

Rhetoric of Life: A Philosophical reading of selected stories from
O Henry

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Name: Sanjoe P Davis

Register Number:

210011004038

Post Graduate Department of

English Bharata Mata College,

Thrikkakara Kochi – 682021

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “*Rhetoric of Life: A Philosophical reading of selected stories from O Henry*” is a bona fide record of sincere work done by, Sanjoe P Davis, Register Number: 210011004038, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature under the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2020-2023.

Project Guides,

Mrs Smitha Varkey

Guest Faculty

Post Graduate Department of English

Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara

Dr. Thara Gangadharan

Head of the Department

Post Graduate Department of English

Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara

Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation “*Rhetoric of Life: A Philosophical reading of selected stories from O. Henry*” is based on the research that I did on under the supervision and guidance of Mrs. Smitha Varkey, Guest Faculty, Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of therequirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report of my hands based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work and interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed basis for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

Date:

Sanjoe P Davis

Place: Thrikkakara

Reg.No: 210011004038

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General Introduction

The works of numerous eminent prose writers and poets from various centuries, whose combined efforts have given the language an unmatched depth and ageless literary value, are where the profundity of English literature finds its roots. This study intends to take up two of the most famous stories of two very different styles and backgrounds from the American author, O. Henry. The visible difference in the setting and backgrounds will help widen the perspective on how the study of existentialism and its relevance in a broad spectrum of literature can be associated.

William Sydney Porter, best known by his pen name O. Henry, was a brilliant and prolific short story writer. Born in Greensboro, North Carolina, Porter subsequently moved to Texas in 1882. It was when he was in New York, with Porter writing 381 short stories, that Porter's most intense writing time occurred. O Henry wrote in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His stories are mainly known for their witty narration and surprise endings. In the history of world literature, his writing stands apart for its vibrancy, and for his use of irony, metaphor, metonymy, and exaggeration. O. Henry is known as a master of shocking endings, radically designed story plots, and at unexpected twist, which are probably out of the expectations of readers. His writing style brings a tearful smile, with a blend of irony and tragedy. It is possible to infer the traditional writing style of Henry as humorous.

His stories mainly took place in different parts of the country, portraying both the urban and rural environments of the time. He frequently portrayed the bustle of big American cities like New York, Chicago, and New Orleans in his stories, capturing the

essence of urban life in the country. He constantly examined the contrast between the prosperity of the city and the hardships experienced by its less fortunate residents.

The aim of the study is to analyze two works from O Henry using the theme of existentialism. Such an analysis will help to understand the notion of existentialism better as an underlying and ever present thought in fiction. It can also help us understand how existentialism is a recurrent theme in short fiction set in different settings and character traits in the western background of O Henry. The findings of existentialist themes in the stories of this analysis will help in considering a common theme and idea that can be seen in all forms of fiction mainly short stories.

The 20th-century philosophical movement puts an emphasis on the existence, freedom, and responsibility of the person. It examines issues such as the meaning of life, human consciousness, and the search for meaning in a frequently chaotic and uncaring world. Existentialism presents a multifaceted and nuanced perspective on the human predicament rather than being fundamentally negative in terms of human life. While acknowledging the difficulties, fears, and uncertainties of human existence, it also places a strong emphasis on personal freedom, accountability, and the opportunity for real self-discovery and development.

Existentialism recognizes that there may not be a fundamental or predetermined meaning to existence, and this realization can cause existential distress or sorrow. It also emphasizes the value of human agency and people's ability to control their own destiny through their decisions and deeds. The depth and breadth of the human experience are frequently explored by existentialist thinkers, who also honor each person's capacity for

self-awareness, creativity, and personal development. They exhort people to accept their freedom and responsibility and to face life's difficulties head-on with courage and truthfulness.

It has some common traits with the short story genre and offers a distinctive lens through which to examine and interpret the human experiences as it is presented in these narratives which make existentialism an especially suitable philosophy to analyze short stories. Characters in short stories frequently focus on their unique experiences. With its focus on personal life and the quest for meaning, existentialism offers a framework for exploring characters' complicated inner lives, thoughts, feelings, and existential crises. The search for meaning, the nature of freedom, and the certainty of death are just a few of the fundamental issues that existentialism addresses. Condensed narratives like short stories can address these existential topics succinctly and intently. Existentialism promotes self-analysis and introspection, which is consistent with the reflective tone of many short stories. These stories frequently give readers a peek into the internal conflicts, moral quandaries, and existential crises of the characters.

Existentialism recognizes the feeling of existential anguish, or the sense of dread and hopelessness regarding the state of humanity. Readers of short stories may be inspired to reflect on the meaninglessness and unpredictable nature of life as characters in these works are put in ludicrous situations. Existentialism emphasizes personal autonomy and the duty to make sincere decisions. Short stories frequently center on pivotal times when people must make choices that affect their lives, allowing existentialist concepts of freedom and responsibility to be explored. Hence, for all the reasons stated above and

many more, the theme of existentialism is perfect for the purpose of analyzing short stories in depth.

Three stories have been selected each from hundreds of works of O Henry and Tagore which are completely different in the plot and its underlying theme. Even though they are different the readers can sense a common theme in the story. This analysis aims to explore and find the connection between them. These stories have been selected as they can be broken down into various segments to make the study even more precise. The notions of existential philosophy will help to gain in depth understanding of the fictional world.

Existentialism being a vast topic, the study is done in accordance focusing on a statements made by various existential thinkers about existentialism. Thinkers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, and de Beauvoir have illuminated this approach. They emphasize the idea that life lacks inherent meaning, compelling individuals to grapple with their own freedom, choice, and responsibility to create personal meaning in an often absurd and indifferent world. Existentialism's impact extends beyond philosophy, influencing literature, psychology, and art, promoting a focus on authentic, individualistic living. A further understanding of this theme can help an ardent reader of English literature to take note of similar themes that are prevalent in many other literart works.

The Study is divided into four other chapters post the introduction. Chapter two will deal with the broad concept of existentialism and existential thought by the various philosophers. Chapter three will deal with the analysis of the work *The Last Leaf* by O.

Henry and the existential analysis of the work will be provided along with it being substantiated with the words of the relevant thinkers. Chapter four will deal with the work *The Cop and the Anthem* in a similar manner. The concluding chapter will be aimed at summarizing the previous sections in an apt manner highlighting the important points taken from them. It will ultimately be the conclusion for the project.

