

Analysis of the Element of Surprise in the Works of O. Henry and Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh

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ABSTRACT

Article type: Research Article	Surprise or sudden twist in a narrative is one of the crucial elements in storytelling. O. Henry, one of the greatest short story writers of all time, is renowned for his use of wit, wordplay, character depiction, and the clever and unexpected endings of his stories. Similarly, Jamalzadeh is a leading figure in contemporary literary fiction who has concluded some of his stories with this very element. This research employs an analytical-descriptive method to examine the surprise element and the commonalities and differences in its usage in the short stories of O. Henry and Jamalzadeh. The case study in this article includes three short stories by O. Henry ("The Cop and the Anthem," "The Pendulum," and "The Last Leaf") and three short stories by Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh ("The Goose Kebab," "Heel Puller," and "Aunt Bear's Friendship"). The findings of the research indicate that the surprise element is prominent in the works of both authors, with the difference that in O. Henry's stories, surprise is stronger in terms of cause-and-effect relationships, leading to more powerful twists in his narratives.
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Introduction

The element of “surprise”—often manifested as a sudden twist in the narrative—is a critical component of plot architecture in short story writing. It serves to engage the reader, disrupt expectations, and often reveal hidden truths about characters or the narrative situation. O. Henry, a globally renowned master of the short story, is celebrated for his wit, characterization, and signature “surprise endings.” In Persian literature, Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, a pioneer of modern short fiction, also frequently employed this element to conclude his narratives. Despite the widespread use of surprise as a literary device, comparative academic inquiry into how these two authors utilize this element—and the logical coherence of their plot twists—remains limited. This study aims to analyze the commonalities and distinctions in the use of surprise within the short stories of O. Henry and Jamalzadeh, evaluating the efficacy and narrative logic of their respective twist endings.

Method

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology to investigate the element of surprise in three selected short stories by each author. The case studies for O. Henry include “The Cop and the Anthem,” “The Pendulum,” and “The Last Leaf.” For Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, the study examines “Kabāb-e Ġāz” (Roasted Goose), “Pāšne-keš” (Shoehorn), and “Dūstī-ye Hāle Hōrse” (Bear’s Friendship). The analysis focuses on how surprise is integrated into the plot, the relationship between the climax and the twist, and whether the surprises are “superficial” (arising from arbitrary events) or “genuine” (arising from character psychology and revealed truth).

Results

The comparative analysis yields several significant findings regarding plot structure and narrative technique:

- **Narrative Logic:** O. Henry’s surprise endings generally demonstrate a stronger integration with cause-and-effect

relationships compared to Jamalzadeh's. This integration creates more robust and convincing plots.

- **Structural Placement:** A key distinction is the positioning of the twist. In O. Henry's stories, the surprise often occurs independently of the climax, allowing the reader to experience a distinct shock separate from the main narrative tension. Conversely, in Jamalzadeh's works, the surprise often coincides with the story's climax.
- **Typology of Surprise:** The study classifies the twists into "superficial" (often caused by random chance or misunderstanding) and "genuine" (revealing deep-seated truths about human behavior). In O. Henry's "The Last Leaf" and "The Pendulum," the surprises function as genuine revelations of character depth. Among Jamalzadeh's works, "Kabāb-e Ġāz" stands out for having the most coherent plot, with a "genuine" surprise that effectively highlights the character's true nature, closely mirroring the effectiveness of O. Henry's style.
- **Comparative Efficacy:** While both authors successfully utilize the surprise element, Jamalzadeh's reliance on explicit moral or social commentary (e.g., in "Bear's Friendship") sometimes diminishes the shock value, as the thematic foreshadowing (often signaled by the title) prepares the reader for the twist. O. Henry's technique, by contrast, frequently maintains higher levels of narrative misdirection.

Conclusion

The research concludes that while the "element of surprise" is a shared stylistic preference, the authors' approaches differ in execution and structural impact. O. Henry's mastery lies in his ability to create distance between the primary conflict and the surprise ending, maximizing the reader's shock. Jamalzadeh's work, while innovative for Persian literature, occasionally suffers from weaker causal links in his surprise endings, with the exception of works like "Kabāb-e Ġāz," where the twist is seamlessly woven into the character's development. Ultimately, the study asserts that for a surprise ending to be "genuine" and artistically successful, it must not be a mere coincidence; it must emerge logically from the character's choices and the story's inherent tensions.