

## EXPLORING *THE ITCH*: THE PROTAGONIST'S EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AND THE HUMAN SEARCH FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE

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### Abstract

*The study explores Farrukhi's The Itch through an existentialist lens, emphasizing the protagonist's search for meaning and the portrayal of the human condition. The study explores the protagonist's existential crisis through the symbol of the itch, reflecting the broader human search for meaning and purpose. Grounded in Sartre's existentialist theory, which emphasizes individual freedom and the creation of personal meaning, the research examines how the protagonist's experiences and choices shape his understanding of himself and the world around him. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, analyzing the narrative structure and symbolic elements of the text to uncover how the itch functions as a metaphor for the protagonist's internal struggle with the lack of inherent meaning in life. By applying Sartre's concept of "existence precedes essence," the research highlights how the protagonist's search for meaning arises from his confrontation with an indifferent world, leading to both existential anxiety and moments of self-creation. The findings suggest that the itch symbolizes the persistent, unresolved desire for purpose in the face of existential freedom.*

### 1.0 Introduction

Existentialism is a philosophical approach that examines the meaning of human existence, focusing on thought, emotion, and action (Sartre, 1958). Existential crises are a fundamental aspect of the human experience, often arising when individuals confront the uncertainty and seeming meaninglessness of life. Literature explores the search for meaning and purpose as characters grapple with existential dilemmas. In many narratives, the portrayal of a character's internal conflict becomes a powerful tool for understanding the complexity of the human condition. One such metaphor is the "itch," which symbolizes a persistent, unresolved yearning for fulfilment or clarity in the face of life's uncertainties. The present study explores how the protagonist's existential crisis is symbolized through the itch, highlighting the broader human struggle to find meaning and purpose in a seemingly indifferent world.

The theoretical framework guiding this research is existentialism, particularly the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, who argues that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre, 1967). Sartre's philosophy emphasizes that humans are not born with a predefined purpose; instead, they must create their meaning through choices and actions. This radical freedom is both empowering and burdensome, often leading to feelings of anxiety and isolation as individuals realize the absence of inherent meaning in the world. Sartre's concept of "nausea" captures this disorienting realization of life's meaninglessness, which drives the individual to seek purpose and identity despite the overwhelming void. By applying existentialist principles, this study aims to analyze the protagonist's struggle with meaning, symbolized through the metaphor of the itch, and how this reflects the broader human search for purpose.

In examining the protagonist's existential crisis, the study will utilize a qualitative approach to analyze the narrative structure and symbolism in the text. The itch is an integral symbol within the protagonist's journey, representing not just a physical discomfort, but a deeper psychological conflict. Through careful analysis of the protagonist's internal dialogue and interactions with the world around him, the research will explore how the itch mirrors his frustration with the lack of meaning in his life. The character's choices and actions will be

evaluated in light of existentialist ideas, especially the notion that individuals must actively create meaning through their lived experiences. The research will consider how the protagonist's choices, driven by his existential yearning, shape his perception of self and the world.

The itch symbolizes the human condition itself: a constant, restless pursuit of purpose amidst the vast unknown. Through the protagonist's internal conflict and search for meaning, the study will demonstrate how existentialist themes such as freedom, responsibility, and self-creation are explored in literature. Ultimately, this research offers insights into how symbols like the itch can illuminate the existential struggles that define human existence, providing a deeper understanding of the ways in which individuals navigate their search for meaning in an often indifferent world.

### **1.2 Problem Statement**

The problem this study addresses is the protagonist's struggle with existential meaning in Farrukhi's *The Itch*, where an "itch" symbolizes the pervasive human quest for purpose within a seemingly indifferent world. Despite individual freedom to shape meaning, as emphasized by Sartre's existentialist theory, the protagonist faces an internal conflict, confronting the void of inherent purpose that produces existential anxiety yet also offers moments of self-discovery. This research problem thus centres on understanding how existential crises, symbolized by the itch, reflect the broader human condition of seeking significance in an unfixed, ambiguous existence.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the way the protagonist's existential crisis reflects the broader human search for meaning and purpose.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How does the protagonist's existential crisis reflect the human search for meaning and purpose in the selected text?