Chapter II

The Broad Spectrum of Existentialism

The philosophical movement known as existentialism first gained popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in the years following World War II. It is distinguished by a stress on personal experience, autonomy, decision-making, accountability, and the purpose of life. Despite being a broad and diverse school of thinking, existentialism has some underlying themes and ideas that have been emphasized by different thinkers who have made substantial contributions to the philosophy in the form of ideas and viewpoints. The existentialist school of thought has had a significant impact on literature and art, offering a wealth of subjects, viewpoints, and sources of creative inspiration. Numerous authors, playwrights, poets, and painters have investigated existentialist concepts in their works, frequently focusing on themes of human condition, freedom, meaninglessness, and alienation.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) is arguably the most well-known existentialist thinker, who was instrumental in spreading the existentialism movement across the 20th century. His "Being and Nothingness" (Sartre) study examined human freedom, decision-making, and the idea of "bad faith" (Sartre). Existentialists believe that people construct their own meaning by their acts, and Sartre's statement that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre) captures this idea.

Søren Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) writings set the groundwork for many existentialist issues and are frequently regarded as the forerunner to existentialism. He examined the subjective experience of the individual, the essence of faith, and the difficulties of leading an authentic life. In the face of existential quandaries, Kierkegaard emphasized the significance of individual decision, passionate commitment, and the idea of the "qualitative leap" (Kierkegaard)

Although Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is not often referred to as an existentialist, his thoughts had a significant impact on the movement. Infamously declaring "God is dead" (Friedrich Nietzsche) he attacked conventional theological and moral principles. Later existentialist thinkers found resonance in Nietzsche's examination of the "will to power" (Friedrich Nietzsche) the reevaluation of values, and the idea of the "Übermensch" (Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche).

The "Being and Time" (Heidegger et al.) is a key text in Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) existentialist philosophy. He explored the idea of authenticity as well as the nature of human existence and of "Dasein" (Heidegger et al.). Dasein is a German word that means "being-there" or "existence". Heidegger, who used it to refer to the way human beings are in the world. Heidegger argued that Dasein is not a static or fixed entity, but a dynamic and relational process of understanding, interpreting, and engaging with one's own being and the being of others. Dasein is also characterized by its temporality, its finitude, its care, its freedom, and its possibility. In order to truly live, Heidegger stressed the importance of facing our death and the transience of life.

The absurd and humanity's search for meaning in an uncaring universe are central themes in Albert Camus's (1913–1960) writings. His essay *he Myth of Sisyphus* popularized the notion that people should fight against life's inherent folly by embracing their freedom and making their own purpose.

Along with other thinkers, these philosophers helped existentialism grow into a complex and multifaceted philosophical movement. All of them had a shared interest in learning more about the nature of human life, freedom, and the pursuit of meaning in a complicated and

frequently perplexing world even while they may have had various emphasis and views. The belief that human life is essentially distinct from that of other beings in the cosmos is at the centre of existentialism.

Existentialists contend that unlike objects and animals, which have a fixed essence or nature that govern their behaviour, people do not. Rather, they define their essence by their acts and decisions after existing first. A noteworthy idea is that “existence precedes essence” (Sartre). The idea that "existence precedes essence" is a cornerstone of existentialist philosophy, particularly as it relates to Jean-Paul Sartre. It encapsulates a key idea in existentialism and sets apart human life from that of other living things in the universe.

It is frequently held in traditional philosophical and religious perspectives that an entity's identity and purpose are determined by its fundamental essence or nature. For instance, according to religious beliefs, God creates humans with a unique essence and a predetermined purpose in life. In this situation, essence precedes existence. However, existentialists disagree with the notion that there is a fixed human nature or a predefined purpose. They contend that rather than having a fixed essence that defines them, humans instead generate their essence through their decisions and deeds. In other words, we define who we are through the choices we make and the way we live after we have already existed. Therefore, existence comes before essence. This idea has significant ramifications for how we view human responsibility and freedom. Humans are radically free to mould their life and choose their values and beliefs because there is no preset essence. Although this freedom can be empowering, it also carries a heavy responsibility. Each person is responsible for their decisions and needs to own their existence.

The idea of human agency is emphasized by existentialists, who exhort people to take advantage of their freedom and actively participate in the process of self-creation. They hold that we are accountable for the kind of life we lead and that our decisions matter. One of the major tenets of existentialist theory is the emphasis on human autonomy and personal accountability. Additionally, the idea that "existence precedes essence" relates to the existentialist notion of authenticity. Being loyal to oneself and accepting one's independence are all aspects of living an authentic life. Rejecting the adoption of false roles or complying with external expectations is a requirement for authenticity.

Ultimately it encompasses the existentialist understanding of individuality and human life. Existentialism underscores that people have complete freedom and responsibility to define themselves through their choices, actions, and commitments. In an uncertain and frequently ludicrous world, this idea challenges conventional ideas of fixed identities and predetermined goals and encourages people to live authentically and create their own meanings.

Authenticity and Freedom are two key ideas that are interrelated in existentialist philosophy. They are essential in comprehending human existence and the moral ramifications of personal decision-making. According to existentialism by Sartre authenticity is defined as leading a life that is consistent with one's core principles and ideals. It is the quality of being real, honest, and true to oneself in one's choices and deeds. An authentic individual takes ownership of their own life and decisions rather than caving in to social constraints or outside influences.

Existentialists contend that true life is crucial because it enables people to face their freedom and appreciate their special existence. Existentialists contend that true life is crucial because it enables people to face their freedom and appreciate their special existence. They argue

that human beings are not defined by any fixed or predetermined essence, but by their own choices and actions. They also stress the importance of authenticity, which means being true to oneself and not conforming to the expectations or norms of society or others. Admitting that there is no preset purpose or essence regulating human life is a necessary step in embracing authenticity.

Freedom is the central theme of the existentialist philosophy. Existentialists contend that humans possess radical freedom, or the capacity to make decisions without being constrained by outside factors or subject to external causes.

Existential freedom, however, involves more than just having options; it also involves the accountability that comes with those options. Individuals' responsibility for their actions and obligation to accept responsibility for the results of their choices are the burdens of freedom. This burdensome obligation may force one to face life's inherent uncertainties and cause worry. In existentialist philosophy, authenticity and freedom are closely related concepts. Recognizing and embracing one's freedom is essential to living authentically since it is only through freedom that people have the ability to mould their life and build their identity. Realizing one's freedom and being willing to accept responsibility for one's decisions are two characteristics of authenticity.

