

## Exploring Desire, Irony, and Societal Constraints in O. Henry's "A Bird of Baghdad" and Tawfiq al-Hakim's "The Return of the Spirit". Comparative Case Study

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### Abstract

This research evaluates A Bird of Baghdad and The Return of the Spirit through comparative analysis of proposals regarding longing and societal rules featuring ironic elements. From their Western and Arabic origin points these two stories convey significant human outlooks on individual needs versus societal rules. The study evaluates the two literary works through their textual analyses to explore common literary elements between Western and Arabic storytelling traditions. The primary goal of this research investigation focuses on understanding how authors present themes of desire as well as societal limitations through ironic elements using literature from various cultural sources. The two writers show characters pursuing freedom with a great intensity while showing how their life choices become restricted by social communities. A detailed investigation becomes possible because of the comparative approach. The study evaluates essential choices made by main characters after they both admire society's constraints and their longing for freedom. Through irony both authors present barriers that limit agency and show how these obstacles produce tragic outcomes. The research adopts qualitative assessment that uses literary criticism and thematic analysis together with character comparison for its short story analysis. The systematic evaluation of authorial methods dealing with protagonist confrontations will lead to essential discoveries about how each writer exhibits human experiences. The research demonstrates that both societies force residents to relinquish their wants yet achieve it through different societal characteristics. Both O. Henry and Tawfiq al-Hakim write lasting explorations regarding human pursuit of desire against societal constraints under the unpredictable forces of life despite having separate literary backgrounds. **Keywords:** Comparative Literature, Irony, Desire, Societal Constraints, O. Henry, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Character Development, Short Stories

### ملخص

تقارن هذه الدراسة بين قصتي "طائر بغداد" و"عودة الروح" من خلال تقييم المواضيع التي تتضمن الشوق إلى جانب القيود المجتمعية ذات النغمات الساخرة. وعلى الرغم من أن هاتين القصتين تتبعان من خلفيات غربية وعربية، إلا أنهما تقدمان وجهات نظر ذات مغزى حول الصراعات البشرية

بين الرغبات الفردية والقيود الاجتماعية. يجمع هذا البحث بين تحليل هاتين القطعتين الأدبيتين من أجل تحديد أوجه التشابه المشتركة بين تقاليد السرد الغربية والعربية. يسعى الاهتمام الأساسي لهذا البحث إلى فهم أفضل لعرض المواضيع حول الرغبة جنباً إلى جنب مع القيود المجتمعية والسخرية عبر الأدب المستمد من خلفيات ثقافية متنوعة. من خلال سياقات ثقافية مختلفة، يقدم أو. هنري والحكيم شخصيات تسعى بشدة إلى التحرر ولكنها تعاني من هياكل المجتمع التي تسيطر على حياتها. تتيح المقارنة فحصاً تفصيلياً لهذه الأفكار. يبحث التحقيق في كيفية اتخاذ الشخصيات الرئيسية في كل قصة لقراراتها الأساسية من خلال النظر إلى شوقها واحتضان الهياكل الاجتماعية كقيود. يبحث البحث في كيفية تقديم كل من المؤلفين للحوار التي تحد من الوكالة باستخدام السخرية كأداة تكشف عن جوانب مأساوية تنبع من هذه الحدود. يحلل هذا البحث القصص القصيرة من خلال التقييم النوعي الذي يطبق النقد الأدبي والتحليل الموضوعي إلى جانب مقارنة الشخصيات. إن التحليل الشامل لتقنيات المؤلف في التعامل مع صراعات البطل يمكن من اكتشاف طرق مهمة يصور بها كل مؤلف التجارب الإنسانية. تكشف الدراسة أن كلا المجتمعين يضغطان على الناس للتخلي عن رغباتهم في حين يجعلونهم يتخلون عن التطلعات الشخصية ولكنها تقدم عناصر مميزة فيما يتعلق بهذه العناصر بين الثقافتين. تُظهر هذه الدراسة الشاملة أن أو. هنري وتوفيق الحكيم يمثلان خلفيات أدبية مختلفة ومع ذلك ينتجان تأملات دائمة حول كيفية سعي الناس إلى الرغبة في مواجهة العوائق الاجتماعية جنباً إلى جنب مع سلسلة الأحداث غير المتوقعة التي تشكل التجارب الإنسانية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأدب المقارن، السخرية، الرغبة، القيود المجتمعية، أو. هنري، توفيق الحكيم، تطوير الشخصية، القصص القصيرة

