

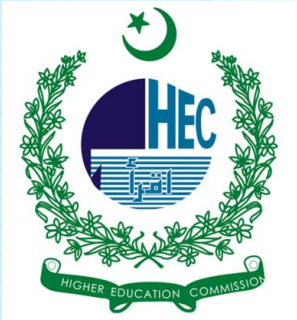
Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

Search for Meaning: A Sartrean Study of O. Henry's The Cop and the Anthem



¹Nazeef Ullah

²Dr. Ahmad Naeem

³Behishat Malook

¹MPhil Scholar Department of English Linguistics and Literature Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, D.I.Khan
nazeefullah28@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature Gomal University, D.I.Khan
anaeemk@hotmail.com

³MPhil Scholar Department of English Linguistics and Literature Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar.
behishatkhattak@gmail.com

Abstract

This research paper explores the theme of existentialism in O. Henry's *The Cop and the Anthem* through the character of Soapy by analyzing his search for meaning and purpose through the lens of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy and highlights the tension between seeking external validation and creating one's own meaning. The research also examines how institutions like the church and organized religion provide predetermined purpose and meaning but may also limit individual autonomy and authenticity by enforcing conformity to external standards and potentially hindering individuals from finding their own subjective meaning. The study used a qualitative approach, and the data was interpreted through content and thematic methods of analysis. The findings of this study underscore a fundamental critique of the church and religion, particularly in their capacity to impose standardized meanings and divine guidance which can potentially hinder individuals from contending with the complexities of subjective existential exploration. By explaining these dynamics, the research explains how such institutions may inadvertently suppress the pursuit of individual freedom and the subjective construction of existential purpose.

Key Words: Existential Crisis, O. Henry, Religion, Sartre, The Cop and the Anthem

Introduction

With the emergence of existentialism, the focus from a predefined and preordained view of existence guided and regulated by religious scriptures shifted towards the idea of “being a saint without God; being your own hero, without all the sanctions and support of religion or society” (Brookner, 1988). Although, existentialism is not metaphysics that tries to prove the presence or absence of God, and in most cases, existentialist philosophers have taken the absence of God for granted and deal with the consequences of the absence of God, but the idea of religion and the religious institutions constitutes a large portion of their critique as a source of bad faith and inauthentic existence (Reynolds, 2006). At the helm of Sartre’s existentialism is the notion that the tendency to seek guidance and direction regarding the meaning and purpose of existence is a futile idea that will result in surrendering the freedom. One of the major sources of external institutions of commanding objective purpose of

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

existence is the Church where individuals are demanded to relinquish their search for subjective meaning of existence and to surrender their freedom in the name of divine guidance and commands (Brookner, 1988).

In *The Cop and the Anthem*, O. Henry shows a searching soul grappling with his existence in an absurd and indifferent world. The journey of the protagonist reflects a profound existential crisis as he seeks to find meaning, identity, and purpose through external sources rather than forging his own subjective path. In *The Cop and the Anthem*, Soapy's repeated attempts to get arrested to secure shelter for the winter symbolize his dependence on external institutions to define his existence. This reliance mirrors the broader human tendency to seek meaning from overarching authorities or divine commands, rather than embracing the freedom and responsibility to define one's own life. Towards the end, Soapy's search for meaning culminates in the form of surrender at the altar of the church and assumes the false identity of leading a life according to the divine commands.

This paper aims to explore Soapy's struggles through the lens of Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy which asserts the necessity of self-created meaning in a purposeless universe. This research paper also argues that Soapy's existential crisis and his ultimate failure to create subjective meaning through external means serve as a critique of religion and other authoritative systems that claim to offer preordained purpose of existence. By analyzing Soapy's character through Sartrean principles, the paper will demonstrate the dangers and limitations of relying on external guidance for existential fulfillment. It will illustrate how O. Henry's story challenges the notion that meaning can be handed down from external sources and advocates instead for the existentialist belief in self-determined purpose.

