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Logotherapy and the Empirical Research of Literature

Joaquin Trujillo

Literature and Empiricism

Literature is hermeneutics articulated to entertain and illuminate. It is a meaning-discovery-interpreting process. Literature, the art of thinking and language, creatively discloses the meaning of being human and deepens our understanding of human reality by publicly revealing who we are, who we have been, and our potentiality to be. Its ability to illuminate the human situation speaks to the profound interconnectedness existential-phenomenology has identified between “language, thinking, and human being” and the observation that “human being is language.”¹ Good literature meaningfully renders the world—that is, human being (*Dasein*, there-being, existence) differentiated as being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*)—to personal understanding. Great literature does it seamlessly. The reader does not notice the migration of meaning in great literature because he lives it. In great literature, *λόγος* (*logos*)—the ability of human being to comprehend the being of beings and communicate their meaning through language—is shared through the written word.

Literature is an expression of *logos*; *logos* is the manifestation of reality through language; and reality is human reality and a concrete totality that is factually shared. Literature is neither relative nor subjective because the world *logos* manifests is neither relative nor subjective. World is an event (*Ereignis*) whereby there-being (the total human person or existence understood as a totality) reveals the meaning of things. There-being, the revelation of things, draws beings (things) out of their concealment (*λήθη*, *lēthē*) and into their truth, being, or unconcealment (*ἀλήθεια*, *alēthia*). It abides in the truth of beings as human presencing and language. The truth of beings indicates nothing metaphysical, relative, or subjective. It signifies the “matter” or essential (ownmost) meaning of beings, and is only relative or subjective insofar as “it is related to a specific person who is entangled in a specific situation.”² It is also

¹ George Kovacs, “Heidegger’s Insight into the History of Language,” *Heidegger Studies* 29 (2013): 129.

² Viktor E. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York: Meridian, 1988), 54; Viktor E. Frankl, “Beyond Self-Actualization and Self-Expression,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 44.

profoundly intersubjective. The truth of beings is available to everyone not because the self is shaped by society and culture, but because human being is being-there-with-others (*Mitdasein*): the other is a world-disclosing dynamism that is factually there with there-being and there with it.³

Literature is possible because human being shares primacy with the world (reality) inclusive of others who share in the same primacy. It succeeds as literature insofar as it manifests world-meaning rather than communicating the monologue of the person intent on expressing his subjectivity, or, as Stevens writes, when it uses “reality” rather than “imagination” as its “central reference.”⁴ Relativistic and subjectivistic readings of literature dismiss its world-disclosing power and signify the decision of the subject to assert his personal meaning on literature rather than let it speak its own significance. The fact that there is always something more to say about literature or that we may not get the meaning of a literary work right when we say it is due ultimately to the inexhaustibility of human reality and the limitations inherent to human comprehending. It is not because the meaning of a literary work is relative or constituted within different subjective realities. The only thing relative or subjective about literature, like reality, or world, is the perspective through which we approach it, and that “does not in the least detract from” its “objectiveness.”⁵

“Empirical” denotes the heuristic appropriation and systematic validation of experience, regardless whether its meaning is individuated as a test, observation, or interpretation. Empirical research embodies the effort to overcome the limitations endemic to human comprehending and the internal tendency of being to conceal the truth of beings; understood existential-phenomenologically, the meaning of things, their truth, emerges from the incessant struggle between the processes of concealment and unconcealment ingredient to being.⁶ Implicit to the appropriation of human being as a transitory process that passes beyond—transcends (human being is transcendence)—the self and the things it intends, and that come to pass as their being (meaning), is the understanding that what is there always exceeds the power of comprehension. All we can do is heuristically chip away at its concealment and pass on our achievements in an endless struggle of discovery characterized equally by its setbacks and accomplishments.

Although literature is fully available to empirical research, our ability to empirically access it is contingent on the methods we apply to study it. Literature is first and foremost a human problematic, and attending to its “matter” is the paramount precondition researchers must satisfy to fit empirical methods in

³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), 154.

⁴ Wallace Stevens, “The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination: Three Academic Pieces,” in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library Classics of the United States, 1997), 686; idem, “The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination: The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” in *ibid.*, 645.

⁵ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 59.

⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 56; William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 484-9, 491-5

literary studies. This matter does not suggest literary studies is a venue for the expression of personal beliefs, values, or opinions—researchers alienate themselves from a literary work’s essential meaning when they use literary studies to assert personal meaning. It suggests, rather, that the fit of an empirical method in literary studies corresponds with its ability to free literary works to communicate their ownmost significance and systematically assess their meaning vis-à-vis the variables and parameters under consideration (e.g., historical, sociological, political, psychological, existential). It further suggests that a method’s success will depend on its ability to check the influence of subjectivity and its openness to the limitations endemic to empirical research.