## **1. Introduction**

By penning universal tales, literary works traverse cultural borders to provide real insight into the human hope together with the cultural barriers besides the inherent contradictions of human nature. Two short storeys, *A Bird of Baghdad* (O. Henry), and *The Return of the Spirit* (Tawfiq al-Hakim), may in comparison to come across its main thematic aspects no matter whether springing from the Western or Arabic cultural backgrounds. The protagonist in O. Henry storey, desires freedom from social demands that leads to an eventful irony as his pursues his individuality. The author al-Hakim takes a society regulated style of life that put into appearance by individual against social and cultural routines through her main character's confrontations with the obstacles patterned by his social and cultural world. Storeys portray that desires of single individuals who are impeded by societal barriers take part in blocking the flow of characters, and irony portrays that fate manipulation is random unexpected events, that control boundaries of the human way to behave. Putting their respective cultural backgrounds, the authors look at the same stage challenges of human community. Through *A Bird of Baghdad* we observe the interior struggle a man, beset with personal desires and social duties, and through *The Return of the Spirit* we see what self-renunciation does to men working for a common good. By examining the two of the text in this exposition this examination demonstrated the conflict in personal choice and social obligation as far as that would utilise irony to make a variety of human execution impeded. Field of comparative studies require more analysis which incorporate Western literature with Arabic literature, when analysing themes that appear alike in these two traditions. Using lens of desire and societal constraints to analyse these works can deepen our understanding of universal human conditions (Hassan, 2016). By carrying out this comparative study so we get deeper insight than the both author perspectives and the dialogue of the human boundaries and the societal norms.

### **1.1. Contextualization of the Study**

The writer O. Henry gained fame through his short story collection that featured ironic unexpected finishes during his life as William Sydney Porter from 1862. His tales find their setting in early 20th-century America as New York City changes while depicting the daily life struggles of ordinary people with both comedic and sad ironic elements. His persistent examination of both human nature and societal dynamics from his time period resulted in his most recognized tales such as *The Gift of the Magi* alongside *The Ransom of Red Chief*. These works established him as one of the most original vocal contributors to American short fiction (Gottfried, 2003). Arabic literature gained one of its most important modern figures through Tawfiq al-Hakim who was born in 1898 in Egypt. The literary works composed by Tawfiq al-Hakim display early twentieth-century Egyptian social evolution within his combined status as playwright and short story writer. The emergence of Egyptian nationalism alongside colonial intricacies inspired al-Hakim to explore individual/social conflicts as well as identities through his stories about traditional/modern social tensions (Badawi 2004). *The Return of the Spirit* (1933) stands as al-Hakim's most recognized novel because it depicts the Egyptian nationalism while studying the psychological turmoil of people struggling through that nation's substantial societal changes. The early stage of al-Hakim's work centered on theater yet his shorter works explored themes of societal limitations

alongside personal liberation which shared similarities with O. Henry's literature. A swift transformation in American and Egyptian society occurred during the first part of the twentieth century when O. Henry and Tawfiq al-Hakim produced their literary work. The United States experienced an industrial growth alongside urban development which concurrently brought large-scale immigration leading to fragmentation within the developing multicultural society. While social mobility became more available to people the period presented new challenges which emerged from class-based divisions together with problems of race and gender. O. Henry, rooted in contemporary social shifts, wrote about individuals whose individual needs met resistance from community norms (Lutz, 2011). Under British colonial administration Egypt experienced the emergence of different nationalist groups in the early 20th century. Al-Hakim portrays a shifting community through his writing which links personal and national self-discovery. Social conflicts intensified in Egypt through the rise of Arab nationalism combined with the intellectual and cultural ideas spreading from Western traditions. Various writers from this period studied individual aspirations within the framework of national collective actions according to Mitchell (1991). An examination of desire as well as sacrifice and societal constraint functions through different cultural perspectives when analyzing *A Bird of Baghdad* by O. Henry and *The Return of the Spirit* by Tawfiq al-Hakim. External societal pressures influence how people develop their desires in both the U.S. and Egypt while the fulfillment of these desires results in either a sacrifice or creates situations that produce irony. The protagonists in both stories are deeply affected by the constraints of their environments, yet their struggles speak to universal human experiences. By examining these themes within both Western and Arabic contexts, this comparative study highlights the shared human condition in literature, shedding light on the ways in which both American and Arab authors grapple with issues of personal freedom, societal limitations, and the ironic twists that often define the human experience.