### **1.5 Rationale of the Study**

The current study explores the meaning of life and human existence in Farrukhi's short story *The Itch*. The story raises important questions about the purpose of life, suffering, and the human condition. By analyzing the protagonist's struggles with a mysterious itch, this study uncovers insights into the human experience of pain, identity, and mortality. It shows the way people cope with uncertainty and the search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

### **2.0 Literature Review**

Existentialism is a philosophical approach that examines the meaning of human existence, focusing on thought, emotion, and action (Sartre, 1958). Although 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialists had differing views, they generally rejected academic philosophies as disconnected from real-life experiences. Kierkegaard, often seen as the first existentialist, argued that individuals must create and embrace life's meaning authentically (Sartre, 1967).

Some scholars argue that "existentialism" refers specifically to the European cultural movement of the 1940s-1950s (Jaarsma, et. al. 2016). According to Sartre's existentialism, existence comes before essence, which means that people reject predetermined essences and define themselves via their lived experiences. This viewpoint runs counter to the idea of inherent essence held by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas (Plantinga, 1983).

Existential crises are times of confusion and intense anxiety when someone is attempting to answer the question, "Who am I" (Andrews, M. 2016)? Webber (2018) interprets Sartre's concept of essence as teleological because it reflects a purpose, like a house designed to provide shelter, while humans define their purpose freely.

Harris' (2009) study highlighted how Sartre's philosophy influences Cortázar's depiction of nothingness and the challenges of finding meaning. Jing (2021) explored existentialism focusing on struggles of the characters with identity and the search for meaning. The study revealed that existential angst, embodied in loneliness, arises from their conflicts with the past. The characters illustrate life's unpredictability and the closeness of death, driving their quest for purpose. Jing (2021) emphasizes the English patient's identity crisis as reflective of the broader exploration of existence, with war's uncertain circumstances enhancing their plight and the themes of loss and memory in a chaotic world.

Another study presented the results of empirical research of the problem of experiencing by an individual of the existential crises (Senkevich, L. V. 2016). A study reveals existentialism deeply intertwined with social justice (Sutanto et al., 2017). Naem and Janoory (2019) conducted a study on the existential predicament perspective in selected novels of Mahfouz. They discussed that the majority of the characters, Mahfouz established, entered into identity and existential conflict statuses. Since philosophy's inception in antiquity, the question of why humans exist has been researched and discussed (Barrett, W. 1964).

In today's secular society, marked by moral and material crises affecting human well-being, the article examines existential crises from social, psychological, medical, and spiritual perspectives, highlighting interdisciplinary respect between science and theology (Nistor, P. P. 2017).

Khadafi (2021) suggested that the story echoes the features of the feminist existentialism since the main character fights for the liberation in the horrors of marriage. The loud sound of joy the protagonist makes upon being informed of her husband's death is equivalent to the desire for liberty. Existential themes of hopelessness were also evident in the analysis as the story's protagonist becomes aware of her insignificance in society, hence the meaninglessness of life. It was deemed that Chopin's choice of words is rather appropriate to describe the protagonist's inner processes and existential struggling. Complementarily, this research enables readers to grasp the heartfelt sentiments as well as the philosophical concepts represented in Chopin's narrative as a fusion of feminism and existentialism.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

This study employs qualitative research method. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning and experiences of individuals or groups. In this study, the researchers explore the themes and symbols in the selected short story (Creswell, 2013). The data collection procedure for this study involves close reading of the selected short story.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

The current study adopts existentialism as its theoretical framework, a philosophy that highlights the individual's freedom, responsibility, and the creation of personal meaning in life. Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion that "existence precedes essence," means that humans are not born with a predefined purpose or essence; rather, they must define themselves through their actions and choices (Sartre, 1967). This radical freedom places the burden of meaning on the individual, who must navigate the complexities of life without relying on external guidance or pre-arranged values. In Sartre's view, humans are "condemned to be free." It means that they must take responsibility for their actions, which can lead to a sense of isolation and anxiety as they confront the absence of inherent meaning in the world (Sartre, 1943).

In the context of the current study, existentialism offers a lens through which the protagonist's experiences, particularly the metaphor of the itch, can be understood as symbolic of an existential crisis. The itch represents an unfulfilled desire for meaning and purpose, signalling the protagonist's struggle in a world that seems indifferent to his quest for significance. According to Sartre, individuals face a frequent confrontation with the "nausea" of existence,

an overwhelming recognition of lives inherent meaninglessness (Sartre, 1938). This sense of existential discomfort motivates the protagonist to search for his own meaning, even as he grapples with the limitations and challenges that come with existential freedom. Through Sartre's framework, the study can explore how the protagonist's choices and experiences are central to his understanding of self and the world, emphasizing his active role in creating meaning despite the existential void around him.