Literature Review

O. Henry, the renowned American short story writer, has left an indelible mark on the literary world with his ingenious and concise tales that continue to captivate readers with their timeless appeal. His works, characterized by unexpected endings and a unique blend of humor, satire, and social commentary, have been extensively analyzed and admired by scholars and critics alike. This literature review chapter aims to synthesize the existing research on O. Henry's works, particularly his short story, *The Cop and the Anthem*, and explores the themes, literary devices, psychological

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

analysis, and social critiques that underpin his stories.

Talking about the abnormal behavior of Soapy in *The Cop and the Anthem*, Akhter (2014) argues that his personality is shaped by his fantasies, which stem from his desires. He envisions prison as a refuge from society, an idea born from his imaginative deconstruction of reality. Consequently, his sense of deprivation leads him to create a fantasy world where he is free from want. This fantasy evolves into a desire and longing that ultimately distances him from reality and leads him to deviate from normal behavior.

Similarly, O. Henry is regarded as the master of unexpected which has influenced a whole lot of subsequent American and British writers. In this regard, Zhe (2020) has analyzed *The Cop and the Anthem* along with other short stories and concludes that although the endings are unexpected and surprising, they are always relevant and align with the themes of the stories and the societal mentality. Furthermore, Zhe (2020) believes that the pluralistic nature of modern literary works, where multiple conclusions are plausible, can be traced back to O. Henry, who influenced American and British writers after the 19th century with his surprise endings.

Similarly, Qing-guang (2006) also believes that O. Henry's works have significantly influenced the evolution of American literature and left a profound impact on the literary landscape. He maintains that O. Henry writing style is remarkable for its concise and ingenious nature which features a distinctive approach that skillfully weaves together seemingly impossible elements and culminates in unexpected conclusions—often referred to as O. Henry's ending.

As a writer who always aligned with the common people, O. Henry paid special attention to the prevailing social issues, problems and injustices. Talking about this aspect of O. Henry, Lou (2016) argues that his depiction of everyday life serves as both realistic commentary and a critique aimed at social reform. Lou (2016) has analyzed *The Cop and the Anthem* from the perspectives of social criticism and realism and highlights the author's portrayal of economic and social inequalities, as well as his critique of government and the American state apparatus. He believes that the story stands high for its portrayal of state corruption and the struggles of the lower class, and it serves as a commentary on the failures and injustices of capitalism and its

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

impact on the poor. Similarly, Qing-guang (2006) also argues that *The Cop and the Anthem* showcases a meticulously crafted plot that captures trivial details and masterfully portrays Soapy's absurd behavior and by using humor O. Henry scathingly satirizes the societal ills of his time.

Furthermore, Patel (2019), also argues Soapy's story critiques a society that neglects its vulnerable members and condemns a system that punishes rather than rehabilitates. Patel (2019) maintains that *The Cop and the Anthem* underscores the absurdity of imprisoning the homeless and jobless instead of providing constructive solutions to empower them. He believes that O. Henry advocates for a more compassionate approach, emphasizing the need for systemic change to support and uplift marginalized individuals like Soapy.

According to Wen-bo (2008), O. Henry's creative genius and masterful writing skills are often cited as the reasons behind his success, but in reality it is his profound understanding of the emotions and experiences of the socially disadvantaged that truly sets his short stories apart. His remarkable insight into the lives of the marginalized and his ability to capture the intricacies of their struggles, desires, and destinies have resonated deeply with readers. Wen-bo (2008) argues that through *The Cop and the Anthem*, O. Henry sheds light on the often-overlooked aspects of American society and reveals the complexities and challenges faced by those frequently relegated to the fringes.

Similarly, Li (2023) has extensively analyzed the literary mastery of O. Henry's *The Cop and the Anthem*, with a particular focus on its rhetorical and semantic shades. Li (2023) has systematically examined the short story's use of figurative language including similes, metaphors, metonymy, personification, euphemisms, irony, and syllepsis. Li (2023) believes that the skillful use of these literary devices plays a great role in conveying meaning, tone, and themes, and has demonstrating their pragmatic functions within the context of the story.