### **1.2. Research Questions:**

1. In what manner do O. Henry and Tawfiq al-Hakim depict the conflict between personal aspirations and societal limitations in *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit*, and what significance does this conflict hold in the evolution of their protagonists?
2. How do both authors employ irony to underscore the constraints of human agency, and in what manner does this literary device enhance the thematic investigation of sacrifice and fate in their narratives?
3. What cultural and social elements impact the protagonists' aspirations and behaviours in both narratives, and how do these aspects mirror the wider societal settings of early 20th-century America and Egypt?
4. In what ways may a comparative comparison of O. Henry's American perspective and Tawfiq al-Hakim's Egyptian viewpoint yield profound insights into the universal themes of longing, societal pressure, and irony across many literary traditions?

### **1.3. Significance of the Research**

Through literary studies people gain meaningful understanding of how human beings worldwide experience similar universal emotional states and life experiences. This research investigates the human struggles in O. Henry's *A Bird of Baghdad* and Tawfiq al-Hakim's *The Return of the Spirit* as well as other pieces from different cultural traditions by demonstrating how these works treat familiar human issues involving desire and societal limitations and the way irony influences human conduct. This research reveals crucial insights about both Western and Arabic literature because it demonstrates how the two traditions address the fundamental human experience through their stories. Through literature people can study human emotions and society because writers use their work to mirror human experiences. O. Henry with Tawfiq al-Hakim present the conflict between individual personal wishful thinking and social limitations in their respective writing although they belong to separate cultural atmospheres. Such themes find universal acceptance since all communities must determine how personal freedom interacts with social requirements. Through his statement Said (2000) explains that literature demonstrates mastery in revealing complex human emotions and functions as a reflective tool to understand how desires and fears emerge across various cultural spaces. Researchers gain insight into the common psychological territory explored by both authors who present remarkable approaches to depict character-driven actions and sacrifices as well as tragic ironic situations. This research Introduction also acknowledges the continuous discussions about cultural and literary diversity by demonstrating that same emotional themes appear differently across literary traditions from America and Arab regions. O. Henry reveals the human condition in stories through humor and irony whereas al-Hakim expresses these themes with serious political content and social commentary that reflects the changes in Egypt during the early 20th century (Badawi, 2004). Different narrative approaches in literature contribute to deeper academic discussions which

demonstrate multiple ways societies handle basic human experiences. This research allows readers to find more respect for how literature unites diverse cultures while demonstrating our fundamental common human challenges. Human souls maintain their essential nature across time and cultural variations and through literature we unravel their limitless complexities about the human soul according to Al-Hakim (1981).

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Thematic Comparisons in Literature**

The analysis of desire along with societal constraints and human nature runs extensively across cultural comparisons in the field of comparative literature. Researchers who analyze Western and Arabic literature demonstrate how these universal themes take shape through different cultural backgrounds and historical time periods and societal environments. Literary scholars tend to focus on differences between Western and Arabic literature but they can also access a common human condition that explores how individuals pursue their needs within societal boundaries. For centuries literary scholars have noted that Western and Arabic literature converges on the conflict that arises from individual versus collective interests. Literature across all traditions allows people to observe universal human emotions which exist above cultural differences according to Said (2000). The authors O. Henry and Tawfiq al-Hakim use their works to present how social expectations construct their main characters' life experiences. O. Throughout his distinctly American short stories Henry depicts characters whose hopes collapse because of ironic unforeseen events that illustrate the bounds of human control (Gottfried, 2003). The works of Tawfiq al-Hakim particularly *The Return of the Spirit* unveil the societal and political conflicts along with intellectual movements of early twentieth-century Egypt that merge personal yearnings with national goals (Badawi, 2004). Within his examination linking Western and Arabic literature Hassan (2016) demonstrates the way O. Henry and al-Hakim apply their main characters' desires to understand how societal limitations affect human personality. The presentation of desire versus societal limitations varies between these authors because of their different cultural backgrounds. The personal tragedies and love and wealth and freedom-driven revelations which O. Henry's American characters confront differ from those faced by al-Hakim's Egyptian characters whose wants align with their independent social sensibilities.

