

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Existentialism refers to a philosophical view that asserts how individuals must create their own life meaning through choice, freedom, and personal responsibility (Sasan, 2023). Building on this idea, Viktor E. Frankl, who is a psychiatrist, neurologist, and Holocaust survivor, introduced the concept of logotherapy. Logotherapy is an existential approach that focuses on each individual's pursuit of the meaning of life. Logotherapy places the search for meaning at the centre of human experience and states that the effort to find meaning is the primary driving force in a person's life.

According to Frankl (1992), the meaning of life is something deeply personal and unique, which can only be fulfilled by the individual themselves. He argues that meaning is not fixed or universal but can differ from one person to another and even change from day to day or hour to hour. What matters most is not a general or abstract idea of meaning, but the specific meaning that arises in a particular moment or situation. Meaning must be understood as a personal responsibility, something that cannot be replaced or repeated by anyone else. Within logotherapy, this sense of responsibility towards one's unique task of meaning is considered the core of human existence.

The theme of existentialism and the pursuit for meaning in life has long been explored in literary works. Literature itself is a form of human expression that depicts life experiences, feelings, and thoughts through words or language (Khan, 2021). It encompasses various forms, including poetry, prose, and drama, each offering a unique way to represent human experiences (Komala & Putri, 2025). In the modern era, literature has developed into various forms, including film, which contains elements similar to drama, such as narrative, transformation, and performance (Klarer, 2023). Along with its narrative function, film can reflect the complexities of the meaning of life, inspiring audiences to reflect on their own experiences. One of the films that engages deeply with the theme of the pursuit of meaning in life is *We Live in Time* (2024).

*We Live in Time* is a movie that presents an intimate and reflective story about love, loss, and the limitations of time through the journey of a couple, Almut and Tobias, told in a non-linear way, with moments full of warmth and emotional tension. Along with its narrative and emotional depth, *We Live in Time* has also received positive recognition. The movie was nominated at the 2025 Irish Film and Television Awards for Best Director (John Crowley) and Best International Actress (Florence Pugh), and won the Women Film Critics Circle Award for Best Screen Couple (Andrew Garfield and Florence Pugh). The film also gained further nominations in categories such as music supervision and casting. These acknowledgements show that the film is well-regarded, which supports its relevance as a subject of literary analysis.

The main character in this story, Almut Brühl, is a professional chef who lives her life with passion and dedication to the culinary world. One day, she is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, which becomes a significant turning point in her life. This diagnosis brings about various changes in her routine and personal relationships, including the dynamics with her daughter, Ella, and partner, Tobias. After receiving the diagnosis, Almut makes an unconventional decision by choosing to participate in a cooking competition that requires intensive training and a significant time commitment instead of focusing solely on her treatment and family life. This decision affects the balance between her professional activities, medical condition, and personal life.

Almut's journey in pursuing the meaning of life is chosen as the focus of this study due to the complexity of her situation, as well as the life choices she made in the face of major changes, in the hope of providing an in-depth analysis of the story to help the audience gain a comprehensive understanding, thus offering meaningful insights, inspiration, and sparking discussion on ways to navigate existential struggles. Almut's life journey reveals the dynamics between personal choices, family relationships, and challenging medical conditions in the face of life and death. This situation presents various dilemmas that are relevant to be analysed through the perspective of logotherapy, particularly in relation to three main concepts: the Freedom of Will, the Will to Meaning, and the Meaning of Life.

In addition, to analyse how Almut is constructed as a meaningful and complex character in the story, Boggs and Petrie's (2008) theory of

character and characterisation is applied in this study. This theory reveals types of characters, such as stock characters and stereotypes, static versus dynamic or developing characters, and flat versus round characters, along with the exploration of how a character's depth and development within a story are revealed through aspects such as appearance, dialogue, external action, internal action, the reactions of other characters, dramatic foils (contrast), caricature and leitmotif, and choice of name.

Furthermore, to strengthen the discussion of Almut's characterisation and pursuit of the meaning of life, and considering that not all meanings are explicitly stated in the dialogue transcript, supporting screen captures from the film are used. To interpret the visual signs on the screen, a semiotic approach is used in this study. Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, which emphasises the relation between what is shown (representamen), what it refers to (object), and how it is understood (interpretant), is employed as a foundation for interpreting non-verbal actions, expressions, and scenes that implicitly convey meaning, thus allowing the analysis to be more comprehensive (Adhia, 2024).