On the other hand, O. Henry is also regarded a great master of the feelings and emotions of love. In that regard, Omar (2018) has conducted a research study comparing O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi" with works by Oscar Wilde and Henrik Ibsen to explore themes of sacrifice. He found that Jim and Della in "The Gift of the Magi," the nightingale in Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose," and Nora Helmer

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

in Ibsen's "A Doll's House" all make sacrifices for spiritual and emotional fulfillment over material gain. Omar concludes that while all three authors critique materialism and advocate for the spirit of sacrifice, O. Henry's story is unique in having the lovers sacrifice for each other directly, unlike the third-party sacrifice in Wilde's story and the ego-driven sacrifice in Ibsen's play. This comparison underscores O. Henry's belief in the redemptive power of selfless love and moral values.

Furthermore, Zafarovna (2021) argues the often admired aspects of O. Henry's writing style plays great role in explaining his philosophy of love. Zafarovna (2021) argues that the irony in *The Gift of the Magi* serves to highlight the deep mutual love between Della and Jim, rather than mock their seemingly futile sacrifices. She believes the irony elicits admiration for their pure love and turns it into a powerful tool to engage readers. Zafarovna concludes that O. Henry uses irony to elevate the couple's love and prompts his readers to reflect on the true nature and purpose of love, sacrifice, and what is truly valuable in life.

Research Method and Theoretical Framework

This research is conducted through qualitative method of research. The Cop and the Anthem serves as the primary source of data for this research paper while Sartre's *Being and Nothingness, Existentialism is Humanism*, research articles by other scholars, magazines, journals etc. serve as the secondary sources of data. For the analysis of the research data, the researchers used Thematic Analysis and Content Analysis methods.

The term "existentialism" was first coined by Gabriel Marcel to describe the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, who later embraced this label in his 1945 lecture "Existentialism is Humanism." Existentialism is a philosophical framework that delves into human existence, stressing the importance of subjective experience, authenticity, and individual relationships (Warnock, 1970). It examines the purpose, meaning, and value of human life, considering various possibilities and interactions with objects and others. This definition of existentialism is deeply rooted in intellectual history, particularly connected to Sartre's work and the postwar writings of his contemporaries (Barnes, 1967).

Crowell (2011) observes that existentialism evolved into a cultural movement in 1940s-1950s Europe, involving philosophers like Heidegger, Jaspers, and Buber.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

However, this characterization as a movement has been contentious. Scholars such as Khawaja (2016) argue that labeling existentialism as a movement leads to confusion about its boundaries, as many who were called existentialists either did not identify with the term or outright rejected it. Instead, Khawaja (2016) views existentialism as a tradition where ideas are transmitted and transformed across generations, influencing each other.

Webber (2018) interprets existentialism as an ethical theory that emphasizes freedom as the foundation of all values. This approach allows existentialism to impact various fields such as social psychology, moral philosophy, and psychotherapy. Crowell (2020) integrates Webber's view with Khawaja's, noting that both highlight authenticity as a core element of existentialist thought. Existentialists argue that understanding human existence requires new categories that transcend traditional modes of thought, rejecting the notion of humans as mere substances or subjects. Instead, they advocate for a phenomenological approach that seeks to comprehend human existence in ways that surpass conventional scientific explanations.

In the philosophical tradition of existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre's central argument is that 'existence precedes essence.' This means that individuals exist first, and only later do they define their purpose and meaning through their choices and actions, rather than being guided by any preconceived essence (Sartre, 2007, p. 2). Sartre illustrates this concept with the example of a paper-knife, which is crafted with a specific purpose in mind. Unlike a paper-knife, human existence is not predetermined by any divine or natural essence (Sartre, 2007, p. 3). Historically, religion provided a framework for human existence, with God as the creator who knew the purpose of each individual. Subsequently, philosophers shifted focus to human nature, still maintaining that essence precedes existence. Sartre challenges this view, arguing that human existence is defined not by any predetermined essence but by individual choices and experiences (Sartre, 2007, p. 5).