By choosing authenticity, one acknowledges that there is no outside authority or objective meaning to life and that each person must choose their own set of values and goals. People who live authentically can resist giving in to social pressures, discover who they truly are, and find meaning and fulfillment in their lives.

In short, existentialism emphasizes the distinctiveness of human existence through the core ideas of authenticity and freedom. Taking ownership of one's life, accepting freedom, and developing one's own values and meanings are all components of authentic living. Existentialists encourage people to face their fears and doubts and, through honest living, discover meaning and fulfillment in an often confusing and ludicrous world.

Existentialist philosophy frequently discusses anxiety and angst because they are important factors in determining the human experience and conception of existence. The nature of anxiety and anguish are fundamental components of the human condition that result from the inherent uncertainties and difficulties of existence as explored by existentialists. A deep-seated sensation of worry, fear, or apprehension that results from realising human freedom and the responsibility that goes along with it is referred to as anxiety in existentialism. The enormous freedom to make decisions that burdens human beings can be daunting and unsettling. Existential distress might result from being conscious of our freedom and the effects of our decisions.

The knowledge that life has no set or predestined course leads to anxiety. Without ultimate direction or outside approval of our decisions, we must negotiate a complex world. This unpredictability can be crippling, leaving people feeling lost or imprisoned in an abyss of existential dread. Instead, they exhort people to face their concern and welcome the freedom that it brings. People can learn more about their true selves and the depth of their existence by acknowledging their uneasiness.

The German word angst is frequently used to refer to a more severe and profound sort of existential worry. It expresses a profound sense of existential dread, despair, or misery brought on by realising how uncertain existence is and how worthless the cosmos is. Angst is a reflection

of loneliness and the absence of a fundamental reason for living. The experience of angst was emphasised by existentialists, particularly the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, as an essential component of human existence. He said that people need to face the overwhelming sense of futility and hopelessness that life might inspire. People might become conscious of their existential condition and the need to develop their own sense of purpose and meaning in life by doing this.

Anxiety and angst are not seen by existentialists as being intrinsically bad feelings that should be avoided or repressed. They view them as vital components of the human experience that can promote personal development and self-awareness. People can learn more about their actual selves and the true nature of existence by facing their fear and angst. Living truthfully entails admitting to angst and anxiety as well as accepting life's ambiguity. It entails accepting independence and accepting accountability for one's decisions despite any worry they might cause. In order to live authentically, one must accept the problems and contradictions of existence without looking for an untrue way out. The key motifs of existentialist thought are uneasiness and angst, which reflect the difficulties and ambiguities of human existence. Existentialists advise people to face these feelings head-on and to accept the freedom and responsibility that come with them. By doing this, people can develop a sense of authenticity and find their own meanings in a world that is otherwise unpredictable and occasionally ludicrous.

Absurdity and the Absurd are the key concepts which centre on the conflict between humanity's quest for meaning and the universe's apparent meaninglessness in existentialist philosophy, made well-known by the philosopher Albert Camus. Absurdity in existentialism refers to the tension that exists between the human yearning for meaning, order, and purpose in life and the understanding that the cosmos is uncaring and devoid of any innate meaning or

purpose. It is the sensation of being in the presence of a seemingly irrational, chaotic, and meaningless universe.

The perception of absurdity results from people's propensity to look for logical justifications and conclusive solutions to life's problems. However, given the size and complexity of the cosmos, it is impossible for us to truly understand its meaning or purpose. We are not given a master plan or overarching scheme by the cosmos to direct our lives. Albert Camus introduced the philosophical idea of the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. As a metaphor for the human predicament, Camus invokes the myth of Sisyphus, a character doomed by the gods to roll a boulder up a hill for all of eternity just to watch it roll back down again. Camus contends that Sisyphus' endless toil, which lacks any final goal or reward, is a metaphor for how people search for purpose in absurd circumstances. Despite the task's apparent meaninglessness, one must consider Sisyphus to be content since he recognizes and embraces the absurdity of his existence.

A person can construct their own values and meanings in life by embracing the absurd, recognizing that these are personal and self-selected rather than mandated by outside forces. Existentialists argue that real existence entails living in harmony with the absurd. The use of the terms absurdity and the Absurd emphasises the conflict between people's need for meaning and the universe's apparent lack of meaning. Existentialists promote confronting the Absurd, accepting one's freedom and responsibility, and developing one's own meanings and values in a world that may appear uncaring and irrational. By doing this, people discover a feeling of fulfillment and purpose even in the face of a ludicrous and unpredictable existence.

“Inter-subjectivity” (De Beauvoir) is one of the key ideas in existentialist philosophy, especially in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. They investigate how social connections and interpersonal interactions affect our sense of identity and how they shape our perceptions of ourselves.

“The Other” (Levinas) in existentialism refers to people who exist separately from oneself. It symbolises the presence of other people who have their own ideas, emotions, and viewpoints. An essential component of human existence is the interaction with ‘the Other’, which shapes our perceptions of both ourselves and the world around us. Being around the Other can be both reassuring and difficult. He uses the concept of “The Other” to describe the way human beings encounter and respond to those who are different from themselves. He argues that human beings are not isolated individuals, but are always in relation with others. He also claims that the relation with the other is not based on knowledge, power, or violence, but on responsibility, respect, and generosity. On the one hand, interpersonal connections and belongingness allow us to share feelings and experiences with others. However, the presence of the Other can be disturbing because it forces us to acknowledge that we are not the centre of the universe and that not everyone will share our viewpoints.

Inter-subjectivity, which refers to the shared experiences and comprehension that result from human interactions, is strongly tied to the idea of the other. It is the understanding that other people's ideas have an impact on and form our own subjective experiences and viewpoints. Inter-subjectivity, in other words, recognises that we exist in connection to others and that our identities are bound up with theirs. Existentialists emphasise how intricately linked the existence of one person is to that of all other people. Our experiences with the Other help us to

comprehend who we are and how the world works, and the social setting helps us to co-create our sense of identity.