Logotherapy and Literary Studies

Logotherapy is existential-psychotherapy and existential-analysis (*Existenzanalyse*). It is often called the “Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy.” Viktor E. Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, sources its empirical efficacy to the experiences he witnessed, studied, and suffered during his three-year internment in the Nazi death camps, including Auschwitz and Dachau, his life’s work as a psychiatrist and neurophysiologist, and his commitment to the method’s existential-phenomenological basis.⁷ This basis distinguishes logotherapy as a “radical empiricism”⁸ and empirical “in the broadest sense of the word.”⁹ Logotherapy is radical because it suspends the subject-object dualisms through which we commonly perceive (live) reality and returns it to its phenomenal unity (i.e., there-being, transcendence). It is empirical because it strives to appropriate human reality as it is and tasks itself to rigorously analyzing it pre-philosophically, pre-ideologically, and without prejudice. Logotherapy stands on the same basis Gadamer proposes to “secure” a “scientific” foundation for hermeneutics. “The important thing,” he writes, “is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.”¹⁰

Logotherapy humanizes the existential-phenomenological discernment of human being as there-being by further differentiating it as the meaning of being there, the will-to-meaning, and the obligation to be one’s ownmost meaning. Logotherapy views the human person as a totality (event, unfolding) whose potentiality for meaning is to be found and fulfilled within the world inclusive of

⁷ George Kovacs, “Ultimate Reality and Meaning in Viktor E. Frankl,” *Ultimate Reality and Meaning: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Philosophy of Understanding* 5, no. 2 (1982), 122; Frankl, “The Philosophical Foundations of Logotherapy,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 3-4, 8-14.

⁸ James M. Edie, “Introduction,” in *What Is Phenomenology? And Other Essays*, ed. James M. Edie (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962), 19.

⁹ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy*, 69.

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1975), 238. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 195.

the pain, guilt, and death endemic to human living.¹¹ Frankl developed logotherapy to address “existential vacuum” (also “existential frustration”), or the meaningfulness characteristic of contemporary life and which he associates with existential and collective neurosis.¹² Existential neurosis is the condition where one fails to embrace one’s intrinsic freedom and responsibility to find and fulfill one’s ownmost meaning. Collective neurosis is the condition where one forsakes that freedom and responsibility and looks to the anonymous “they,” or the everyone and no one of daily life, to tell one who one is and should be.¹³ Both conditions are rooted in the renouncement of authenticity, where “authentic” (*αυθεντικός, avthentikós*) denotes the essential power, freedom, and responsibility to decide one’s own meaning. Logotherapy, “as a form of existential analysis,” treats existential vacuum and its associated neuroses by bringing the individual to an awareness of his authenticity, or, as Frankl puts it, by throwing him “back upon the primal elements of human existence: being conscious and being responsible.”¹⁴

Frankl posits a direct relationship between the meanings a person chooses to live by and the possibility of living meaningfully. We do not achieve meaningfulness by pursuing self-actualization or self-fulfillment. We let it ensue (happen) by insisting on self-transcendence.¹⁵ Self-transcendence signifies the lived commitment to meanings whose significance aim away from the self and are grounded in being conscious and responsible. It is a way of human being that is open to reality as it is, authentically strives to realize meaning there, and is shaped by existentiality, or life’s imperative to resolve the “tension” between who one is and should be to realize one’s ownmost meaning. Self-transcendence corresponds with self-detachment. It signifies a turning away from the pursuit of self-fulfillment and a turning toward authentically finding and fulfilling meaning within the world.¹⁶

¹¹ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, vii-ix, 16, 73; Frankl, “The Philosophical Foundations of Logotherapy,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy*, 15; Frankl, “Existential Dynamics and Neurotic Escapism,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy*, 24.

¹² Frankl, “Psychiatry and Man’s Quest for Meaning,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 71-2; Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 27, 44-5, 64-5, 163; Victor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, trans. Ilse Lasch, 4th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 111; Herbert Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry: A Historical Introduction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 344.

¹³ Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 106-8, 131; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 165-6, 295-6.

¹⁴ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2000), 29; idem, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston, 3rd Expanded ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 5, 63, 105.

¹⁵ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 31-6.

¹⁶ Frankl, “The Philosophical Foundations of Logotherapy,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 3-4, 15, 21; Frankl, “Existential Dynamics and Neurotic Escapism,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 24, 28; Frankl, “Logotherapy and Existence,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 54; Frankl, “Dynamics and Values,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 68; Frankl, “Psychiatry and Man’s Quest for Meaning,” in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, 78; Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 17-9, 50, 70; Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 67; Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry*, 352.

Logotherapy's defining elements suggest its efficacy as an empirical method to study literature. Logotherapy offers the researcher an epistemologically appropriate and empirically corroborated method to deconstruct the meanings and values a literary work embodies and a zero-risk opportunity to systematically evaluate how they operate and unfold under ordinary and extraordinary thematic circumstances. Logotherapy avoids psychologizing the meaning of literature or reifying it to a scientific comprehension of empiricism (e.g., 'If a theory can't be tested, it's not science; it's science fiction!'). Its goal is not to count words or map them into a matrix that adheres to a set of preprogrammed values or scientific principles, but, rather, to free the saying power of the word and let it speak its ownmost significance: that is, to unmask the 'matter' at hand until one is "confronted with what is genuine," namely, its truth or essential meaning. Frankl contends that when the researcher "does not stop there" and attempts to psychologize or objectify literature's human significance, he only succeeds at unmasking his "unconscious motivation" to dehumanize it.¹⁷