#### 4.0 Data Analysis

According to Sartre (1958), existentialism is concerned with subjective experience, liberty and commitment. In *The Itch*, the itch stands for the main character's existentialist conflict. The itch is an allergy for spiritual conflict and a desire to find the purpose of life. This is evident in the story due to the protagonist's ceaseless itching, which depicts his struggle to seek comfort and meaning in selfish society. This symbol represents the existentialist belief that people are self-defining in that they make their own meaning out of the world and their experiences. The itch compels the main character face the realities of his life and concern him with the purpose of living.

Plantinga (1983) explained existentialism that humans exist first and then decides what they are to be. This requires people identify themselves through their behaviour and occurrences that surround them and not due to some inherent nature. Existentialism generally focuses on the concepts of the meaning of life and the search for meaning in the context of life and universe. The desire in *The Itch* is an example of this irrationality. The mode of the protagonist's confrontation with the itch can also be viewed as the struggle of the hero with the meaningless of life. He cannot escape the problem of the meaningless of life and has to set the meaning for himself. Thus, the itch stands for the main existentialist concept of the novel the protagonist's identity, freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning.

"He first felt the itch as a tiny formation in his arm; something that was almost imperceptible but as days went by, it grew, spreading its roots deeper and deeper into his skin... The itchiness could not be scratched away no matter how hard he tried,... it felt as if this itch has a mind of its own and was controlling him" (Farrukhi, 2013:p.2).

Farrukhi's description of the itch symbolizes external force acting upon the individual, undermining personal freedom and autonomy. Sartre opines that human beings are "condemned to be free," implying that individuals are forced to confront the need to make choices in an indifferent, often absurd reality. In Farrukhi's text, the itch "grew, spreading its roots deeper and deeper into his skin" (Farrukhi, 2013, p. 2), symbolizing how inescapable, unclose aspects of existence can invade one's sense of self. Sartre might interpret this itch as a manifestation of "bad faith," wherein the character passively surrenders his agency to this uncontrollable sensation, rather than exercising his freedom to resist or redefine his experience.

The persistence of the itch, which "could not be scratched away no matter how hard he tried" (Farrukhi, 2013, p. 2), aligns with Sartre's concept of "nausea" which is an existential awareness of the senselessness and limitations imposed upon human life. Sartre describes nausea as a realization of the uncertainty of existence, causing individuals to feel alienated from both the world and themselves. In this case, the character's constant struggle to lessen the itch yet failing to do so evokes Sartre's idea of a futile struggle against the absurd. The itch becomes a force beyond his control, reflecting an inherent detachment from one's own body and desires which is a critical aspect of existential alienation.

The sense that "the itch has a mind of its own and was controlling him" (Farrukhi, 2013, p. 2) further reflects Sartre's notion that individuals often feel externally manipulated, as if outside forces shape their choices. This sensation challenges the character's sense of agency,



confronting him with the existential reality that the freedom to act is sometimes disillusioned by circumstances outside his control. Eventually, the character's experience highlights Sartre's declaration that the human condition is often characterized by an internal conflict between the desire for autonomy and the limitations imposed by an indifferent world.

"He was all alone, and his thoughts took him to the worst part of his life... The itch was not only physical anymore; it became the manifestation of his *Aniya*, the emptiness that plagued him" (Farrukhi, 2013: p. 3).

The passage highlights the transformative nature of solitude and self-reflection, which can lead one to confront the emptiness of existence. Sartre argues that individuals, when exposed of external disruptions, must face the raw reality of their being, often encountering feelings of despair and emptiness. In the line "he was all alone, and his thoughts took him to the worst part of his life" (Farrukhi, 2013, p. 3), the protagonist's solitude compels him to confront painful memories, which evokes Sartre's concept of "nothingness." For Sartre, this nothingness represents the void at the core of human existence which is absence of intrinsic meaning that one must grapple with individually.