In existentialism, The Other's presence and the understanding of intersubjectivity also have ethical ramifications. One person's freedom crosses paths with another person's freedom. Our decisions and deeds have an impact on both ourselves and people around us. Existentialists contend that we are accountable for the effects of our actions on others in addition to our own actions. The notion of radical individualism is opposed by this notion of inter-subjective responsibility. It emphasises how intertwined human life is and how important it is to take other people's viewpoints and well-being into account when making moral judgements.

Existentialism has come under fire for a number of things, such as pessimism, nihilism, and the absence of a cogent ethical framework. The emphasis on individuality and freedom that characterises the existentialist, can breed moral relativism and contempt for one's social and ethical obligations. One of the critics of existentialism who argued that the emphasis on individuality and freedom that characterizes the existentialist can breed moral relativism and contempt for one's social and ethical obligations was Gabriel Marcel, a French philosopher and Christian existentialist. He wrote,

The existentialist, in so far as he is a pure existentialist, is not concerned with ethics. He is concerned with existence, and existence is something which escapes all ethical categories. [...] The existentialist is not interested in the problem of good and evil, but in the problem of being and nothingness. He does not ask what he ought to do, but what he is. (Marcel)

Another critic of existentialism who made a similar point was Karl Jaspers, a German philosopher and existentialist. He wrote:

Existentialism is a philosophy of freedom, but it is also a philosophy of irresponsibility. It denies any objective basis for morality and values, and leaves everything to the subjective choice of the individual. It does not recognize any universal or transcendent norms or laws that bind human beings together in a community of reason and justice. It does not offer any guidance or direction for human action, but only a radical affirmation of human autonomy and possibility. (Jaspers)

Existentialists argue that accepting the Absurd is an opportunity for authenticity and freedom rather than a reason for despair. Individuals can embrace the Absurd and develop their own meaning and purpose by celebrating the absurdity rather than looking to others for approval or definitive answers to life's big issues. Accepting the inherent limitations of human understanding while looking for significance in the here and now and in the act of living itself is what it means to live with the absurd. This embrace of the absurd might make people feel liberated since it relieves them of the pressure to live up to social norms or traditional ideals.

Chapter III

O Henry the Last Leaf

"The Last Leaf" is a poignant short story written by American author William Sydney Porter, better known by his pen name, O. Henry. The story was first published in 1907 and has since become one of O. Henry's most famous and enduring works. In "The Last Leaf," O. Henry explores the themes of hope, friendship, and the human condition through the lens of existentialist philosophy, emphasizing the search for meaning, human connection, and freedom of choice.

The story is set in Greenwich Village, New York City, during a bleak and cold autumn. It revolves around three central characters: Sue, Johnsy, and Mr. Behrman. Sue and Johnsy are two young artists who share a small apartment and a dream of making it big in the world of art. However, their dreams are overshadowed by the onset of a severe pneumonia epidemic that is sweeping through the city.

The turning point of the story occurs when Johnsy falls seriously ill with pneumonia and becomes convinced that she will die when the last leaf falls from the ivy vine outside their window. She fixates on the leaves falling one by one, believing that when the last leaf drops, her time will be up. Sue, deeply concerned for her friend's well-being, does everything she can to nurse Johnsy back to health. She also enlists the help of Mr. Behrman, an older artist who lives downstairs and is known for his eccentricities. Mr. Behrman, despite his rough exterior, cares deeply for the two young women.

As the weather grows colder and the leaves continue to fall, Johnsy's condition worsens, and she loses hope. However, in a surprising and heartwarming twist, the last leaf on the vine

outside their window remains firmly attached, defying the autumn winds and rain. This small act of nature becomes a symbol of resilience and hope.

Without giving away the story's touching conclusion, *The Last Leaf* explores themes of friendship, sacrifice, and the enduring power of art to inspire and uplift. It reminds readers of the beauty that can be found in the smallest acts of kindness and the profound impact they can have on the human spirit, even in the face of adversity.

O. Henry's storytelling prowess shines in this short but emotionally charged narrative, making *The Last Leaf* a classic piece of American literature that continues to resonate with readers for its timeless themes and heartfelt message of hope.

Existentialism as a philosophy in the story is seen mainly in the lives of the characters of Johnsy and Old man Behrman and also in the character of Sue in some levels. The intertwined lives of the characters provide for the existence of the theme making it possible for the study. To analyze and find out the existential traits in the story we must first identify the where it comes in the story and how it is viewed. Such a theme is mostly found in the lives of the characters and so a character analysis is needed. Aligning them with the existential ideas and notions will help strengthen the relation between each character to great thinkers like Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger.

The characters in the story are people of various qualities that live life under certain influences of their own beliefs and traits. They are individually responsible for the way their lives turn out to be and the outcome can only be changed for the good or for the worse only if they are willing to make certain changes in their lives. As a result the reader can see how they

have changed their own lives for the better and for the worse and the way they enjoy or suffer the results from their actions.

Identification of the existential elements in the text holds much importance in the analysis. It involves looking for specific themes, character traits, and situations that align with existentialist philosophy. Looking for some key factors helps in this. Instances where characters experience a sense of isolation or alienation from others or from the society are examples of existential themes. In *The Last Leaf* Johnsy's illness and her obsession with the falling leaves isolate her from Sue and the outside world. This ultimately nearly leads to her death.

Existentialism often explores the idea of individual isolation and the sense of loneliness that can accompany self-awareness. Johnsy's illness and her fixation on the falling leaves create a sense of isolation. She is emotionally and psychologically distant from Sue, and her obsession with her own mortality isolates her further. It also emphasizes individual freedom and the responsibility to make authentic choices. In the story Sue and Johnsy both make choices throughout the story. Sue chooses to care for Johnsy and seek Mr. Behrman's help. Johnsy chooses to give up hope and prepare for her death. These choices reflect their individual responses to their circumstances.

Examining the characters' actions and decisions is another factor. Are they making choices that reflect their own values and beliefs? In the story, Sue's decision to care for Johnsy and Johnsy's choice to give up hope both reflect their individual responses to their circumstances. Existential anxiety or fear of death is also seen in the story as we can see Johnsy's belief that her life depends on the falling leaves reflects existential anxiety about mortality.

Looking for absurdity and meaning is another factor that helps the reader in the analysis of each work. Look for symbols or situations that convey the idea of life's inherent absurdity and

the search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. In the story, the falling leaves and the persistence of the last leaf symbolize the unpredictability of life and the quest for meaning.