Sartre out rightly rejects the notion that God or universal human nature dictates human existence. Instead, he posits that individuals exist first and must then create their own meaning and purpose through their choices and actions. Only through their deeds can individuals define themselves and establish their own essence. Sartre concludes that there is no fixed human nature or divine plan, asserting that "man is

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

nothing else but that which he makes of himself," emphasizing the profound freedom and responsibility of each individual (Sartre, 2007, p. 7).

Webber (2018) elucidates that Sartre uses "essence" in a teleological sense, referring to a property that enables something to perform a specific function. For instance, a house's essence is to provide shelter, achieved through its structural components like the roof and walls. In stark contrast, humans come into existence without a predetermined essence or purpose. They are free to choose and create their own meaning, thus shaping their essence through their lived experiences (Crowell, 2020). This principle forms the core and foundation of Sartre's existentialism.

Sartre's existentialism underscores the importance of individual freedom and responsibility. It challenges traditional notions that confine human existence within predefined frameworks, advocating instead for a life where meaning and purpose are forged through personal choices. This existential freedom, however, comes with the burden of responsibility, as individuals must continuously navigate the consequences of their actions, shaping their essence in an ever-evolving process of self-definition. Sartre's philosophy thus invites individuals to embrace their freedom and the weight of responsibility that comes with the power to define their own existence.

Discussion and Analysis

O. Henry's short story *The Cop and the Anthem* is a story of a searching soul for its meaning, identity, and purpose in this absurd world. The central character, Soapy, is conscious enough to struggle at finding some meaning for his existence, but instead of trying to create subjective meaning of his existence, he tries to find it from some other sources. Ultimately, the story becomes an existentialist criticism of religion, which tries to provide meaning and purpose to the searching souls in the form of commands pre-planned by an overarching God divinely. The story is very rich in symbolism, and all existentialist criticism is carried through specific symbols. The harsh winter is coming, and Soapy wants to go to the Island (Prison). For this purpose, he tries to commit petty crimes in different parts of the city so that he might be caught and sent to the Island. The selection of the areas where Soapy goes and expects some relief is not free of purpose. The different parts of the city are the different aspects of life that stand as symbols for different sources of guidance for the existence of humanity. The prison itself stands as a symbol of a condition where Soapy can shield himself and

shun away from his freedom and the subsequent burden of responsibility.

Thapliyal and Chelliah (2016) are of the opinion that the inability of the church to provide any last resort to Soapy is a criticism of the lack of constructive interference on the part of religion and religious institutions. However, from the existentialist perspective, this short story is a criticism of the church and religion that perceive human existence in the light of a grand divine purpose for the fulfilment of which human life came into existence. The church considers individuals to sacrifice their personal ambitions, surrender their individual desire for freedom, and dedicate themselves to live their lives under the commands ordained in the divine scripts. On the other hand, the death of God and the diminished role of the Church in regulating the lives and affairs of people is central to existentialism of Sartre. The major concern of Sartre is not to deny the existence of God, rather he supposes the unreality of God and moves forward to the consequences that come as a result of the absence of God. He is concerned not only with the idea that God does not exist but also claims that we have to face all the consequences of God's absence (Crowell, 2011). For Sartre, the absence of God entails a different kind of world full of absurdity, anguish, and despair on one hand, and on the other hand, it also presents a next level of opportunities.