Meaningfulness and Human Living

Logotherapeutic readings of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (OMS) and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (TMS) distinguish the novellas as literary thought experiments ("hypothetical thought-possibilities") in the art and practice of human living. It also reveals in them an understanding of the individual that is remarkably consistent with the individuation of human being as the will-to-meaning. OMS and TMS intimate the human person as a totality defined by the need to find and fulfill authentic meaning, suggest corresponding relationships between the self and transcendence, and indicate correlating trajectories between the meanings a person lives and their capacity to yield meaningfulness. The contrasts between the tragedies they tell hinge on the opposing ways their respective protagonists, namely, Santiago "*El Campeón*" and Gregor Samsa the "horrible vermin," appropriate existence. OMS and TMS epitomize the logotherapeutic observation that personal meaningfulness stands the best chance of happening when a person desists from self-actualization and insists on self-transcendence.

Santiago: "*El Campeón*"

Santiago's heroic tragedy hunting and killing the "fish" exemplifies the individual commitment to self-transcendence and its capacity for meaningfulness. Santiago's (1) mindfulness; (2) conscientious self-detachment; and (3) the authentic concern he shares with Manolin testify to his propensity to find his

¹⁷ Viktor E. Frankl, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning: Psychotherapy and Humanism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 88; idem, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, 105-6.

ownmost meaning in the world. They evidence the path to meaningfulness and intimate the real work it requires to ensue in daily living. Reading OMS, it is hard not to admire Santiago's life despite his poverty, age, and solitude. It is hard not to wonder, 'If I could only be as great as him.' Living in a dirt floored "guano" shack,¹⁸ "eating an imaginary "pot of yellow rice and fish,"¹⁹ eagerly reading "the baseball" in "yesterday's paper,"²⁰ "barefooted" and dressed in a shirt "patched so many times that it was like the sail and the patches were faded to many different shades by the sun,"²¹ and sleeping on a bed of "springs" covered by "old newspapers,"²² Santiago stands tall on "the generalized meanings which underlie and impregnate the action."²³ His tragedy shows us the "right" way of being and exemplifies the possibility of living meaningfully despite life's sufferings and limitations.

Santiago's resolutely dwells in the world. Thinking chiefly "about all things" with which "he was involved,"²⁴ he mindfully attends to the transitory dynamics of human living and intimately humanizes his there. His graceful "humility" before the world—an attitude that "carried no loss of true pride"²⁵—is characteristic of his mindfulness and essential relatedness with things. Santiago abides within a disposition that is characteristic of self-transcendence and distinguished by its "attunement" and genuine "listening" to the "stillness," "mystery," and "unfolding" of being and stands in opposition to the "mindlessness" and "machinations" of "the (reflective) activity of the (thinking) subject thinking its own thought(s)," "becoming more and more self-conscious," and falling "prey to the prominence (self-importance) of the 'I.'"²⁶ His comportment is dominated by a wonder at the beauty, givenness, and interrelatedness of things and grounding within the with-dimension of existence (*Mitsein*) that manifests as "a sense of brotherhood and love" that "binds together the creatures of nature" and "establishes between them a unity and an emotion which transcends the destructive pattern in which they are caught."²⁷ It is an attitude where "everything is gathered up in the relation" of what is there and in "a discovering of the primal, of origin."²⁸ Santiago is with "*la mar*," the noble "love" that "gave or withheld great favors" and whom he refuses to dehumanize,

¹⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18-9.

²² *Ibid.*, 24.

²³ Phillip Young, "The Old Man and the Sea: Vision/Revision," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Old Man and the Sea: Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Katherine T. Jobes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1968), 22.

²⁴ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁶ George Kovacs, "Heidegger's Directives in Mindfulness for Understanding the Be-Ing-Historical Relationship of Machination and Art," *Heidegger Studies* 24 (2008), 41-2.

²⁷ Leo Gurko, *Ernest Hemingway and the Pursuit of Heroism* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 162.

²⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner Classics, 2000), 80-1.

like “some of the younger fisherman” who “spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy.”²⁹ He is with “our brothers,” the “stars,” who “sleep” during the day, the “porpoises,” who “play and make jokes and love one another,” and the “flying fish,” his “principal friends on the ocean.”³⁰ He is with “the fish” he hunts and kills—a “friend” whom no one is worth eating because of “his behavior and his great dignity.”³¹

Santiago’s self-detachment is ingredient to his self-transcendence. Experiencing “pain” that had “gone into a dullness that he mistrusted,” “tireder” than he has “ever been,” taking the “suffering” as it comes, and with only his “will,” “intelligence,” and the “resolution” that “man is not made for defeat,”³² Santiago distances himself from his pain and suffering. He actively transforms the “somewhat less tolerable” into the “almost comfortable”³³ and embeds himself within his existentiality. Santiago “could not fail” himself and “die on a fish like this” now that he had “him coming so beautifully.”³⁴ “Born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish,”³⁵ he conscientiously (freely and responsibly) chooses to be his potentiality for meaning rather than remitting to his mounting suffering, because “pain does not matter to a man” and “now is the time to think of only one thing. That which I was born for.”³⁶ He immerses himself within the matter at hand and transcends (goes beyond) his limitations to achieve his purpose: “Then he thought, think of it always. Think of what you are doing. You must do nothing stupid.”³⁷ “Now everything is clear away that might make trouble and I have a big reserve of line; all that a man can ask.”³⁸ “The thousand times he had proven it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it.”³⁹