Exploring whether characters engage in acts of defiance or rebellion against the absurdity of life is yet another key factor. Mr. Behrman's decision to paint the leaf can be interpreted as an act of defiance against meaninglessness of life and existence. Existentialism often delves into the depth of human emotions, including anxiety, despair, hope, and resilience. In the story Johnsy's emotional journey and her evolving attitude toward life and death are central to the story.

Identifying existential elements in a story involves analyzing the characters' thoughts, actions, and experiences in the context of existentialist themes. While not all elements may be present in every story, recognizing these themes can enhance the understanding of the characters and their existential dilemmas, adding depth to the narrative.

The reference of major theoreticians and their ideas about existentialism gives the reader a better analysis of the works. That can be done once the analysis of the major characters is done. The first character is Johnsy. Her life is not short of inspiration and something to look forward to but once she is down with pneumonia her life gets toppled down. She feels like she has lost everything in life and is awaiting death on her hospital bed.

She has a very small chance," he said. "She has a chance, if she wants to live. If people don't want to live, I can't do much for them. Your little lady has decided that she is not going to get well." I will do all I know how to do. But when a sick person begins to feel that he's going to die, half my work is useless. Talk to her about new winter clothes. If she were interested in the future, her chances would be better. (Henry)

In this passage, the doctor's assessment of Johnsy's chances for recovery and his emphasis on her desire to live or not reflects existentialist themes of choice, responsibility, anxiety, and the importance of finding meaning in life. It suggests that an individual's attitude and engagement with the future can significantly impact their will to live, which resonates with existentialist ideas about the significance of personal choices and authenticity. The doctor's statement, "She has a chance if she wants to live," (Henry) highlights the existentialist concept of freedom and personal responsibility.

In existentialism, individuals are responsible for their choices and actions, including the choice to live or not. It also shows the idea of existential anxiety prevailing in the mind of Johnsy. The passage also shows how thinking of a better future will have a better impact on the life of the person. It is a nature of existentialism to encourage individuals to create their own meaning in life, even in the face of adversity and mortality.

The character of Behrman should also be taken as an example and because his character is a contradiction to that of Johnsy. Mr. Behrman's essence, or the meaning and significance of his life, is defined through his actions. While he may not be a celebrated artist, his decision to paint the last leaf on the vine outside Johnsy's window ultimately becomes a defining act in his life. He chooses to take a risk, to create something meaningful, and to help save a life.

All of these thoughts can be associated with the contribution of Jean Paul Sartre to the studies of existentialism. He stated that "Existence precedes essence" (Sartre). Sartre is one of the most famous existentialists and is known for his emphasis on individual freedom, responsibility, and the idea that humans create their own essence through their choices.

O. Henry uses Mr. Behrman's character as opposed to the character of Johnsy to illustrate how one's existence can lead to the creation of an authentic essence, especially when individuals make choices that align with their values and impact the lives of others. This portrayal aligns with the existentialist perspective that emphasizes the significance of personal agency and the power to create meaning in a world that may initially appear devoid of inherent purpose.

Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does (Sartre). In this quote, Sartre emphasizes the idea that humans are fundamentally free, but this freedom also comes with the burden of responsibility. Our existence precedes any predetermined essence, so we must create our own meaning through our choices. We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. (Sartre)

Sartre's notion of being "condemned to be free"(Sartre) underscores the existentialist perspective that individuals must navigate the world without the comfort of predetermined meaning or purpose. Existence precedes any essential identity, leaving us with the responsibility to define ourselves. The characters of Johnsy and Behrman did the same but they did it in two different ways.

Another existential perspective is of the nihilistic thought that Johnsy undergoes through. Johnsy's feelings of nihilism and meaninglessness are evident in her thoughts and beliefs about her own mortality. While the story does not explicitly use the terms nihilism or meaninglessness, her outlook reflects these existential concepts. "When the last one falls, I must go too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?" (Henry)

Johnsy sees the falling leaves as a symbol of her own life dwindling away, indicating her belief in the inevitable and the meaninglessness of fighting against it. "I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of thinking. I want to turn loose my hold on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves" (Henry). In this quote, Johnsy expresses her weariness and lack of interest in the future, conveying a sense of resignation and indifference to life. These quotes illustrate Johnsy's existential despair and her belief that her life lacks meaning, leading her to accept her impending death.

"Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?" (Friedrich Nietzsche). This quote above is about Nihilism spoken by the prominent existential thinker Frederick Nietzsche. Nihilism is the belief that life lacks inherent meaning, value, or purpose. Nietzsche examined the consequences of nihilism and its impact on culture, morality, and human existence. Nietzsche suggests that in a nihilistic culture, the values and beliefs that once held significance lose their meaning and worth, leading to a devaluation of the highest moral and cultural ideals. Johnsy had attained a nihilistic outlook in her life as she was bedridden with pneumonia. She ultimately wished for death to get away and escape from this meaningless world. This feeling from her worsened her condition to the brink of death.

"To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering" (Friedrich Nietzsche). Nietzsche explored the idea that life inevitably involves suffering and challenges. He believed that individuals could find meaning and value in their experiences by confronting and overcoming these challenges. The character of Berhman lived through this suffering and ultimately confronted his condition. In Nietzsche's philosophy, the process of self-overcoming and the will to power were central concepts. He emphasized that individuals should not merely

endure suffering passively but actively engage with it, seeking to transform it into something meaningful and valuable. Just like what the old man did.

Another existential analysis of the work comes from the thoughts of Martin Heidegger. Martin Heidegger's existential ideas challenge traditional philosophical approaches and encourage a deeper examination of human existence. Applying Heidegger's concept of authenticity to Johnsy, we see her initially caught in a state of inauthenticity. Her obsession with the falling leaves and the belief that her life depends on them represents a form of inauthentic existence, as she is fixated on external circumstances rather than engaging with her own existence.

As the story progresses, Johnsy begins to confront the authenticity of her own choices. When she witnesses the last leaf clinging to the vine despite the harsh weather, she is confronted with the possibility of meaning and hope. This moment can be seen as her transition toward authenticity as she reevaluates her will to live and her engagement with life itself.

Behrman's character can be viewed through Heidegger's concept of "thrownness" (Heidegger et al.). Behrman, like Johnsy, is thrown into a world that he did not choose, a world where his artistic aspirations have not been fully realized. He finds himself in a modest, unremarkable existence. However, Behrman's decision to paint the last leaf can be interpreted as a response to his thrownness. He engages with the world and his own existence in a meaningful way by making a deliberate choice to create hope and meaning for Johnsy. This act exemplifies an attempt to transcend the limitations of his thrownness and engage authentically with life.