The itch, which initially seems merely physical, transforms into a profound symbol of existential "*Aniya*," or emptiness, which "plagued him" (Farrukhi, 2013, p. 3). Sartre would interpret this as the character's dawning realization of his own emptiness, a kind of existential awareness that aligns with Sartre's notion of "nausea." This nausea arises from an acute confrontation with the absurdity and pointlessness of life, forcing individuals to recognize the emptiness within them that cannot be filled by external factors. The itch becomes a manifestation of this inner void, an embodied reminder of his "*Aniya*" that cannot be relieved by physical means alone.

Sartre argues that this emptiness or "*Aniya*" symbolizes an authenticity. The character is confronted with a sense of alienation from himself, seeing his own emptiness in a physical form that he can neither control nor escape. This experience of emptiness is central to Sartre's existential thought. It highlights the human condition of being thrown into a meaningless world where one must construct their own essence. In feeling the itch as a manifestation of his internal emptiness, the character confronts a heavy freedom Sartre describes as the freedom to define meaning within an otherwise indifferent universe, despite the "plague" of this emptiness within him.

"As he scratched and scratched, he thought about why he was being punished. Was the itch a consequence of his actions or a way to see how much he could endure? .....The more he scratched, the more he felt the burden of his existence, each moment of reprieve short lived and unfulfilling" (Farrukhi, 2013: p. 4).

The protagonist experiences an itch which never goes and his wondering of the purpose of the itch shows the author's exploration of existential questions. In this paper, it has been critically looked at how the itch is relevant to the existentialism of the protagonist, using work of Sartre.

The focus on the thoughts of the protagonist leads the reader to similar reflections about the purpose of punishment. Sartre (1958) pointed out; existentialism is founded upon the belief that value, meaning and purpose are to be discovered within the persons' existence. The protagonist's self-doubts whether the itch is punishment or some sort of endurance test seems to contain this confrontation. He tries to understand that suffering may have a purpose as a punishment for some sin or as the way people's endurance is examined.

The constant itching of the protagonist and the brief moments of relief represent the impossibility of attaining true human contentment and the reality of life's enduring weight. According to Camus, the reason that makes life absurd is the fact that people seek a purpose

in life while there is none. Their contradictory desires of pleasure and suffering correspond to the humanistic theme of the work where an individual experiences an endless search for the elixir only to end up with temporary and inadequate consolation. The itch is the absurd fight for meaning and the temporary relief that is offered, which in this case is small. This seems to harmonize with the existentialist proposition that people live in a world that is devoid of meaning, but they keep trying to search for some meaning.

The text continues as follows: “The more ...and freedom held no satisfaction.” This is an example of the protagonist’s existential anguish. The focus on the protagonist’s itching and absence of the lasting relief accentuates his existential responsibility. True rest is impossible for the protagonist, as even brief breaks from labour are presented the viewer as unsatisfactory and miserable, reflecting the endless nature of the character’s existential plight. This situation can be explained by existentialist philosophy since meaning is sought and has to be pursued and occasionally one feels the hope and discovers it again.

The thoughts, the main character had about the itch, being some form of punishment or a test; tie it into the existentialist viewpoint of the need for the person to look inward. As stated by Sartre (1967), people have to pay attention to what one does and accept the consequences of their decisions. The protagonist’s pondering of the itch as the indirect outcome of his deeds reveals a significant degree of introspection. One of the most significant factors of understanding existentialist philosophy is the manner in which an individual tries to locate suffering.

The researchers claim that one of the themes of Farrukhi’s short story *The Itch* is the search of the main character for the meaning of life and his attempts to find it through the cure of the itch. The itch at the beginning of the story is presented as a rather trivial problem, although it gradually evolves into a significant image of the protagonist’s spiritual throughout. The philosophy of Sartre’s existentialism which holds the view that “existence precedes essence” is used to analyze the situation of the protagonist. The hero has to search for meaning where there is no meaning to be found. The itch makes him face his existence and the fact that he is a man with no goal in life. The itch being the main subject, it leads the protagonist to a state of self-reflection whereby he starts to analyze his actions and their implications. This is in consonance with Sartre’s notion where people make their choices and in the process determine who they are, in a world that is perceived to be quite meaningless.