Although the logotherapy approach has not been widely applied in the analysis of literary works, several previous studies have addressed the theme of the search for meaning in life through the analysis of literary works. A study by Muzaqqi and Jumino (2024) also used the logotherapy approach to explore a novel character's crisis to find the meaning of life after losing her mother. This study revealed that the process of dealing with suffering and guilt can help the character rediscover the meaning of life

through social relationships and attitudes towards suffering. Next, a study by Utami (2024) examined and compared the search for meaning in life of protagonists from two movies who experienced an out-of-wedlock pregnancy through the lens of logotherapy. The analysis revealed that Dara (the first protagonist) failed to find the meaning of life due to irresponsible choices and inconsistent application of logotherapy pillars. In contrast, Natalie (the second protagonist) succeeded in achieving happiness and the meaning of life by consistently applying those pillars. Another study conducted by Sukaesih (2024) analysed how the second main character in a novel discovered life meaning through concrete actions, appreciation of love and art, and achieving the highest meaning of life through a sense of humanity and a spiritual connection with God. A recent study by Nisah (2025) explored how the main character reconstructed the meaning of life after facing stress, loss, and suffering. This previous study also used the logotherapy approach and emphasised the values of attitude, experience, and creativity as the path to a meaningful life. These previous studies have discussed the theme of the search for meaning of life in literary works, but they generally focus on characters whose search for meaning aligns with long-term quality of life and emotional well-being, not on characters who are explicitly faced with limited time and the nearing possibility of death, like Almut.

Therefore, this study aimed to fill the gap by analysing how Almut, within the limitations of time and the possibility of death she faces, continues to struggle to pursue meaning in her life through the logotherapy

perspective proposed by Frankl. Moreover, this study also combined Frankl's logotherapy theory with Boggs and Petrie's character and characterisation, which has not been done in previous studies. By examining how the search for life's meaning is portrayed through Almut's journey, this study also aimed to deepen the understanding of character and narrative in literary studies, while encouraging critical discussion on existential themes, particularly humans' pursuit of meaning in times of struggle.

### **1.2. Research Question**

The research question of this study is:

How is the pursuit of the meaning of life portrayed through Almut's character in the movie *We Live in Time* (2024)?

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is:

To analyse how the pursuit of the meaning of life is portrayed through Almut's character in the movie *We Live in Time* (2024).

### **1.4. Limitations of the Study**

This study is focused on analysing and interpreting the existential journey of the character Almut in her pursuit of the meaning of life in the film *We Live in Time* (2024), using Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy theory, Boggs and Petrie's character and characterisation framework, and supported

by Peirce's semiotic theory to understand her character and analyse how the human's pursuit of the meaning of life is portrayed through her journey. The semiotic theory is only applied to the supporting screen capture, to bridge the analysis of the supporting screen capture as a sign in this literary study, as this study focused primarily on the film's narrative aspect, not its cinematographic ones. Thus, the analysis focused on how Almut is portrayed through dialogue, actions, narrative development, and supporting screen captures, without a deep analysis of cinematographic elements, such as camera angle or lighting.

#### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

This study is aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how the pursuit of the meaning of life is portrayed in Almut's character through a logotherapy perspective, while also contributing to the development of literary studies that focus on character analysis and existential themes. Furthermore, this research is expected to serve as a reference for further studies that wish to examine life's meaning and suffering through literary work, as well as help readers or viewers understand and reflect on the meaning of life and existential struggles conveyed through the message of literary work.

#### **1.6. State of the Art**

This study used a logotherapy perspective to analyse Almut's journey in pursuing the meaning of life in the movie *We Live in Time* (2024). Although many studies have used logotherapy in counselling and psychology, the application of this theory to the analysis of character from literary work is still limited. In addition, this study applied Boggs and Petrie's character and characterisation theory to explore the depth and development of Almut's character comprehensively, and Peirce's semiotic theory to analyse the supporting screen capture from the movie, which the combination of these theories has not been done in previous studies. The focus on Almut's emotional and existential journey, particularly in facing conditions that challenge the limits of life, provided a rich and profound new perspective for literary studies through the narrative element of a film. This research is expected to provide a contribution to the development of literary study that explores existentialism more deeply.