Heidegger's focus on temporal existence aligns with the changing attitudes of both Johnsy and Behrman throughout the story. Johnsy's initial despair and belief in her imminent

death give way to a more hopeful outlook as she witnesses the persistence of the last leaf. Behrman's temporal existence is also significant as he chooses to paint the leaf despite his advancing age and health concerns. This act represents a temporal engagement with the world, an acknowledgment that meaning can be found in the present moment, even in the face of the passage of time.

The analysis of the story has been done taking the notions and ideas of the three philosophers namely Jean Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. This provides concrete supporting notions about the relevance of existentialism in the story. O. Henry's *The Last Leaf* presents a poignant narrative that resonates with existentialist themes and ideas. The story follows the intertwined lives of Johnsy, Sue, and Mr. Behrman, and their experiences reflect key existential concepts such as authenticity, choice, meaning, and the confrontation of mortality. *The Last Leaf* aligns with existentialist philosophy, which challenges the reader to confront the inherent uncertainties and challenges of existence and to engage authentically with our own lives. The story reminds the reader that, in the absence of inherent meaning, the search for purpose and the resilience to confront adversity are fundamental aspects of the human experience.

Chapter IV

The Cop and the Anthem

The Cop and the Anthem is a charming and humorous short story penned by O. Henry. This delightful tale, first published in 1904 as part of O. Henry's collection "The Four Million," directs readers into the bustling streets of early 20th-century New York City, where a homeless and helpless character named Soapy embarks on an unconventional quest to escape the harsh winter cold. The narrative, while lighthearted in tone, delves into themes of freedom, choice, and transformation, all through the lens of one man's comically failed attempts to find shelter in an unexpected place.

With wit and insight, O. Henry weaves a tale that offers both entertainment and a deeper exploration of the human spirit's resilience in the face of adversity. The story can be viewed through an existentialist lens, highlighting the themes of freedom, choice, adversity, individualism, and transformation that resonate with the core ideas of existentialist philosophy. Soapy's journey from desperation to self-discovery, driven by his choices and actions, becomes a microcosm of the existentialist exploration of the human condition.

The protagonist, Soapy, is a homeless man who lives on a park bench in New York City. He fears the cold winter and wants to spend it in a warm jail cell. He tries various ways to get arrested, such as eating at a fancy restaurant without paying, smashing a shop window, harassing a woman, insulting a cop, and stealing an umbrella. However, none of these schemes work, as he is either thrown out, ignored, mistaken for someone else, or forgiven by the people he tries to offend. He fails to get what he wants despite his efforts. On the other hand, when he passes by an old church and hears an anthem playing, he feels a sudden change of heart. He decides to give up

his vagrant life and start anew. He thinks he has finally found his freedom and happiness.

However, at that very moment, a policeman arrests him for loitering and sends him to the prison he had been longing for. He gets what he wanted when he no longer wants it. The story ends with a twist that shows the irony of Soapy's situation and the cruelty of fate.

While *The Cop and the Anthem* may not be explicitly an existentialist work, it does touch on some themes that align with existentialist ideas, particularly the notion of individual freedom and choice. Soapy, the protagonist, grapples with his own existential dilemma. Existential Dilemma can be taken as the first step by which we can analyze the story relating it to existentialism. An existential dilemma is a philosophical or moral problem that arises when an individual grapples with fundamental questions about the nature of existence, the meaning of life, and their own role and purpose in the world.

Existential dilemmas often involve choices or decisions that may have profound consequences for a person's identity, values, and beliefs. These dilemmas are central to existentialist philosophy and literature, which explore the challenges of being human in an often indifferent or absurd universe. He is faced with the choice of how to live his life, even in his dire circumstances. He attempts to exercise his freedom by choosing to get arrested as a means of escaping the harsh winter conditions. However, his repeated failures to achieve this goal lead him to a moment of existential crisis, where he must confront the absurdity and meaninglessness of his actions.

Existential dilemma can also be divided into certain traits that are felt by each individual. One of the core themes of existentialism is the idea that individuals have freedom of choice and are responsible for their actions. This can lead to dilemmas when individuals must make difficult

choices and face the consequences of those choices. For example, a person might face a moral dilemma where they have to choose between personal happiness and the well-being of others.

Existentialists often grapple with questions about the meaning of life. Individuals may find themselves in a dilemma when they confront the apparent lack of inherent meaning in the universe. The character of Soapy is one such individual who has to find meaning in his absurd life. They must decide whether to embrace this lack of meaning and create their own purpose or fall into despair.

Soapy feels yet another dilemma in his life associated with the importance of living an authentic life, true to one's own values and beliefs. Individuals may face dilemmas when societal pressures or expectations push them to conform to norms and values that they do not resonate with. Choosing between authenticity and conformity can be a significant existential dilemma. The thought of existential dilemma can be associated with the combined thoughts and ideas of some prominent thinkers of existentialism.

The condition faced by Soapy and his helplessness can be related to the words of Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre and his thought that "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre) and that "Existence precedes essence" (Sartre) can directly be related to the condition of Soapy. Soapy is a free agent who can choose his own actions and goals in life. He is not bound by any moral or social rules or expectations. He chooses to live as a vagabond on a park bench, and he chooses to go to jail for the winter. He also chooses to change his life after hearing the anthem. However, with freedom comes responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. Soapy has to face the reality of his poverty, his loneliness, and his lack of purpose in life. He also has to face the irony of his

situation, where his choices lead him to opposite results than what he intended. He is alienated from society and himself, as he does not fit in any social class or role.

Another way of analyzing the story is by the feeling of Absurdity in the life of Soapy. The theme of absurdity is evident throughout the narrative, highlighting the incongruity and futility that can be found in certain aspects of life. The statement associated with Albert Camus encompasses the actions of Soapy which says that the literal meaning of life is whatever you're doing that prevents you from killing yourself". Soapy is on a mission to save himself from the bitter cold of the winter. In this way he aligns with the thought of Camus by doing whatever that prevents him from killing himself.

Absurdity refers to the idea that life is inherently irrational, chaotic, and meaningless, and that humans are constantly searching for order and logic in a world that lacks them.