The process of the protagonist’s isolation deepens the existential anxiety of the character. He realizes that he is all by himself and has to face the dark memories of his life. Solitude is valued to existentialist thinkers because it unveils people’s true nature by eliminating all possible sources of change. The itch transforms into the reflection of the inner void and the suffering that is an inevitable part of the protagonist’s life. His constant itching is an embodiment of the human being’s futile search for significance in an otherwise meaningless world, an idea that is central to existentialism because people have to find their purpose and meaning in life on their own.

This short story is a depiction of the human endeavour to find purpose and direction in life through the main character’s existential conflict with the itch. The itch is employed as an allergy of the main character’s inner conflict and his search for meaning in the world that does not seem to care. The theory of Sartre helps to clarify the process of the protagonist, the importance of existential choice, the absurdity of the world, and the need to create one’s own meaning. The protagonist’s scratching; the times when he reflects on himself; and his battle with the senselessness of the world all stress the existentialism that governs his search for meaning. Thus, Farrukhi conveys the main idea of the human existence and the struggle for the purpose in the purposeless world through this story.

“Chasing those ants, he had a lot of questions.... Was the stinging itch a sort of revenge for past sin, was he being punished, was the purpose of this torture to make him understand that he can take it.... It was with each scratch that the protagonist seemed to dig deeper into his soul, to increase the load of existential suffering.... Each pause only showed the return of the ants, thus, the temporary relief...” (Farrukhi, 2013: p. 6).

In the selected text, the itch starts out almost incidental; as are the questions of one’s existence and its worth. Then, step by step, it becomes uncontrollable. Transformation from the small itch to the profound and growing itch is a reflection of the protagonist’s growing awareness of his existential state. Existential questions outgrow themselves, becoming evident. So, the imagery of the roots spread deeper into the skin of the protagonist demonstrates the relentless presence of existential anxiety, illustrating that these concerns do not only come and go but rather become a part of the generalized life experience of a human being. Moreover, the roots are illustrative of how the existential dread starts from some deeper level, meaning that existentialism itself is not a fleeting issue, but is deeply ingrained in the protagonist’s inner world.

The protagonist cannot remove the itch no matter how much he tries. According to the existentialists, one cannot find an easy solution to the questions of existence, as existential anxiety must be faced, and the meaning of life must be built by individuals themselves, in the manner prescribed by Sartre (1958). The itch as a symbol of the protagonist’s inability to be in control of his own body, shows the audience how it is to be an autonomous

A more literal possibility to describe the itch as the character’s main antagonist since it gained a ‘mind of its own’ and literally controls the protagonist underscores the existentialist motifs most clearly. This personification of the itch is to express that existential anxiety looks and feels like something which is on the outside of the person, controlling their thinking and decisions. Scratching continues without any intermission and the fact there is no rest for the hero illustrates that pleasure is only temporary and the struggle of life goes on. The brief satisfaction of not scratching is immediately followed by the urge to do so again, thus it is not a satisfying experience and epitomises the existentialist believes that there is no meaning to life.

The size of the itch represents existential anxiety’s constant presence and inability to be shaken off. The extent of the itch’s influence over the protagonist is a representation of existentialist concepts of freedom and oppression. Thus, the protagonist’s attempt to remove the layer scratching it resembles the general search for meaning in life and the difficulties of being true to oneself. By using this concept, Farrukhi captures the essence of the protagonist’s fight for meaning in the narrative, and they incorporate the elements of existentialism described by Sartre.

“...and with the itch starting to expand beyond the physical realm, The symbolism became more psychological as the itch became an embodiment of his state of mind.. . He was advertising a purposeless hopeless life and the itch with all its tentacles became a representation of his inward self. ... The itch was no longer physical, it was more of a mental thing as it represented the worthlessness of the empty existence that filled his mind...” (Farrukhi, 2013: p. 7).

The selected text provides insights of psychological and emotional nature of the main character focuses on his loneliness. Loneliness is one of the most significant components of the main character’s existential anxiety. It deprives him of interruptions and pushes him against his worst self-wherein he returns to the dark life. This solitude is something existentialist thought offers since it frees one from external restraints and makes a person face

himself. How the main character thinks and observed the world around him underlines the existentialist opinion about the truth and knowledge that arises when one faces their inner demon and fear of existence.

As the itch changes from a skin irritated feeling to a psychological symptom, the latter signifies the growth of the protagonist's identity crisis. At first, the itch is but an insignificant, skin-related discomfort in the beginning the itching increases, it symbolizes the protagonist's lack of content. Thus, this shift is in line with existential thinking that many somatic symptoms are indeed existential distress. The itch, that in the preceding review defined the protagonist's "Aniya" or lack of substance, represents how the emptiness consumes the essential aspects of the protagonist's well-being.