### **2.2. O. Henry's Use of Irony and Characterization**

O. Henry's storytelling reputation shows his talent for ironic writing combined with his detailed character work that creates important themes about human boundaries and want. According to literary scholars O. Henry devotes his storytelling to people who strive for love wealth and adventure but end up blocked by unforeseen obstacles. Through his ironic conclusions in his stories O. Henry illustrates how both human wishes and life's unpredictability become pointless (Gottfried, 2003). *A Bird of Baghdad* tells the story about a man who seeks freedom from his enclosed world but meets tragic irony which demonstrates the baselessness of his wants. O. Henry's characters repeatedly experience a pattern of wanting freedom or beauty which ends in disappointment that stems from his ironic story structure according to Lutz (2011). Irony in this narrative reveals the battle between individual dreams and the cruel realities which emerge from social restrictions together with personal restrictions that control what occurs to people. Beyond his literary tales O. Henry consistently presents unattainable desire as his primary mechanism to critique the human experience. The critics have examined how O. Henry creates protagonists from average people who feel desires based on common human emotions. Gottfried (2003) states that O. Henry's main strength in his characters emerges from their everyday quality since they represent typical people whose struggles play out against normal life situations. The character seeks freedom in *A Bird of Baghdad* because it represents both his individual aspirations and the collective human inclination to rise above social boundaries. O. Henry uses ironic irony to demonstrate that humans cannot completely break free from their present position thus delivering a serious lesson about human ability to influence their outcomes.

### **2.3. Tawfiq al-Hakim's Exploration of Societal Themes**

The narratives of Tawfiq al-Hakim depict Egyptian society within its historical political and social framework of early twentieth-century Egypt. All of Al-Hakim's stories deal with conflicts between personal desires and social norms based on Egypt's fight for independence from British colonial power. Through his story *The Return of the Spirit* al-Hakim follows the narrative of someone undergoing transformation while Egypt endures dramatic societal transitions. The main character experienced personal changes reflecting the national revitalization which Egypt experienced in its period of transformation. During his times Al-Hakim drew his societal insights from Egyptian nationalistic ideologies while Western intellectual movements were also present. According to Badawi (2004) al-Hakim's works display the characteristics of national resistance together

with identity exploration while his characters represent social ambitions toward independence and autonomy. Within Taha Hussein's novel *The Return of the Spirit* personal independence directly correlates with the shared political aspirations of the people. Al-Hakim's literary works display a unique characteristic because his characters' urges establish a parallel between personal aspirations and national aspirations. This distinguably distinguishes his approach from O. Henry's writing that portrays private human motivations with minimal nationalist implications.

#### **2.4. Irony in O. Henry and Tawfiq al-Hakim**

The two authors utilize irony in separate ways because they address individual thematic elements through this literary technique. Through his stories O. Henry uses irony to show that human needs remain unachieved because people cannot master their fate. Lutz (2011) explains that O. Henry dependent ironic situations to expose "the difference between what his characters think and what harsh existence actually shows them." Through *A Bird of Baghdad* the main character faces a heartbreaking outcome when his wish for liberation fails showing that fate disrupts our ability to control our destinies. Through this story O. Henry demonstrates his belief that existence carries both injustice and shocking unexpected events.

Al-Hakim presents irony in *The Return of the Spirit* when compared to his usage in other works. The irony used by Al-Hakim serves to illustrate both political events affecting society while also showing how individual development endangers the larger national transformation. The main character achieves personal transformation through a paradoxical plot development which exposes the opposing forces present in his community. Badawi (2004) explains that Al-Hakim's use of irony shows more than narrative unexpectedness because it critiques Egypt's social and political condition during colonial rule. Through al-Hakim's work readers discover how personal and national identity remained complex until people faced societal powers which molded their existence.

#### **2.5. Characterization and Human Desire**

Within *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit* the main characters undertake major emotional and enduring quests however their inner needs develop based on their respective cultural settings. The protagonist in O. Henry's story pursues an intimate emotional goal because he wants to escape societal rules. Through his experiences his desires trigger an emotional change during which he grasps the boundaries of human control and reaches an unfortunate conclusion. Lutz (2011) states that O. Henry's characters experience several psychological transformations which reveal the limits of human efforts through both successful and unsuccessful fulfillment of their desires. The al-Hakim lead character develops both intellectual awareness and national consciousness. He seeks freedom for his country because his motivations reflect the anti-colonial activities throughout Egypt during that historical period. Badawi (2004) explains that in Al-Hakim's works characters battle between their individual yearnings and their social duties while their odyssey leads them to discover individual as well as national identity. O. Henry's characters consider only personal needs yet al-Hakim creates main characters who connect to societal aspects in their storeys. The authors illustrate that human wishes are always restricted regardless of pursuing individual or community objectives through a portrayal of the ironic results which stem from these ambitions. Our analysis of *A Bird of Baghdad* by O. Henry against *The Return of the Spirit* by Tawfiq al-Hakim helps us understand common human experience with desire versus social boundaries as well as ironic meanings in literature. O. In storey-telling Henry focuses on character emotion but al-Hakim uses his writing to understand politics and society. Through their ironic presentation both authors demonstrate how people fail to overcome societal limitations. Through literary traditions readers gain enhanced knowledge about how universal themes with specific examples of longing and sacrifice appear in different cultural backgrounds for understanding human experiences.