In other words, the norms and values that we consider as inevitable for human life are not lying somewhere outside in the world or inside human nature that can be discovered. Instead, they are to be invented, crafted, and created through the choices we make for ourselves as our identity. It is this misconception of Soapy that is a point of concern. He does not think for a moment that he does not need any external authority to prescribe a course of action for his life; rather, he himself has the power, ability, and opportunity to create meaning based on his own subjective understanding of existence. Talking about this radical freedom, Westphal (2012) says that on the darker side, it involves an enormous burden of responsibility without any guidance or guarantees that lead an individual towards anguish, forlornness, and despair. But on the brighter side, we are free from God and the Good and any Reason that would tell us who we are and how we should live prior to our choosing how to answer those questions (p. 336). Soapy was attacked mainly by the darker side of the absence of God, and he did not realize that the absence of any meaning and purpose in his existence did not mean to search it outside in the false hope and expectations that it

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

could be discovered as it was laying hidden somewhere, and failed to realize that it provides an opportunity to truly become who he was. In this misjudged and misguided struggle, he was eventually entrapped by the church and its calling and teaching convinced him who he was and what he should do in the process of fulfilling his already defined purpose of existence.

This is where the misguided Soapy in *The Cop and the Anthem* is going and is unable to understand, and this is what he is faced with. This is his dilemma. On one hand, he has this realization that he has been put in a situation where there is no apparent purpose and identity, but on the other hand, he is also misguided that instead of trying to give meaning to his own existence through his own attempts at creating values, he is in search of some system of values where he can find the purpose of his existence. Eventually, he falls prey to the trap of religion and the persuasions of the church.

Westphal (2012) says that Sartre saw the threat presented by the existence of God in creating a Mega Gaze that envelops everyone and thus creates universal Bad Faith (p. 336). So, the only solution provided by Sartre is to become God himself and absolve the self from the limitations of its definition by others. Soapy fails to understand this point, and he still searches for other gazes to define him who he was. In this struggle, he somehow secures himself in the beginning but eventually is subjugated by the Church to become submissive to the gaze of God and then define himself accordingly. Hence, O. Henry shows that threats and dangers posed by the church in leading an individual to surrender his freedom and abandon his own attempts at creating meaning and values.

The existentialist tone is set in the setting of the story. Soapy is sitting in a square where the path goes in every direction in the outdoors. This signifies the beginning of our existence without any prior purpose and identity. However, a path toward the outdoors goes in every direction, and one can give any course to one's life through the given freedom and the available choices. Akhter (2014) concludes that Soapy is governed by his fantasy generated by his desires, and the idea of prison as developed by his fantasy is an imaginative deconstruction of reality as he wants to find an escape from society and find refuge in a prison by committing a crime. Hence, his own deprivation worked upon his mind to create a world of fantasy where he is no

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

longer faced with that deprivation. This fantasy later on developed into a desire and longing that eventually led him away not only from reality but also deviated him from a normal course of action. However, from an existentialist point of view, it is not the power of fantasy and desire due to which Soapy wants to go to the prison. It is the burden of responsibility and absurdity of existence from which he wants to escape in some form of Bad Faith. Kalelioglu (2019) believes that symbolism is not only an artistic way of expression for O. Henry but a means through which the gap between the reader and the author is eliminated, and a direct relation is established between them. Here too, O. Henry resorts to this technique, and the realization of absurd existence is symbolized in the coming of the harsh winter. The cold is not actually a physical cold but the shuddering and chilling realization of existence without any prior purpose and the subsequent fear and burden of responsibility that accompanies freedom. The invisible narrator says, "A dead leaf fell in Soapy's lap. That was Jack Frost's card." (Henry, 1953, p. 37). After this realization and a blank book of existence, it was Soapy's responsibility and opportunity to write anything, but he set on a journey that was futile and bound to diminish his subjective individual existence.