Existentialism is a branch of philosophy that emphasizes the individual's freedom and responsibility to create their own meaning and values in life, regardless of external factors or influences.

One of the absurd elements in the story is the ironic contrasts between Soapy's attempts to get arrested and his failure to do so. Soapy, a homeless man wants to spend the winter in jail, where he can have a warm bed and food. He tries various methods to commit crimes, such as breaking a window, stealing an umbrella, insulting a cop, etc. However, each time he fails to get arrested, either because of his appearance, his luck, or his circumstances. For example, when he breaks a window, the cop assumes he is not the culprit and chases another man instead. When he tries to steal an umbrella, the owner turns out to be a thief himself who thinks Soapy is the rightful owner. When he insults a cop, the cop mistakes him for a drunk college student and lets

him go. These events show how Soapy's actions have no logical consequences or outcomes, and how he is subject to the whims of fate and chance.

Another absurd element is the sudden change in Soapy's attitude and decision at the end of the story. After failing to get arrested several times, Soapy walks past a church and hears an anthem playing inside. The music stirs up his memories and emotions, and he decides to reform his life and find a job. He feels a new sense of hope and dignity, and abandons his plan to go to jail. However, as soon as he makes this resolution, a cop arrests him for loitering and takes him to court, where he is sentenced to three months on Blackwell's Island. This event shows how Soapy's choice has no effect on his destiny, and how he is trapped in a cycle of absurdity.

Soapy also alienated from God and nature, as he does not find any meaning or comfort in them. He lives his life in his own ways and does not adhere to the conventional path of religion and faith. According to Heidegger, human beings are characterized by Dasein, which means "being there" (Heidegger et al.). Soapy, as a character, does not seem to exhibit the features of Dasein as described by Heidegger. He does not seem to be aware of his own existence or its possibilities.

Soapy does not seem to have any goals or projects that give meaning and direction to his life. He does not seem to care about his past or his future. He only lives in the present, trying to satisfy his basic needs and desires. He does not seem to face his own mortality or his freedom. He does not seem to make any authentic choices that reflect his values or his identity. He only follows the conventions and expectations of society, such as trying to get arrested in order to spend the winter in jail. He does not seem to have any personal relationship with God or any other transcendent source of meaning. He only hears the anthem playing in the church, but does not enter or participate in the worship.

Soapy can be seen as a non-believer in the sense that he does not believe in his own existence or its significance. He does not believe in being as such, or in being as a question that needs to be explored and answered. He does not believe in himself as a free and responsible agent who can create his own meaning and values in life. He does not believe in anything beyond his immediate situation and circumstances. He lives an inauthentic and absurd life, which is ultimately meaningless and futile

The story's humor also contributes to its sense of absurdity. O. Henry employs irony and wit to depict the absurdity of Soapy's attempts. The absurdity is heightened by the fact that Soapy's attempts are often thwarted by chance or by unforeseen circumstances. For instance, when he tries to break a window to get arrested, he accidentally hits a philanthropist instead, resulting in an unintended act of charity. Such humorous twists add to the overall absurdity of Soapy's endeavors.

Additionally, the contrast between Soapy's desperate situation and the beauty of the world around him further underscores the absurdity of his quest. Soapy's encounters with the vibrant city, the delicious aromas of food, and the heavenly strains of a church choir highlight the richness of life that he is missing out on due to his fixation on getting arrested. This contrast between the potential for joy and the narrow focus of his pursuit amplifies the absurdity of his choices.

In conclusion, *The Cop and the Anthem* by O. Henry is a story steeped in absurdity, as it portrays the comically futile and irrational efforts of its protagonist, Soapy, to escape the cold streets of New York City. The absurdity is reflected in Soapy's eccentric actions, the inversion of societal norms, humorous twists, and the stark contrast between his grim situation and the beauty

of the world around him. Through these elements, O. Henry highlights the absurdity that can be found in the pursuit of seemingly irrational goals and the unpredictability of life's outcomes.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The aim of the study kept focus on how the theme that is existentialism can be viewed in the works by O. Henry. The Concept that is underlying in the works *The Last Leaf* and *The Cop and the Anthem* both by the prominent writer O Henry was made the main outline to the study in this work. “That has in common an interpretation of human existence in the world that stresses its concreteness and its problematic character” (Abbagnano). By Abbagnano’s definition of existentialism, it means that existentialism is a philosophy that focuses on how human beings exist in the world as concrete and unique individuals who have to deal with various choices and difficulties that shape their lives. Concrete means that human beings are not general or abstract concepts, but specific and singular beings. Unique means that human beings are not identical or interchangeable, but different and original. Choices and difficulties mean that human beings are not determined or fixed by any prior essence or fate, but have to make their own decisions and face their own challenges.

The first chapter of the study gives a small introduction to the author O. Henry and his two works that is being analyzed namely *The Last leaf* and *The Cop and the Anthem*. The aim of the study is to establish how the theme of existentialism underlies in fiction and how it frequently appears as a recurring motif in O. Henry's short stories, which are set in various backgrounds and feature diverse character traits within a Western context. Identifying existentialist themes in the analysis of these stories will contribute to identifying a shared theme and concept that can be observed across all forms of fiction, particularly in short stories.

Existentialism shares certain characteristics with the short story genre and provides a unique perspective for exploring and interpreting human experiences as they are depicted in these narratives. This makes existentialism a particularly apt philosophy for analyzing short

stories. The division of the study into four other chapters helps in distinguishing and analyzing the works better.

The second chapter of the work is solely dedicated to the understanding of what existentialism is as a theory. Numerous authors, playwrights, poets, and painters have investigated existentialist concepts in their works, frequently focusing on themes of human condition, freedom, meaninglessness and alienation. The widespread thought and use of the concept is due to the efforts and ideas of prominent thinkers whose views are also given in the chapter. Jean-Paul Sartre and his concepts of “Being and Nothingness”(Sartre) , the idea of "bad faith" (Sartre) and Sartre's statement that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre) captures the idea of existentialism. The next thinker is Søren Kierkegaard whose writings set the groundwork for many existentialist issues and is frequently regarded as the forerunner to existentialism. In the face of existential quandaries, Kierkegaard emphasised the significance of individual decision, passionate commitment, and the idea of the "qualitative leap" (Kierkegaard) .