The meaningfulness of Santiago and Manolin’s relationship emerges from their authentic concern for each other and mutual commitment to self-transcendence. It manifests as friendship, mentorship, care, companionship, camaraderie, and in, what Buber calls, “the solid give-and-take of talk.”⁴⁰ Their relationship does not resonate with the machinations of a self-prominent or self-seeking “I,”⁴¹ but with “primary” encounter with the other as a “Thou,” or the “definite person” each is “in his potentiality and his actuality.”⁴² Santiago and

²⁹ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 29-30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 29, 48.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

³² *Ibid.*, 23, 64, 89, 103.

³³ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 40, 84.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 99.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19, 122.

Manolin “confront one another in mutual effect that is neither connected to nor colored by any causality,” but is “assured” in the “freedom” of an “I” bound in its relatedness to a “Thou.”⁴³ The old man and the boy meet each other, as individuals who are fundamentally free, equal, and unique. As intimated by the below excerpts, they mindfully give way to each other to freely choose (pursue) his own possibilities (future) and prove (or not prove) his mettle notwithstanding their disparity in age and maturity.

Excerpt 1

Manolin: “Santiago,” the boy said to him as they climbed the bank from where the skiff was hauled up. “I could go with you again. We’ve made some money.”

Santiago: “No,” the old man said. “You’re with a lucky boat. Stay with them.”

Manolin: “But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones every day for three weeks.”

Santiago: “I remember,” the old man said. “I know you did not leave me because you doubted.”

Manolin: “It was papa made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him.”

Santiago: “I know,” the old man said. “It is quite normal.”

Manolin: “He hasn’t much faith.”

Santiago: “No,” the old man said. “But we have. Haven’t we?”

Manolin: “Yes,” the boy said. “Can I offer you a beer on the Terrace and then we’ll take the stuff home.”

Santiago: “Why not?” the old man said. “Between fishermen.”⁴⁴

Excerpt 2

Manolin: “I would like to go. If I cannot fish with you, I would like to serve in some way.”

Santiago: “You bought me a beer,” the old man said. “You are already a man.”⁴⁵

Excerpt 3

Santiago: “I’ll waken you in time.”

Manolin: “I do not like for him to waken me. It is as though I were inferior.”

Santiago: “I know.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁴ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 10-1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 24.

The expectation of authenticity is integral to Santiago and Manolin's relationship. At the same time one opens the way for the other to be the person he freely chooses to be, they also induce each other to be the person each one knows he should be. Santiago shows Manolin the possibility of living meaningfully despite the irrevocable limitations he faces. He shows the boy, through word and deed, the person he (Manolin) can (should) be, and teaches him the art of being human through the art of fishing. Santiago reveals to Manolin the human purpose of living consciously, responsibly, and, when it comes to fishing, creatively in light of the human facticity that "nothing is easy."⁴⁷ Manolin, in turn, assimilates the values Santiago embodies hence intimating the old man's worth as a human being when he knows "no one should be alone in their old age," although "it is unavoidable." He reminds Santiago who he is and "keeps him alive"⁴⁸ by prompting him to "recapture" some of the "strength and confidence which distinguished his own young manhood as a fisherman, earning him the title of *El Campeón*."⁴⁹

Excerpt 1

Manolin: "What do you have to eat?" the boy asked.

Santiago: "A pot of yellow rice with fish. Do you want some?"

Manolin: "No. I will eat at home. Do you want me to make the fire?"

Santiago: "No. I will make it later on. Or I may eat the rice cold."

Manolin: "May I take the cast net?"

Santiago: "Of course."

There was no cast net and the boy remembered when they had sold it. But they went through this fiction every day. There was no pot of yellow rice and fish and the boy knew this too.⁵⁰

Excerpt 2

Santiago: "I would like to take the great DiMaggio fishing," the old man said. "They say his father was a fisherman. Maybe he was as poor as we are and would understand."⁵¹

Excerpt 3

Manolin: "And the best fisherman is you."

Santiago: "No, I know others better."

⁴⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 48, 106.

⁴⁹ Carl Baker, "The Boy and the Lions," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Old Man and the Sea: Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Katherine T. Jobes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1968), 28.

⁵⁰ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 16.

⁵¹ Ibid., 21-2.

Manolin: “*Qué va,*” the boy said. “There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you.”

Santiago: “Thank you. You make me happy. I hope no fish will come along so great that he will prove us wrong.”

Manolin: “There is no such fish if you are still strong as you say.”

Santiago: “I may not be as strong as I think,” the old man said. “But I know many tricks and I have resolution.”⁵²

Excerpt 4

The old man went out the door and the boy came after him. He was sleep and the old man put his arm across his shoulders and said, “I am sorry.”