However, this journey from a blank square along with the possibility to choose any direction does not give any solace and comfort to Soapy. Instead of working as the cartographer of his own life to choose and make his own way, he succumbs to the fear and anguish, and it is this fear of responsibility from which Soapy runs away and tries to find refuge in something where he can remain hibernated from the duty of creating his own identity and meaning. Akhter (2014) believes that the idea of Prison is actually the idea of total satisfaction with one's own conditions. However, in existentialist terms, this total satisfaction of Soapy sometimes finds expression in terms of living life according to his own subjective meaning of existence, and at other occasions, it symbolizes refuge in some inauthentic existence from the burden of responsibility. This place of hibernation is symbolized in the idea of Prison where Soapy would be able to live an inauthentic life without any remorse. The narrator says that "The hibernatorial ambitions of Soapy were not of the highest... three months on the Island was what his soul craved. Three months of assured board and bed and congenial company, safe from Boreas and bluecoats, seemed to Soapy the essence of things desirable." (p. 37-38).

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

However, Soapy is also not someone who would live an inauthentic life from any source that is offered to him. He is an inquisitive soul and cannot be made oblivious easily to the realization of a purposeless existence or to easily fall prey to the gaze of the others. In fact, he hates all the available guidance and philosophies about the purpose of human existence because of the fact that he had to accept them blindly and with the condition of surrendering his own attempt at discovering his own existence for his own self. He is worried about the fact that he not only had to accept those philosophies but actually, in return, he had to surrender his freedom and kill his own individuality. He contemplates about this aspect of the available guidance and agrees that “There was an endless round of institutions, municipal, and eleemosynary, on which he might set out and receive lodging and food accordant with the simple life.” (p. 38).

However, such a life that depends upon the guidance and wisdom of others will also be merely living a simple life like a Thing-in-Itself, and the individual will be required to sacrifice and surrender his soul for it. Soapy himself realizes this existential humiliation, and the narrator says that “But to one of Soapy’s proud spirit, the gifts of charity are encumbered. If not in coin, you must pay in humiliation of spirit for every benefit received at the hands of philanthropy.” Soapy is well aware that any help provided by “charity must have its toll of a bath, every loaf of bread its compensation of a private and personal inquisition.” (p. 38).

Thus, he knows very well the price he has to pay, and in his own misjudged assumption, he thinks that he had rejected the already available philosophies in the form of the prior purpose of human existence, but at the same time, his struggle and attempts at finding meaning and purpose are aimed again at finding some external sources of guidance. Lou (2016) believes that Soapy is the symbol of the sad fact that how much difficult it is in contemporary society to take the path of reformation and be accepted. However, what Lou (2016) misses here is the fact that Soapy was in search of reformation but his path towards it was misguided and misjudged. He is misjudged in the sense that instead of realizing that he has to create values himself, he tries to discover them, which proves to be a Cartesian Circle at the end.

The first attempt that he makes is that of an epicurean to revel in the luxuries of life. He tries to avoid the bitter realization of creating his meaning by posing an

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

agnostic attitude towards it. He knows that the easiest way to get escapism was to become indifferent towards it. He contemplates that among the different methods to find solace and comfort from the absurdity of existence, “the pleasantest was to dine luxuriously at some expensive restaurant; and then, after declaring insolvency, be handed over quietly and without uproar to a policeman. An accommodating magistrate would do the rest.” (p. 39).

For this purpose, Soapy goes to the place “where are gathered together nightly the choicest products of the grape, the silkworm, and the protoplasm.” (p. 39). However, this place of flesh and carnival is unable to sustain him because he is not a person who would revel in sensual pleasures as he goes there in a getup of “his neat black, ready-tied four-in-hand” (p. 39) that was given to him by a missionary lady that symbolized his controlled self. Eventually, he is turned down from that place with the realization that the path of indifference and agnosticism was not meant for him and he must find another way as “It seemed that his route to the coveted Island was not to be an epicurean one. Some other way of entering limbo must be thought of.” (p. 39)

Soapy makes several attempts at different sources symbolized by throwing stones at glass windows, taking hands of women, stealing an umbrella from another person by force, all with the purpose and intention to find some route of escape from his present existence and reach the desired Island of refuge, but he has never succeeded at gaining access to the Island. The main reason for his failure is his own dissatisfaction with those identities and meanings of existence. Each time he retreats from pursuing that identity, as none of them is able to give him any refuge and satisfaction symbolized as the Island. After each attempt, he measures himself, finds dissatisfaction, sheds that identity, and moves ahead in life. The narrator says that “He rose, joint by joint, as a carpenter’s rule opens, and beat the dust from his clothes. Arrest seemed but a rosy dream. The Island seemed far away.” (p. 40).