Friedrich Nietzsche is yet another great propagator who infamously declaring "God is dead" (Friedrich Nietzsche) and "will to power" (Friedrich Nietzsche). Martin Heidegger's concept of “Being and Time” (Heidegger et al.) and Albert Camus's absurdity and humanity's search for meaning in an uncaring universe are central themes to the study as well.

Studying the ideas of such great thinkers alongside a work of fiction allows for a richer and more nuanced understanding of the philosophical concepts at play within the narrative. By examining the work through the lens of existentialist philosophy, it was able to place them within the broader intellectual and philosophical context. This contextualization helps uncover the author's intentions and the philosophical underpinnings of the narrative. Existentialism often

deals with profound questions about existence, freedom, meaning, and choice. Drawing on the insights of great existential thinkers can provide valuable tools for interpreting and analyzing the themes, characters, and situations presented in the work. And so the second chapter gives the reader tools as to how the works can be analyzed according to the different authors and thinkers of Existentialism.

The third chapter is the analysis of the first work *The Last Leaf*. In the chapter the summary of the story gives the reader an insight into the story before the analysis. Existentialism as a philosophy in the story is seen mainly in the lives of the characters of Johnsy and Old man Behrman. The reference of major theoreticians and their ideas about existentialism after the character analysis gives the reader a better analysis of the works. O. Henry uses Mr. Behrman's character as opposed to the character of Johnsy to illustrate how one's existence can lead to the creation of an authentic essence, especially when individuals make choices that align with their values and impact the lives of others.

The philosophies and quotes of Jean Paul Sartre, Frederick Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger are used to substantiate the analysis. This provides concrete evidence that underscores the relevance of existentialism within the story. O. Henry's "The Last Leaf" offers a touching narrative that deeply resonates with existentialist themes and principles. The story aligns with existentialist philosophy, urging readers to confront the inherent uncertainties and difficulties of existence and to engage authentically with their own lives. It serves as a reminder that, in the absence of inherent meaning, the pursuit of purpose and the resilience to face adversity are core elements of the human experience.

Similarly, the fourth chapter is the analysis of the next work *The Cop and the Anthem*. Like the previous chapter the summary is given in short for the basic understanding of the work. The deeper exploration of the human spirit's resilience in the face of adversity in the life of the protagonist Soapy is the source of existential analysis. The narrative can be analyzed from an existentialist perspective, emphasizing the themes of liberty, decision-making, challenges, individuality, and personal growth that align with the fundamental principles of existentialist philosophy. Soapy's transformation from despair to self-realization, guided by the decisions he makes and the actions he takes, represents a miniature version of the existentialist examination of human existence.

Existential Dilemma is one of the most important crises the protagonist goes through. The ideologies of Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Martin Heidegger are used in the analysis to give us the existential traces in the life of Soapy. It depicts the hilariously fruitless and irrational endeavors of its main character, Soapy, as he attempts to break free from the frigid streets of New York City. The absurdity is evident in Soapy's eccentric behavior, the reversal of societal conventions, amusing plot turns, and the stark disparity between his grim circumstances and the beauty of the world surrounding him. Through these components, O. Henry underscores the absurdity inherent in the pursuit of seemingly illogical objectives and the unpredictable nature of life's results.

Through the careful analysis of the works substantiating it with the theories of major existential thinkers it can be said that the works indeed have underlying themes of existentialism in them along with the theories proposed by significant existentialist philosophers, it becomes evident that these works not only contain underlying themes of existentialism but also serve as compelling case studies of how existentialist ideas manifest in diverse narratives. This analysis

illuminates the profound influence of existentialist thought on literature and underscores the enduring relevance of existentialism as a lens through which to explore the complexities of human existence in art and storytelling.

The significance and relevance of the study is very relevant as well as the future applications very significant. Existentialism as a field of study holds significant importance in philosophy and beyond, and its future relevance and applications are promising. It delves into the depths of human existence, exploring themes such as freedom, choice, authenticity, and the search for meaning. Studying existentialism provides valuable insights into the complexities of the human psyche and the human condition.

Existentialism has had a profound impact on philosophy, challenging traditional philosophical approaches and opening up new avenues of thought. It has influenced a wide range of philosophical disciplines, including ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology. It also raises ethical questions related to personal responsibility, authenticity, and the consequences of one's choices. These ethical considerations continue to be relevant in contemporary discussions of morality and decision-making. It also enables authors to explore the human condition, including themes like the search for meaning, the experience of freedom, and the confrontation of mortality. These themes resonate with readers, adding depth and substance to the narrative.

As literature continues to evolve and diversify, existentialism offers a versatile framework for exploring various cultural, social, and individual perspectives. It can help authors address contemporary issues through the lens of existential thought. Future authors can innovate within the existentialist tradition, combining it with other literary genres and styles to create

fresh and engaging narratives. This fusion of existentialism with new forms of storytelling can yield innovative literary works.

Existentialism in fiction can play a crucial role in addressing mental health issues.

Authors may use existential themes to depict characters' struggles with anxiety, depression, and identity, contributing to De stigmatizing mental health discussions. Existentialist fiction can be adapted to diverse cultural settings, allowing for the exploration of existential themes within different societies and contexts. This cross-cultural approach enriches global literature.

In summary, the examination of existentialism within fiction holds importance due to its capacity to enhance character depth, captivate readers, and investigate the intricacies of human existence. Its prospective value resides in its flexibility to fit various literary styles and subjects, serving as a valuable instrument for tackling present-day concerns, nurturing analytical thinking, and enhancing the realm of literature. Existentialism's enduring pertinence in fiction guarantees its enduring role as a wellspring of inspiration and wisdom for both authors and readers.

This study has also highlighted how existentialism, as a philosophical framework, enhances our comprehension of literature by providing a perspective through which we can engage more deeply with narratives. It encourages contemplation of the choices we make, the authenticity of our lives, and the quest for purpose in a world where meaning is not readily apparent. Looking ahead, this project underscores the lasting significance of existentialism in literature and its potential to inspire authors and resonate with readers in the generations to come. As we confront evolving societal issues and navigate an increasingly intricate world, the existential examination of literature remains a valuable tool for exploring the profound questions that define our shared human existence.

In conclusion, the existential exploration of O. Henry's stories has not only enriched our understanding of his work but has also reaffirmed that literature, when imbued with philosophical depth, possesses the capacity to provoke thought, ignite introspection, and connect us to the enduring and universal aspects of our existence.

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