“*Qué va,*” the boy said. “It is what a man must do.”⁵³

Gregor: “The Vermin”

TMS depicts a more common side of human being and a considerably more intricate problematic. The novella metaphorically reveals the everyday tragedy of the person actively caught up in a life of inauthenticity and machination. Its literary power lies in its effectiveness, not in discerning, as does OMS, the meaningfulness that ensues from consciously responding to the tension between who one is and should be, but, rather, in showing us who we commonly, and quite tragically, are and tend to be. TMS caricaturizes the human susceptibility to existential and collective neurosis. It radically portrays the everyday human tendency to flee from life’s imperative to be, dwell in mindlessness and machination, and divest oneself of meaning and meaningfulness. Whereas Santiago’s tragedy testifies to the meaningfulness that ensues from self-transcendence, Gregor’s tragedy points to the meaninglessness produced by a life affixed on self-actualization. There is nothing authentic in Gregor’s life. Unlike Santiago, he has no “born for”⁵⁴ “worthy of,”⁵⁵ “must do,”⁵⁶ “love,”⁵⁷ “God,”⁵⁸ “hope,”⁵⁹ or “sin.”⁶⁰ He only has the meaninglessness he generates through his incessant pursuit of pleasure. Gregor is driven by the motivation to secure a life he wants not because it is “right” in anyway remotely connected with self-transcendence, but because it pleases him. He wants a good meal,⁶¹ a warm bed, a

⁵² Ibid., 23.

⁵³ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 40, 50.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 48, 95, 99.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 29-30, 48, 54, 72, 104-5.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 53, 63, 87.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 13, 101, 104-5, 117.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 104-5.

⁶¹ Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. David Wyllie (Lexington: Classix Press, 2009), 7, 9, 19, 36.

comfortable room, and mindless ways to idle his time,⁶² his sister's intimacy and compassion,⁶³ a pleasant home,⁶⁴ his family's company, acceptance, and approval,⁶⁵ and, above all, a way of living that shelters him from life's immanent call for authenticity.⁶⁶

Gregor's focus on self-fulfillment thrusts him into a cycle of mindlessness and machination where he persistently tries to shape (manipulate) the world to realize himself. Bent on recapitulating the "secret complicity" of his former life, on realizing his mundane desire to please himself, he glosses over the horrific significance of his metamorphosis⁶⁷ and, perhaps even more importantly, who he has been and continues to be. Gregor remains "morally identical with his former self" and meets his transformation "in complete accordance with the mediocrity of his character."⁶⁸ How or why he transforms into a bug does not surface in his monologue beyond the initial, "What happened to me?"⁶⁹ and notwithstanding the corresponding total phenomenal transformation existential analysis would predict, Landsberg observes,⁷⁰ and TMS intimates Gregor experiences in light of the interconnectedness between the meaning of the self and the body. After feeling a "faint vexation," Gregor almost entirely dismisses his metamorphosis⁷¹ and returns to the mindless absorption and inauthenticity of his former life: "Oh, God . . . what a strenuous career it is that I've chosen!" and "How about if I sleep a little bit longer and forget all this nonsense?"⁷² "The first thing he wanted to do was to get up in peace without being disturbed, to get dressed, and most of all to have his breakfast." He "wondered how his imaginings would slowly resolve themselves today."⁷³ "Gregor was still there and had not the slightest intention of abandoning his family."⁷⁴ "If he hurried he really could be at the station for eight o'clock."⁷⁵ "I'll get dressed straight away now, pack up my samples and set off."⁷⁶ And although his parents "had so much to worry about at present that they had lost sight of any thought for the future," Gregor did not. He "did think about the future," and in his mind, the "chief clerk had to be held back, calmed down, convinced and finally won over; the future of Gregor and his family depended on it."⁷⁷

⁶² Ibid., 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 32, 34.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁷ Albert Camus, "Hope and Absurdity," in *The Kafka Problem*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Gordian Press, 1975), 275.

⁶⁸ Paul L. Landsberg, "The Metamorphosis," in *The Kafka Problem*, 131, 137.

⁶⁹ Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 17.

⁷⁰ Landsberg, "The Metamorphosis," 138.

⁷¹ Albert Camus, "Hope and Absurdity," in *The Kafka Problem*, 268.

⁷² Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 7.

⁷³ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 16.

Gregor's specious altruism masks his machinations. The sacrifices he professes to make for his family indicate that even when his meanings intend away from himself, their noematic reference surreptitiously points back to the realization of its noetic correspondent. Gregor's declared selflessness—providing ideal living arrangements for his family,⁷⁸ assuming his “parents debt,”⁷⁹ and wanting to send his sister to a “conservatory”⁸⁰—is a manifestation of his will-to-pleasure. Gregor commits “the unforgivable sin of self-assertion”⁸¹ when attempting to win over (dominate) his family's intentional acts (future) to achieve himself. He shoulders his father's responsibilities to usurp his family's approval and admiration—“Gregor converted his success at work straight into cash that he could lay on the table at home for the benefit of his astonished and delighted family” who “took the money with gratitude and he was glad to provide it”⁸²—and produce a life, including the “lively conversations” he “always thought about with longing when he was tired and getting into the damp bed in some small hotel room,”⁸³ that pleases and protects him from responding to life: “he's been in town for a week now but stayed home every evening. He sits with us in the kitchen and just reads the paper or studies train timetables. His idea of relaxation is working with his fretsaw.”⁸⁴ His “love” for Grete and willingness to burden the expense of sending her to a conservatory turns out to be a twisted, controlling, and self-indulgent obsession culminating in a fantasy where she “would breakout in tears of emotion,” and he “would climb up to her shoulder and kiss her neck, which, since she had been going out to work, she had kept free without any necklace or collar.”⁸⁵