### **3. Methodology**

The analysis through qualitative literary methods examines desire and societal barriers and ironic situations that populate O. Henry's *A Bird of Baghdad* as well as Tawfiq al-Hakim's *The Return of the Spirit*. The research approach involves thematic analysis combined with close reading and character analysis to determine how symbolic devices reveal these thematic elements in both texts. The study investigates how characters in the narratives develop their desires through social influences together with surprising elements. Some Did Loads develop because of such ambitions.

**3.1. Qualitative Literary Analysis** The chosen analytic framework consists of thematic analysis because researches analyse patterned text themes to identify and interpret them. *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit* unite through their thematic elements of desires alongside social boundaries as well as ironic

situations. Research will analyse theme development across the authorship with an examination of the connexion between authorial themes and character desires. O. Henry demonstrates how his character achieves freedom and social independence in unexpected ways through his narrative conclusion. The analysis of al-Hakim's story examines how personal transformation needs of the central character connect with the developing political desires within a society undergoing major changes. According to Hall (2009) thematic analysis enables researchers to discover fundamental human themes that transcend cultural differences which results in comparable findings. The authors' use of language along with structural elements and symbolic devices emerges during detailed textual analysis which focuses on the two works. The core approach of close reading pertains to the precise evaluation of text elements including word selection along with storytelling patterns and literary devices through metaphors and pictures. Using this analytical technique enables researchers to observe O. Henry's narrative patterns that result in his ironic conclusions as well as al-Hakim's literary devices such as dialogue and symbolism which express societal limitations in Egypt. The research analysis will establish how the surrounding forces affect both the emotional development and intellectual progress of the stories' protagonists. The critic can reveal hidden layers of meaning through close reading method as explained by Selden et al. (2005). The analysis studies how the main characters in each story represent the core themes of desire together with social restrictions. The analysis examines character motivations together with their actions while studying emotional changes of protagonists in each work. The main character in O. Henry's story will experience freedom cravings which eventually lead to an acknowledgment of its immeasurable nature. The protagonist in al-Hakim's work develops intellectual and national awareness through a process that forces him to face social limitations on his desires. A character analysis process reveals when internal desires interfere with the social demands that each society demands of its citizens.

### 3.2. Cultural Context

The comprehension of cultural setting serves to explain character conduct and aspirations because societal forces stem from the cultural heritage of each individual. O. Henry depicts social pressures in his short story *A Bird of Baghdad* by using the specific circumstances of early 20th-century urban America. America endured brisk industrial expansion and population growth thus producing a intricate social environment that frequently clashed between personal wishes and societal views founded on capitalism and materialism. The characters in O. Henry's stories battle between individual wants and the omnipresent urban competition of their surroundings according to Smith (2014). The historical background illuminates why the main character seeks freedom and why the plot develops its ironic ending. Tawfiq al-Hakim's *The Return of the Spirit* strongly reflects the cultural and political atmosphere of Egypt during the first part of the twentieth century. The story of Al-Hakim depicts both the conflict occurring between ancient traditions and contemporary culture together with the expanding power of nationalistic emotions following British colonial influence. The main character yearns to change himself while also sharing this yearning for political liberation with his community with external forces being shaped by both identity issues and societal modifications. Badawi (2004) explains that "Al-Hakim's works exhibit dual identity between personal needs and the influence of colonialism and national liberation movements." This research demonstrates how societal constraints connect inextricably to each author's historical political, economic and social environment through a comparison of O. Henry's American urban capitalist society and Tawfiq al-Hakim's Egyptian society. The research methods including thematic analysis with close reading and character analysis enable complete comparison between *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit*. The research evaluates how both authors employ literary tools to study desire themes and societal rules and irony features and shows how these concepts persist across works together with their distinct cultural backgrounds affecting character perceptions. Societal pressures manifest differently in O. Henry's American society versus al-Hakim's Egyptian society but both contexts reveal how cultural notions affect personal desires in literature. Therefore we can observe similar human dilemmas across dissimilar cultural traditions.