The term Aniya reflects the main character's loneliness, hopelessness, and the nothingness that pervades the protagonist. This void correlates directly to nihilism or absence for meaning and purpose in one's life which like existentialism is a philosophy. The meaning of the itch being identified as the emptiness inside the protagonist means that the existentialist's idea is right: people must experience their voids to be genuine. The itch thus represents the existence symbol, which imposes the awareness of the protagonist's existential predicament upon the protagonist, catering to the recovering individual's need to recognize the absurdity of existence.

Personal reflections that are depicted by the protagonist to undergo a self-awakening embrace the aspect of existing in the worst part of one's life, which is another aspect of existentialism. Changing of the itch from a physical sensation to the psychological issue keeps reflecting the development of the protagonist's existential conflict and his attempts to find purpose in life. The process to change of the protagonist's self-reflect and harsh treatments of his past form genuine realization according to existentialist point of view that authentic knowledge begins with confronting one's soul. The itch, representing the protagonist's "Aniya", is fully expressive of the major existence themes of existentialism such as meaning, reflection and the ridiculousness of existence. By means of this story, Farrukhi manages to embody the main character's search for meaning, reconciling her with her existence, which may be considered an existentialist message based on the theory of Sartre.

### **5.0 Conclusion**

From Sartre's existentialist perspective, Farrukhi's selected story shows a deep struggle with suffering and the search for meaning in pain. Sartre believes that humans are "condemned to be free," meaning they must take responsibility for their choices and face their own existence without depending on any external meaning or divine purpose. Here, the protagonist wonders if the itch is "a consequence of his actions or a way to see how much he could endure" (Farrukhi, 2013, p. 4). This question reflects a desire to find purpose in his suffering, to believe it is either punishment or a test of endurance. This idea of attributing meaning to suffering connects to Sartre's belief that people often struggle to find meaning in experiences that are essentially without inherent purpose.

The protagonist's continuous scratching reflects his effort to find relief, but this relief is "short-lived and unfulfilling" (Farrukhi, 2013, p. 4). This moment illustrates Sartre's concept of "nausea," a feeling he describes as the realization of the emptiness and futility in many human actions. In this case, the itch represents an on-going discomfort that cannot be resolved permanently. Every act of scratching only gives temporary relief, much like many actions in life that offer only brief distractions from a deeper emptiness. Sartre sees this pattern as part of the absurdity of life, where people often try to escape feelings of emptiness by seeking comfort in temporary actions that lack deeper meaning.

The passage also conveys a sense of existential burden, as the protagonist feels "the burden of



his existence” (Farrukhi, 2013, p. 4) more intensely with every scratch. This aligns with Sartre’s belief that human life is heavy with the responsibility of existence. This responsibility stems from the fact that people must make their own choices and create their own purpose. Yet, this freedom can feel overwhelming, as there is no inherent satisfaction or fulfilment in existence itself. The itch represents this sense of burden because it is a problem that has no satisfying solution, symbolizing the challenges people face in a world without clear purpose.

The protagonist’s repeated scratching also connects to Sartre’s concept of “bad faith.” Bad faith, according to Sartre, is when people avoid confronting the reality of their freedom and instead fall into routines or habits to escape the discomfort of making choices. By focusing on scratching, the protagonist seems to be seeking a quick escape from his suffering rather than confronting the emptiness that lies beneath it. This behaviour shows a reluctance to face the true nature of his situation, which would require him to accept that the itch and his suffering may simply exist without meaning. Sartre would argue that this avoidance of the truth about his freedom and responsibility keeps the protagonist trapped in a cycle of temporary relief followed by continued suffering.

The protagonist’s experience in the story represents Sartre’s view of the human condition. Sartre believes that individuals are responsible for finding their own meaning in life, even when this search is difficult and often seems pointless. The protagonist’s attempts to interpret his suffering and to find purpose in the itch reflect this struggle. Sartre sees this as the defining challenge of human existence: the need to create purpose in a life where meaning is not automatically given. Although the process is painful and frustrating, it remains the only way to live authentically in a world that offers no guarantees of satisfaction or fulfilment.

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