Gregor's tragedy highlights the profound relatedness existential analysis posits between the appropriation of the self, the other, and the world.⁸⁶ It metaphorically evidences the logotherapeutic observation that the more one insists on self-actualization, the more one alienates oneself from basic attributes of human existence and the possibility of genuinely encountering others. The individual caught up in the drive for self-fulfillment tends to instrumentalize others to his pursuit of pleasure at the same time, incessantly looking inward, he forsakes the meaning of his there, including the possibility of discovering meanings and values that not only may induce meaningfulness, but, equally important, protect against suffering and meaninglessness. Take for example the depth of Santiago's human relations, as evidenced by the memory of his deceased wife, whose “tinted photograph” on the wall he had taken down “because it made

⁷⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 23

⁸¹ F.D. Luke, “The Metamorphosis,” in *Franz Kafka Today*, ed. Angel Flores and Homer Swander (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1958), 26.

⁸² Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 22-3.

⁸³ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁸⁶ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 8.

him too lonely to see it,⁸⁷ the love he shares with Manolin, and the concern his fellow person displayed for him when the community organized a search “with coast guard and with plane.”⁸⁸ There is nothing authentic or meaningful about Gregor’s human relations, however. Their depth consists of a “cut out of an illustrated magazine and housed in a nice, gilded frame” showing “a lady fitted out with a fur hat and fur boa who sat upright,”⁸⁹ “the salesmen and the apprentices, that stupid tea boy, two or three friends from other businesses,” a “tender memory” of “one of the chambermaids from a provincial hotel,” “a cashier from a hat shop for whom his attention had been serious but too slow,” “mixed” memories of “strangers and others he had forgotten” and who are “inaccessible, and he was glad when they disappeared,”⁹⁰ a “chief clerk” who becomes “highly suspicious” at the “slightest shortcoming,”⁹¹ and a family who “incarcerated him in his room.”⁹²

Gregor’s metamorphosis shattered the parameters defining the Samsas’ unity and exposed the family’s true intentions toward him. It revealed that his father, mother, and sister encountered him the same way he encountered himself, as a subject removed from essential attributes of human being. Gregor did not die for his family when he died or transformed into a bug, because to them he never truly existed. The family, as witnessed in Grete’s final denunciation of Gregor when she shouts, “It’s got to go,”⁹³ always met him as an “It.” They always intended him as a thing with no “present” or future, only a “past,” and as a “means” and “object of perception without real connection” to transcendence.⁹⁴ His metamorphosis also revealed he was not alone in his machinations. He only proved to be their principal victim. Gregor and his family deceptively instrumentalized one another to achieve their personal objectives. Their motivations geared into an ensemble of intentional acts aimed at self-fulfillment. At the same time Gregor used his mother, father, and sister to achieve pleasure, security, and self-valuation, they used him to achieve comfort and leisure. Because of Gregor, the mother, whose love had “narrow limits,”⁹⁵ could tend to her “asthma” and spend “every other day” seemingly “struggling for breath on the sofa by the open window.”⁹⁶ The father, “who deceives his son and sells him unnecessarily to the boss as a debt slave,”⁹⁷ could take a five-year “holiday” from “a life that had been full of strain and no success” and each day “stretch” out his breakfast “for several hours as he sat reading a number of different

⁸⁷ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 16.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁹ Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 10-1.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 27, 30, 34, 36, 40.

⁹⁵ Klaus Köhnke, “Klaus Köhnke on Gregor Samsa, Kafka’s ‘Good Sinner,’” in *Kafka: The Metamorphosis, the Trial, and the Castle*, ed. William J. Dodd (New York: Longman, 1996), 78.

⁹⁶ Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 24.

⁹⁷ Köhnke, “Klaus Köhnke on Gregor Samsa, Kafka’s ‘Good Sinner,’” 78.

newspapers.”⁹⁸ And Grete, whose apparent “loving kindness springs from a similar pleasure in self-affirmation that was evident in Gregor when he began to support the family,”⁹⁹ could enjoy a life that “had been very enviable, consisting of wearing nice clothes, sleeping late, helping out in the business, joining in with a few modest pleasures and most of all playing the violin.”¹⁰⁰ As for Gregor, he could abide in the self-seeking admiration at the family’s “quiet life” and the false “pride that he was able to provide a life like that in such a nice home.” The fear that “all this peace and wealth and comfort should come to a horrible and frightening end” was internal to his attempt to control his family. Losing the life he created was something that “he did not want to think about too much” and drove him to apprehensively “move about, crawling up and down the room.”¹⁰¹ Whenever the family “began to talk of the need to earn money, Gregor would always first let go of the door and then throw himself onto the cool, leather sofa next to it, as he became quite hot with shame and regret.”¹⁰²