## 4. Thematic and Character Analysis

### 4.1. Desire and Longing

The principal characters from *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit* understand profound desires yet experience divergent types of longing which directly correspond to their cultural environments.

The main character of *A Bird of Baghdad* devours his cravings for freedom combined with beauty. The main character wants the unreachable bird because he seeks personal liberation from environmental limitations. The desire fulfills his personal needs since he wants something he cannot achieve. Gottfried (2003) explains that O.

Henry's characters constantly pursue something they cannot obtain and this behavior shows mankind's universal drive toward impossible goals. Through the representation of a bird the main character reveals not freedom but an idealized sense of beauty and liberty that stems from his own mental creation. His desire holds a private significance because he seeks an unattainable source of greatness that never materializes. Lutz (2011) explains that "The protagonist's desire achieves impact because it shows his longing for an ideal standard which remains permanently out of his grasp similarly to his dreams about freedom in a suppressive environment." The main character of *The Return of the Spirit* feels an intellectual and collective social urge. The main character of *Al-Hakim* needs both personal self-discovery and active participation in national awakening for his development. His longing aligns with the national fortunes of his country at a time when Egypt was undergoing intellectual and political transformations. The character advances on a mission that integrates his personal longings with national goals towards independence and societal transformations. According to Badawi (2004) al-Hakim's work shows how personal desires blend with national identity because the intellectual and political emergences defined the period of time in which he wrote. The narrative demonstrates how al-Hakim uses the protagonist's evolving desire to demonstrate the growth of personal goals into a movement that serves a national purpose. After an intellectual transformation the protagonist accepts his part in leading Egyptian national rebirth movements. Their intense desires stand apart because the amount of desired change differs between the two characters. O. The protagonist in Henry's story wants an abstract personal thing represented by the bird but al-Hakim's protagonist seeks a refreshed national identity that builds personal growth together with social and political transformation.

#### 4.2 Societal Constraints

Societal boundaries that block characters from attaining their goals play a vital role in understanding both *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit*. The limitations that affect the protagonists function differently depending on the unique background represented in each narrative. Social barriers in *A Bird of Baghdad* operate primarily from inside the protagonist and his personal desires. The protagonist faces barriers against his unrealizable wish for the bird because he fails to grasp that the treasure remains unconquerable to his limited understanding. The narrative subtly criticizes urban conditions together with early 20th-century American social restrictions which shaped the societal context of the story. As an embodiment of liberty the bird exists only as wishful thinking since the antagonist's competitive circumstances deny him the chance to escape that reality. According to Lutz (2011) "O. Henry employs irony to reveal how social standards along with individual constraints stop characters from reaching their goals although those objectives seem achievable." The main character fails to catch the bird which represents unattainable desires that society denies to its members. The restrictions faced in *The Return of the Spirit* stem from political and social forces within the society. The protagonist in *Al-Hakim's* novel initially shows no interest in Egypt's national movement because intellectual passivity was common for people living under British colonial rule in his time. His own wishes remain restricted because society pays no attention and because oppressive political systems block individual activism. The protagonist's sense of detachment resembles the overarching political situation of colonized nations because social norms prevent people from taking control of their lives while simultaneously blocking their aspirations for major shifts in the nation. Badawi (2004) observes "Al-Hakim's protagonist together with other natives during his era needed to surmount the social inertia which blocks individual growth as well as national progress." The character demonstrates a fight to balance his individual objectives with national political requirements which demonstrates the conflict existing between individual ambitions and communal identity. The main characters navigate their paths while facing numerous social limits in each work. O. While Henry's story concentrates on personal barriers within an economically driven society O. Henry created health issues the main barrier preventing the title character from national service. Each main character faces deconstructing these barriers to reach their objectives while they confront personal objectives in opposition to social restrictions.