A world without God and existence without any obvious purpose become hard for many to survive and create their own identity. Along with reverting to an inauthentic life, some feeble and sensitive souls might contemplate putting an end to life. The narrator gives an impression of this condition where Soapy, disheartened and disappointed, reaches on the verge of committing suicide due to the absurdity of existence. O. Henry has symbolically shown him to be in a condition of life where he

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

became alienated, dejected, isolated, and depressed. But Soapy shows his strong sense of survival as he is saved from committing suicide due to his inherent love to stick to this world no matter how absurd his existence was. This period of depression, colored with suicidal thoughts and the overcoming desire for living, is described in a symbolic and metaphorical manner. The narrator says that after making many failed attempts to find some source to reach the desired Island, “At length Soapy reached one of the avenues to the east where the glitter and turmoil were but faint. He set his face down this towards Madison Square, for the homing instinct survives even when the home is a park bench.” (p. 41)

It is this mixture of fear and desire of existence coupled with the inability to create his own identity that eventually brings him to the Church from where “a soft light glowed” and “drifted out to Soapy’s ears sweet music that caught and held him transfixed against the convolutions of the iron fence” (p. 41). Here, Soapy is held firmly. For the first time in his existence, he found some satisfaction and his thoughts became still and calm symbolized through his realization of the peaceful and calm surroundings that he never realized before. His association with the church brought a new perspective of life in him. All his inner thoughts, confusions, sense of loneliness, and absurdity at once came to an end, and he found refuge in life as a child finds in the lap of his mother. However, the existentialist criticism is very loud and bitter because the whole episode is presented like the funeral ceremony over the death of a free soul. The narrator says that the scene was like that of a churchyard, and the anthem played on the piano was the final notes played for the dead body because it cemented Soapy to ‘the iron fence’ and clipped the wings of his free spirit. It changed Soapy from someone who was not satisfied with mere living and wanted to find the true purpose of his existence and reverted him back to the ordinary existence of spending an inauthentic life with mothers, friends, and ‘immaculate thoughts’. However, the last word that comes to Soapy’s mind during that condition is ‘collars’ that symbolizes the restrictions if taken in the sense of the collar of a clergyman as well as also hints at living a life of blind devotion and unconditional loyalty if taken in the sense of the collar of a dog. This new outlook of Soapy is symbolically discussed in the following lines:

The moon was above, lustrous and serene; vehicles and pedestrians were few,

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

sparrows twittered sleepily in the eaves--- for a little while the scene might have been a country churchyard. And the anthem that the organist played cemented Soapy to the iron fence, for he had known it well in the days when his life contained such things as mothers and roses and ambitions and friends and immaculate thoughts and collars. (p. 41)

All of a sudden he is entrapped. The effect of the church is quite visible on him as he decides to start living an inauthentic life by finding refuge in the church and religion from the burden of responsibility. Perhaps he felt the guilt of conscious at surrendering his freedom that's why he is trying to console himself by reminding himself of the anguish and burden of responsibility. While reflecting upon those days of self-discovery, his tone and terminology at once become that of a clergyman. The narrator says, "He viewed with swift horror the pit into which he had tumbled, the degraded days, unworthy desires, dead hopes, wrecked faculties, and base motives that made up his existence." (p. 42)