Gregor’s refusal to awaken to the meaninglessness he had been willing and living speaks to the everyday tendency to repudiate authenticity. Possessed by “totally pointless” thoughts,¹⁰³ thinking how “he would have to re-arrange his life,”¹⁰⁴ and approving “fully” of his treatment,¹⁰⁵ Gregor conveys nothing to suggest he encounters himself as a human (total) person, is aware of the innermost human possibilities his metamorphosis has annihilated, or realizes he was responsible for annihilating those possibilities before his metamorphosis. Despite the desire TMS prompts in the reader to reprove Gregor’s family, it also reveals that, in the final analysis, Gregor brought his tragedy upon himself. Gregor’s inauthenticity, mindlessness, and machinations, and not his metamorphosis, are the root causes of his suffering. Gregor does not suffer, quite remarkably, because of his metamorphosis; in fact, he hardly pays any attention to it. He suffers because his machinations—his deceptive use of altruism to control his family to achieve himself—turn against him. Perhaps even more remarkable is that Gregor recapitulates the escapable (chosen) elements of his suffering when he defends his neurosis by ignoring and justifying his family’s deception. Gregor overlooks his mother’s failure to stand up for the immutable love she professes for her son,¹⁰⁶ rationalizes Grete’s growing disinterest and contempt toward him,¹⁰⁷ shamefully accepts his father’s sadism,¹⁰⁸ and with “enthusiasm” and “pleasure” excuses his deceit.¹⁰⁹

⁹⁸ Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 24.

⁹⁹ Köhnke, “Klaus Köhnke on Gregor Samsa, Kafka’s ‘Good Sinner,’” 78.

¹⁰⁰ Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 24.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 20, 29.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 14, 22, 25-6, 31.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 21, 25, 27-9, 33-5, 39-41.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 15, 29, 30.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-4.

Frankl observes that “life holds a meaning for each and every individual, and even more, it retains this meaning literally to his last breath.”¹¹⁰ He also observes “human existence can never be intrinsically meaningless.”¹¹¹ Yes, life’s potentiality for meaning and meaningfulness, itself a meaning, endures in vacuity. The self-actuated and self-perpetuated depth of Gregor’s inauthenticity and mindlessness, however, signify that life also can be essentially prone to meaninglessness to a person’s “last breath.” TMS discloses the intrinsic capacity of human being to live a life that from beginning to end is oblivious to its authenticity when it reveals that Gregor, moments before dying, chooses to let himself drift further into meaninglessness.¹¹²

“What now, then?” Gregor asked himself as he looked around in the darkness. . . . He thought back of his family with emotion and love. If it was possible, he felt that he must go away even more strongly than his sister. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful rumination until he heard the clock tower strike three in the morning. He watched as it slowly began to get light everywhere outside the window too. Then, without his willing it, his head sank down completely, and his last breath flowed weakly from his nostrils.¹¹³

Conclusion

OMS and TMS metaphorically reveal human trajectories to meaningfulness and meaninglessness. The thematic content they convey is concrete and objective. Jobs attributes OMS’s success at communicating its meaning to presenting “the action not in abstract terms—gain and loss, strength and weakness, youth and age—but in vivid images—marlin and shark, right hand and left, Manolin and Santiago”¹¹⁴ or, as Hemingway says, making ““a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks”” knowing that if ““I made them good and true enough they would mean many things.””¹¹⁵ Walzel attributes TMS’s success telling Gregor’s tragedy to Kafka’s “allegiance to strict authenticity and reality,”¹¹⁶ which, according to Robertson, materializes in an “objective voice” that subordinates “the narrator to the chief character.”¹¹⁷ Whatever the authors’ motives, the novellas remarkably illuminate the human situation such that we do not read OMS and TMS. We live them. We ignite their thought-experiment value

¹¹⁰ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, ix.

¹¹¹ Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 50.

¹¹² Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 40.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁴ Katherine T. Jobs, “Introduction,” in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Old Man and the Sea*, 2.

¹¹⁵ “An American Story Teller,” *Time*, 13 December 1954, 72.

¹¹⁶ Oskar Walzel, “Logic in the Miraculous (1916),” in *Kafka: The Metamorphosis, the Trial, and the Castle*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Ritchie Robertson, “Ritchie Robertson on the Metamorphosis and the America Novel,” in *Kafka: The Metamorphosis, the Trial, and the Castle*, 63, 67.

by accepting their invitations to enter into the moments they elucidate and explore the meaning of our lives and human living generally. As evidenced by this study, logotherapy provides the researcher with the means to distill this value empirically. It frees the researcher to render its meaning systematically within the context of what we reliably have come to know about human existence.