#### 4.3 Irony and Its Impact

Through irony the authors explore how the main characters in *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit* fail to realize their yearnings. The utilization of irony in each narrative displays marked dissimilarities since it mirrors the thematic concerns together with cultural interests of the authors. Through narrative devices O. Henry depicts the foolishness of his main character's relentless pursuit regarding objects which prove impossible to obtain. The bird representing beauty, freedom and flight dreams evolves into an unattainable object of longing for the protagonist. Throughout the story the protagonist fails to understand what he truly desires even though

he believes he is about to capture his dream. Lutz (2011) explains that O. Henry creates his story ironic moments at the point where characters realize their desired goals never match what they actually obtain which shows how absurd human aspirations can be. The character fails to secure the bird because this miss reflects a central message about impossible dreams and the space between dreams and what life offers. The story presents ironic elements which demonstrate how wishing for something fails in a reality where forces outside personal control prevail. In *The Return of the Spirit* al-Hakim implements irony to show the leading figure gradually become involved with the national movement after being distant at first. At the beginning of the narrative the main character shows no interest in the emerging political movement occurring around him. Through his increased participation in the national movement he understands the central function he must play toward the independence of his people. The protagonist learns that the seemingly flawed habit of distancing himself from things will lead him to find enlightenment. The protagonist achieves an ironic awareness of his contribution to the national movement because it reflects back on his former disengaged attitude according to Badawi (2004). The story's irony emerges through the protagonist's initial disillusionment since this creates greater impact for his eventual enlightenment. The narrative shows how irony functions as a systematic experience which leads characters toward political awareness and personal awakening. Through their use of irony both writers show readers how personal cravings contrast with actual achievable outcomes. O. Richards uses ironic techniques to show dreams which remain forever unreachable and *The Return of the Spirit* highlights the process in which disengagement leads to political understanding. Each narrative uses ironic methods to study the obstacles that societies place on their inhabitants' dreams while portraying their ambitions. A detailed analysis of *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit* confirms how motivational force alongside cultural boundaries interacts with ironic structures to transform character personality development. O. Personal desires which coexist with materialistic public standards play a vital role throughout Henry's work while al-Hakim presents his storey to show how Egypt faced political changes and intellectual transformations in early twentieth-century times. Both writers show a combination of significant dreams and personal discovery challenges through the technique of irony during times of intense social constraint. The authors illustrate universal human seeking and its interaction with social environments through comparative analysis.

## **5. Comparative Analysis**

### **5.1 Cross-Cultural Comparison**

*A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit* analyse the social boundaries against personal ambitions alongside their comic aspects throughout different time periods according to O. Henry and Tawfiq al-Hakim. The two storeys discuss human longing but they show desires through contrasting perspectives about social positions. Within O. Henry's storey the main character exhibits a profound personal desire which extends beyond practical need. Through his quest for the bird he expresses his wish to attain freedom along with beauty while escaping the constraints that urban life places on him. The industrial America depicted by O. Henry shows how these personal desires challenge the capitalist environment's social standards. The protagonist fails to capture the bird because his personal flaws interact with the collective uncaring attitude of society. According to Lutz (2011) O. Henry's characters become trapped by what they want to pursue because this mirrors their life in materialistic urban society. O. Henry creates an ironic structure to demonstrate how impossible it is to achieve certain ambitions in his storey while decrying society for generating unattainable personal aspirations. Al-Hakim places his protagonist of *The Return of the Spirit* in a wide intellectual and political framework. The protagonist's desire goes beyond personal fulfilment because it integrates national spirit and Egypt's political transformation. The intellectual breakthrough brings him to embrace nationalist ideals and social reform. Al-Hakim presents through his Egyptian storey a protagonist who starts by showing no interest in the national movement yet gradually learns about his personal role in shaping political freedom during the colonial period. Badawi (2004) explains that al-Hakim linked individual growth to nationwide development because it mirrored the political mindset of that period. Both writers use different storey sizes in their works because O. Henry concentrates on personal needs yet al-Hakim centres national liberation thus revealing their distinctive authorial historical backgrounds. O. Henry illustrates how capitalist society affects personal desires through futile personal aspirations but al-Hakim depicts individual desires as part of Egypt's wider experience of political and national awakening amid early 20th-century social transformations.

