrator might be a double, containing "two different entities, a specific and a separate anonymous voice" (Morris, 1991: 101). According to Barbara Cooper, each of Doctorow's protagonists represented an artist-historian figure, who often found himself trapped in the same predicament—to find the "proper alignment", which described the artist's ambition to get the "alignment of his materials, his intention, his creation, the conventions of writings, and audience expectations about the nature of the novel" (Cooper, 1980: 6). In his essay "The Stylistic Energy of E. L. Doctorow", Arthur Saltzman concluded that the experimental style of Doctorow, especially the self-reflexive qualities of his narratives actually served his thematic concern—"to demythologize America and to demystify his own craft" (Saltzman, 1983: 75). In this essay, Saltzman also explored such motifs that would be repetitively dug up by critics of later years: the narrator's radical distrust of language, and the futility of the artist to seek representation for his experiences. In the case of Cooper and Saltzman, it can be seen that different from the mimetic mode of the earlier critical essays, later studies on Doctorow's narrative turned to the poststructuralist approach. Furthermore, both Saltzman and Cooper's researches focused on the issues of literary creation in the fictional world, which made it evident that Doctorow's novels were mostly metafictional concerning writing itself.

Compared with Saltzman and Cooper, Geoffrey Galt Harpham moved a step further in the deconstructive direction. His essay "E. L. Doctorow and the Technology of Narrative" deserved a special space in the reception of Doctorow because it shifted critical emphasis to narrative itself. In this essay, Harpham, under the influence of Hayden White, claimed that "narrative, with its volatile images, is a political issue" since its "truth status always depends on the power of authorities that sanction it" (Harpham, 1985: 32). Based on the poststructuralist theories, Harpham's study differed from any previous one because he put narrative prior to reality and considered that our sense of reality originated from texts, which meant "narrativity takes precedence over referentiality". His study revealed the phenomenological