It is easy for an empirical method to restate what it puts into literary studies or read too much of itself into a literary work. Because literature fundamentally is a human problematic, it is vulnerable to subjective efforts to dominate its meaning; that is, to see what one wants to see in a literary work because one wants to see it. Natanson's study of TMS, for example, and despite its stated existential-phenomenological basis,¹¹⁸ intimates this tendency by leaning more toward restating the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz than bringing to light TMS's human significance.¹¹⁹ Natanson's failure to immerse himself within the existential-phenomenological problematic, his focus on the psychological rather than existential aspects of human experience,¹²⁰ and his characterization of TMS as "a primal story of nobility and martyrdom"¹²¹ suggest that the empirical research of literature will tend to restate its methodology inasmuch as it fails to push into the object of its analysis. For example, it is easy to mistake Gregor's specious altruism for a kind of heroism, as Natanson does when he essentially repeats Nabokov's analysis of the text,¹²² without probing further into the meaning-dynamics driving Gregor's tragedy.

Brenner's study of OMS¹²³ also speaks to the susceptibility of literary studies to the problem of restatement. Brenner betrays his empirical analysis of the novella when he psychologizes the text and reduces Santiago's archetypical heroism to a "destructive underconsciousness" of "aggression" and "erotic drive" he ultimately attributes to Hemingway's "personal anxieties" related to his "self-image, his relationship to his three sons, and his relationship with his father."¹²⁴ His impassioned attempt to categorically debunk the interpretation of OMS as "a text that examines a person who experiences trials and tests, that invites us to find meaning in his [Santiago's] experience, and that challenges us to assign our significance to that meaning"¹²⁵ by unlocking "the psychological enigma and uncanny appeal of his simple-seeming character"¹²⁶ resonates with the motivation to assert personal significance. Brenner's "psychological analysis" of Santiago objectifies the protagonist into a Freudian abyss brimming with dysfunctions,

¹¹⁸ Maurice Natanson, *The Erotic Bird: Phenomenology in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9-10, 41-62.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 105-26.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 111; Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 256, 260.

¹²³ Gerry Brenner, *The Old Man and the Sea: Story of a Common Man* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 80, 90, 98.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

including: “overt aggression,” “sexism,” “passive aggression,” “feminization,” “a cauldron of hostility” evidenced by the recollection of his “flagrant” killing of a fish brought into the boat “green,”¹²⁷ “gratuitous name calling” suggesting “that jellyfish are scapegoats onto whom he vents misogynistic attitudes that reflect his sexist stereotyping and aggressions,”¹²⁸ a “litany of sexist aggressions” nested “within the metaphoric equation that women and the sea share identical traits,”¹²⁹ “unconscious homosexual feelings toward Manolin that he cannot accept in himself” because it “would require accepting his own lack of masculinity,”¹³⁰ and an internal conflict between Santiago’s “remorse” for killing the fish and his “fraternalism” toward it, which, as “one course of action for a sensitive, intelligent and ethically responsible human whose emotions guide his actions,” he could have resolved by jettisoning “his proud professionalism” and embracing “some form of environmentalism.”¹³¹ Brenner’s analysis tends to read more like a declaration of the American political correct than an attempt to empirically deconstruct OMS, and it might be interesting to see what unconscious motivations we might surface—including possible interconnected dimensions of inner frustration, rage, and, perhaps, even *ressentiment*—by applying Brenner’s calculus to his interpretation of Hemingway’s work.

Now, although it is by all means empirically legitimate to interpret a literary work as a hermeneutic indicator of the writer’s biography, there is no epistemologically valid basis for turning the analysis the other way around. Biographical criticisms say nothing empirically reliable about the meaning of a literary work. In fact, about the only thing they reliably indicate is the researcher’s decision to commandeer the individual’s inherent freedom and ability to transcend oneself and responsibly elucidate the meaning of things regardless of one’s preconceptions, prejudices, and morality (or lack of). Biographical information is not a substitute for data wrested rigorously and systematically, and insofar as one sources a text’s meaning to the originator’s psychology, one also tends to lean away from empirically discerning it. The same holds true for analysis drawn from opinion, evaluation, and value-judgments. Although the empirical research of literature does not render these subjective claims meaningless, its success hinges on putting them in abeyance.

Logotherapy is not immune to the problem of restatement. If the object of logotherapeutic analysis is wrapped within the context of the individuation of human being as the will-to-meaning then almost everything it analyzes will in one way or another relate to human being individuated as the will-to-meaning. What protects logotherapy from falling prey to its theoretical context, insofar as it or any empirical method aimed at studying human phenomena can protect itself, is (1) its effort to control (suspend, bracket) the presuppositions and preprogrammed attitudes that invariably threaten to obscure (pollute) its analysis;

¹²⁷ Ibid., 80-1, 96.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 83.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 95.

¹³¹ Ibid., 61, 66.

(2) the understanding that its meaning-focus does not exclude other aspects of the human condition nor preclude the efforts and accomplishments of other empirical methods; and (3) its attentiveness to the challenges implicit to the analysis of meaning. Logotherapy recognizes that no matter what success we may have analyzing human phenomena, including the meaning embodied in literary texts, it is unlikely that we can disclose their full significance. It also recognizes that the fractal-like dimensionality of human meaning will often force the researcher to zero-in on one aspect of a literary work's meaning at the expense of ignoring other aspects. This does not mean that the empirical methods applied to literary studies are any less rigorous or systematic than those of other sciences. It means the probability they can yield any "final" words about the meaning of literary texts is low.