Towards the end, we see that Soapy completes his Cartesian Circle and comes to the same place from where he started. The church has taken complete hold of him as "those solemn but sweet organ notes had set up a resolution in him" and he makes a firm resolution that "he would conquer the evil that had taken possession of him." (p. 42). Soapy goes deeper and deeper in his self-deception because the first thing he decides to do is to go and find the 'fur importer' who once offered him a job. Fur is a symbol for the false identity and through it refuge from the chilling cold symbolizing self-realization. Here, O. Henry suggests that the church not only stopped Soapy from exercising his freedom and creating a subjective meaning for his existence but also made him a part of the lot that is bent at spreading self-deception to others in the name of a divine message.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated how O. Henry's *The Cop and the Anthem*, through the character of Soapy, illustrates the peril of seeking external guidance in the search for meaning. Through a Sartrean lens, we have seen how Soapy's reliance on external institutions and divine commands ultimately leads to a surrender of his freedom and authenticity. Towards the end, the short story becomes a powerful critique of religious and authoritative systems that claim to provide preordained

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

purpose and highlights the dangers of bad faith and inauthentic existence. Soapy's struggles and ultimate failure to forge his own subjective meaning of existence and his reliance upon external means underscore the importance of embracing our own subjective path and forging our own purpose. By relying on external sources to define our existence, we risk surrendering our freedom and autonomy, leading to a life of bad faith and inauthenticity. In contrast, Sartre's existentialist philosophy offers a liberating alternative which emphasizes the individual's freedom and responsibility to create his own subjective meaning in life and purpose of existence.

References

- Akhter, S. (2014). Behind the surprised endings of O Henry's short fiction: Fantasy (Psychology) and O Henry's material reality. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, II (V), 1-15.
- Barnes, H. E. (1967). *An Existentialist Ethics*. New York: Knopf
- Brookner, A. (1988). *Writers at Works*. Eighth Series. George Plimpton Reynolds (Ed.).
- Crowell, S. (2011). *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Crowell, S. (2020). *Existentialism*. Retrieved May 13, 2022, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>
- Henry, O. (1953). *The Complete Works of O. Henry*. Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York
- Khawaja, N. (2016). *The Religion of Existence: Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. P. 4.
- Kalelioglu, M. (2019). *Multidisciplinary Approach to the Texts: Semiotic Analysis of the Process of Meaning Construction in O. Henry's The Gift of the Magi*. Mardin Artuklu University.
- Li, Y. (2023). Textual Analysis of The Cop and the Anthem From the Perspective of Functional Stylistic. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, 8(5), 1-15.
- Luo, L. (2016). Analysis of Social Criticism in O. Henry's Short Stories. 3rd International Conference on Education, Management and Computing Technology (ICEMCT 2016), 565-568.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

- Omar, S., H. (2018). The Nature of Sacrifice in O Henry's The Gift of the Magi, Wilde's The Nightingale and the Rose, and Ibsen's A Doll's House. *Journal of Garmian University*, 5(1), 1-15.
- Patel, R. (2019). O. Henry's The Cop and the Anthem: A Predicament of Human Existence. *International Journal of Advance and Innovative Research*.
- Qing-guang, W. (2006). On Figures of Speech in The Cop and the Anthem. *Journal of Southwest Agricultural University*.
- Reynolds, J. (2006). Understanding Existentialism. *Understanding Movements in Modern Thoughts*.
- Sartre, J. (2007). *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. (A. Elkaïm-Sartre & A. Cohen-Solal, Eds.) (Annotated ed.), New York.
- Thapliyal, K., & Chelliah, S. (2016). O. Henry, Work of Outstanding Artistry in the Story The Last Leaf. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, 4(2), 244-247.
- Warnock, M. (1970). *Existentialism*. Oxford University Press
- Wen-bo, Z. (2008). Analyzing O. Henry's Writing Style in "The Cop and the Anthem". *Journal of Jilin Teachers Institute of Engineering and Technology*.
- Westphal, M. (2012). *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Purdue University Press.
- Webber, J. (2018). *Rethinking Existentialism*. Oxford University Press.
- Zafarovna, F., Z. (2021). The Usage of Irony in O Henry's Story The Gift of the Magi. *EPR International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)*, 6(6), 1-15.
- Zhe, W. (2020). O. Henry-Style Ending and Its Influence. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 17(6).