### **5.2 Character Development and Theme Resolution**

Multiple mental transformations develop between leading characters within the storeys *A Bird of Baghdad* and *The Return of the Spirit* as their unique thematic results become visible. O. The character in *A Bird of Baghdad*



struggles in frustration when he fails at everything while The Return of the Spirit uses its main character to demonstrate social enlightenment through spiritual progress. The lead character maintains a useless prolonged search for the bird throughout the storey in O. Henry's tale. This hopeful wish to escape reality fails when he cannot get the bird which demonstrates the impossibility to achieve what he truly desires. The character learns through stern reality that his fantasies will not materialise into reality. Lutz (2011) explains that O. Henry's characters continuously face disappointing realities because they endlessly pursue dreams that they never achieve. The storey displays ironic literary elements because the protagonist never changes as society along with fate crushes his never-ending hopes. Through his adventure in The Return of the Spirit the main character undergoes an intense intellectual along with spiritual enlightenment. The character begins his narrative without any connexions to political movements from his era but discovers his meaning within the national fight for Egyptian independence. National awakening merges with his personal transformation reflecting how individual needs replaced by societal goals. According to Badawi (2004) the storey's protagonist emerges as an embodiment that demonstrates Egypt's national awakening through personal development which manifests as intellectual as well as political progress. The protagonist in al-Hakim's work discovers meaning by recognizing his participation in national duties rather than pursuing his selfish ambitions like O. Henry's main character. The character's intellectual development matches the societal transformation during which he evolves from passive disillusionment to active pursuit of national goals. Each character in A Bird of Baghdad struggled to demonstrate how desire deals with social rules since the two texts evaluated different approaches. O. The final open ending of The Return of the Spirit creates a difference between it and A Bird of Baghdad since Henry shows his main character fails to achieve their personal longing because of social competition. His character fulfils his objective by engaging intellectually with his nation's revolutionary movement which leads to societal evolution. Both authors employ character development approaches to present common human themes through plots about deeply wanting individuals while showing how society makes demands of them.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Summary of Key Findings

University scholarship reveals that A Bird of Baghdad by O. Henry shares fundamental characteristics with The Return of the Spirit from Tawfiq al-Hakim through their examination of wishful thinking against social barriers and ironic societal obstacles. The central characters of both works encounter failed attempts to fulfil their desires because of social barriers that their authors examine through different storey dynamics. O. Henry's main character in A Bird of Baghdad shows strong desires for independence and seeking happiness within Baghdad but fails to achieve these ambitions because of personal defects and social barriers that exist in the city. At this crucial moment in the storey readers learn that in these particular conditions personal aspirations do not manage to reach their intended results. O. Life in capitalistic social structures drives Henry to feel both irritated and let down about his pursuits in the business world across his literary work. Tawfiq al-Hakim explores desire in The Return of the Spirit by using intellectual approaches beyond traditional narrative formats. His personal advancement runs parallel with his service in leading Egyptian national reform which transforms into his total political fulfilment. The ironic technique adopted by Al-Hakim shows the character begins by existing separately from society then evolves into an intense mutual ambition to change their society. Intelligence reaches maturity in the novel although O. Henry wanders through felt personal feelings to understand how colonial oppression and national tensions restrict social life. These opposite cultural authors from early 20th century America and Egypt use irony to show universal unmet desires of humanity. The psychological and emotional drive toward love occurs similarly among people who emerge from different cultures even though disillusionment and ultimate comprehension patterns differ mirrors each other through revealing society's power to shape desire or create obstacles for its fulfilment.

### 6.2. Implications for Literary Studies

The research demonstrates that multicultural studies help people understand basic human experiences across various populations. The study of comparable themes handled by authors from different cultural backgrounds gives us extensive knowledge of timeless human nature across all historical periods and locations. Literature expresses common human challenges about the clash between personal wants and external social standards no matter how much it shaped by different cultural backgrounds and political environments. Analyse this paper triggers multiple research possibilities that future scholars can identify and explore. Research into the recurring themes of ironic elements and societal conflicts and unfulfilled desires would benefit from analyses that study works from the complete oeuvres of O. Henry and Tawfiq al-Hakim. The short storey collection of O. Henry

specifically features two other works named *The Gift of the Magi* and *The Ransom of Red Chief* which would provide extra scope for comparing how irony affects character destinies. A study of al-Hakim's plays *The People of the Cave* and *The Return of the Spirit* would reveal changes in his approach to addressing political and societal restrictions throughout his career. Future research focused on short fiction comparison should explore additional cross-cultural connexions beyond the United States and the Middle East. Studies that combine authors from European and Latin American backgrounds with American and Arabic writers will provide better insight into how universal themes receive treatment across diverse cultures and historical periods. This research demonstrates that comparative study of literature functions effectively to unite different cultures by showing universal human feelings and emotions. O. Henry and Tawfiq al-Hakim employ exploration of desire alongside societal constraints and irony to provide insightful understanding of human interaction with personal longing in social settings.

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