

The Language of Pain: Metaphor Theory and Logotherapy in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

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Abstract

Life moves with various intentions, actions, failures, difficulties and successes. Every minute is a different experience for everyone. As human beings lead their life, they tend to satisfy themselves with some purposes in life which give them the boost to neglect the stings of life and target only on the meaning in overcoming them. So, this study is an approach in applying metaphor theory and logotherapy into acquiring meaning in life which happens with the two major characters of the novel *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Keywords: Failures, successes, metaphor theory, logotherapy and acquiring meaning in life.

Introduction

This analysis explores the role of metaphors in John Green's bestselling young-adult novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*. It specifically focuses on how the main characters employ metaphors to articulate their perspectives on life, cancer and death. Through metaphors the characters try to find out meanings for their tormenting deadly disease. It could be considered as a mixture of emotions and hardships that they face in their day to day life.

The use of metaphors in this novel sinks with the key ideas from logotherapy, the existential psychotherapy developed by Viktor Frankl. Viktor E. Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, was a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School. Born on March 26, 1905, he is widely known for his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. He translated his books into several languages, it shows about love, freedom and the meaning are universal beyond differences in culture, religion, and geography. According to him, three key ideas form the foundation of logotherapy: freedom of will, the will to meaning, and meaning in life. Logotherapy centres on humanity's fundamental drive—the 'will to meaning'—and asserts that individuals can discover purpose and significance in life even amid profound suffering, such as terminal illness or the inevitability of death. The major characters like Hazel and Augustus utilise this technique to live their life as such with life threatening disease and every day check ups enjoying moments in daily life leaving behind the physical pain and the mental pressure they face due to their chronic disease. This they do to find meaning for they are going to live for a short period of time but they expect that to be very happy acceptable and memorable to those who they live with.

John Green exploits metaphors, symbols and other literary techniques to show how cancer truly affects the daily lives of patients and the people around them. There are instances in which he pictures that cancer patients live a life fearing that that day would be their last day in this world. At the same time, he also intensifies the significance one can give to short moments or minor happenings which are not even given any importance in this world. This makes sense of real-life experiences, emphasising turmoil and ease are two extremities that may occur to anyone at any time. Their belief purely goes in hand with the attribute of Frankl because he believed that people are mainly driven by a 'will to meaning', which means they have a strong desire to find purpose in their lives. As per his proposition, life can have meaning, although it is full of difficulties, sufferings and problems.

Frankl's experiences in the Concentration Camp gave him such a philosophical concept of handling life to find its meaning irrespective of its hurdles or failures or illnesses. But there needs to be some meaning in doing whatever the person is detained to do or achieve or face or succeed in life. Ultimately, it is only very simple to have found the meaning or the purpose of what a person has done in the short or long life that is destined to him or her. The same ideology has been followed by the two major characters of the above mentioned novel. This concept has served the basement of many people's life. Knowingly or unknowingly, most of the human beings have a purpose in living this

life.

Beyond its foundational principles, Frankl's logotherapy introduces the concept of attitudinal values, which focuses on how individuals face situations that cannot be changed. People focus on changing that tough situations in their life. But, sometimes it is not possible for a person to make any changes in the life. Simply, it has to be accepted, then comes resilience in a person who becomes more brave enough to face the traumatic struggle and fight against it, although not a success, he or she can end up satisfactorily for having done something from his or her side to overrule the pressure giving or killing disease. At this point occurs the attitudinal change of acceptance.

The characters like Hazel and Augustus adopt the technique of attitudinal shift in concentrating on things that are under their control rather than the symptoms of cancer or the inevitability of early death. They have started enjoying the minute things or moments in their life giving much more importance to emotional values. This helps them being free from spending their energy and time in trivial matters and feeling sorry for the inconveniences they face or the troubles that come out of their way due to their disability. Another important logotherapeutic insight concerns the preservation of dignity when independence is lost. Frankl argues that dignity does not depend on productivity or physical ability. In the novel, illness forces the characters into states of dependency on machines, caregivers, and medical systems. However, the narrative consistently affirms their moral and emotional agency. Their capacity to reflect, choose honesty, and express love supports Frankl's view that dignity remains intact even when autonomy is reduced.

The concept of existential guilt is proposed by Frankl which finds its exploration through the two major characters in the novel. In the beginning, Augustus feels dull and gloomy for his life is going to end soon and Hazel too suffers from losing the emotional connection with her intimate persons after her death. But, after understanding the limitations of life as well as the purpose of living every single moment with whatever possible means stands as a proof for serving comfort and value to every step that they do in the available short life.

For every kind of an emotion, every kind of happening, every activity finds its own meaning and purpose for people differently for different people. Many endure hardships, struggles, diseases, etc for they are not ready to get absorbed in trivial matters or cruel diseases and waste their precious life. Instead they want to play their part very well in this gifted life with whatever positives or negatives that happen to them. In *TFIOS*, Hazel believes in gaining authenticity and connection with her parents and Augustus, although her life will end soon. Likewise Augustus who worries of finding out the meaning of his life, feels comfort once he engages in love with Hazel, because he strongly believes that he will definitely create a lasting impression in her memory. This makes sense that, even though he dies, there is something meaningful of leading this painful life.

Thus, life is beautiful though short or long, but meaningful. Human beings expect a lot, but ultimately they expect emotional connection with others and self-acceptance to be an individual in this life.

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