

**Meaninglessness of Life in Jay Asher's Thirteen
Reasons Why and Jojo Moyes's Me Before You**

اللامعنى للحياة في الروايتين ثلاثة عشر سبباً لجاي آشر
وانا قبلك لجوجو مويس

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Authorization

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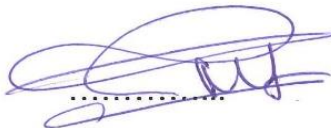

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Thesis Committee Decision

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother and father, who believed in me and raised me with their support and prudence, the ones who stayed up nights so I could sleep comfortably; the ones who suffered their whole life to give me the chance to prove and improve myself; the ones who nurtured in me the love for learning and facilitating everything to enable me to study without worry.

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Abstract

This study aims at analyzing two selected novels, namely *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007) by the American novelist Jay Asher and *Me Before You* (2012) by the British novelist Jojo Moyes. It explores literary presentation of the notion of the “Meaninglessness” of life and the reasons behind which life seem to be meaningless from the protagonists' point of views in the aforementioned novels. Furthermore, the study investigates the issues that incited the two characters to commit suicide. To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher makes use of theories of “Existentialism”. According to the novels, bullying, loss of trust and self-confidence, and the sudden and radical change in one's life can be reasons for perceiving life as meaningless and to view suicide as a way of escape.

Keywords: Meaninglessness of Life, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Me Before You*, Jay Asher, Jojo Moyes.

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إعداد

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إشراف

الدكتورة نسرين يوسف

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل روايتين مختارتين، وهما ثلاثة عشر سبباً (2007) للروائي الأمريكي جاي آشر وأنا قبلك (2012) للروائية البريطانية جوجو مويس. تعرض الدراسة للتصوير الأدبي لمفهوم "اللامعنى" للحياة والأسباب التي من خلالها تبدو الحياة بلا معنى من وجهة نظر الأبطال في الروايات المذكورة أعلاه. علاوة على ذلك، تبحث الدراسة في القضايا التي حفزت الشخصين على الانتحار. لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، استخدم الباحث نظريات "الوجودية". وفقاً للروايات، يمكن أن يكون التمر وفقدان الثقة بالآخرين وبالنفس والتغيير المفاجئ والجذري في حياة المرء أسباباً لليقين بأن الحياة ليست ذات معنى وأن الانتحار قد يكون وسيلة للهروب والخلص.

الكلمات الرئيسية: اللامعنى للحياة، ثلاثة عشر سبباً، أنا قبلك، جاي آشر، جوجو مويس.

Chapter One

1.0 Introduction

Life is a journey that has to be undertaken by every single human being. Humans in general endeavour to lead happy, interesting and meaningful life. However, some people do not succeed in creating a well-balanced life. Thus, they struggle with their lives as they lose interest in it. Fear is among the psychological complexities that can be an obstacle in one's journey of exploring the meaning of life. Fear prevents people from having control over their lives; anxiety can hinder one's effort to establish healthy and enjoyable life and ultimately he/she loses the purposes of life. A personality who suffers from psychological problems is challenged to fight against the fear to live up his/her life again by doing any useful activities. Nevertheless, some people feel unable to cope with distress and fear and therefore, they sometimes decide to commit suicide.

Literature as a tool of reflecting life can be a proper arena to approach such a dilemma and to suggest resolutions for it. Among the literary works that deal with the issue of "Meaninglessness" of life are *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher and *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes.

Jay Asher's life

Jay Asher is an American contemporary author who started his literary career with writing children's books and then a Young Adult genre books. Born on September 30, 1975, in Arcadia, California, Asher graduated from San Luis Obispo High School. While he was in high school, Asher wrote two children's books for a class called Children's Literature Appreciation, but this experience sparked his passion for writing books for young readers. Then he decided to go on to study at Cuesta Community College. He eventually transferred to California Polytechnic State University. Asher's passion for writing led him to drop out during his senior year from his university to pursue a serious career in writing.

Around twelve years took Asher to sell his first book for children. In the meantime, his young debut novel, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, became very famous and critically acclaimed and it became on bookshelves around the globe. The novel is a gripping tale of a young girl and the catalyst that made her commit suicide. Asher's inspiration to write his first novel came from the suicide attempt of a close relative. This girl is close to the age of Hannah Baker, the protagonist of *Thirteen Reasons Why*. Her suicide provoked Asher to write his novel and to approach the issue of suicide.

What makes Asher's novel a distinguished one is that it deals with the story of character that passes away. The details of the character's story are known through recordings left after she commits suicide. Moreover, *Thirteen Reasons Why* focuses on the topics of bullying and teen suicide, which has made it a popular book amongst readers and activists of the suicide prevention movement. Thus, the author has a serious message to deliver to the readership. Apart from reading, Asher travels around the United States to speak at schools and libraries about his books, suicide prevention, and the creative writing for young adults.

Asher wrote another two young adult novels after *Thirteen Reasons Why*; the first is *The Future of Us* (2011) that he co-authored with Carolyn Mackler, and the second is *What Light* (2016) which was published on October 11, 2016.

Thirteen Reasons Why is a novel that narrates the suffering of the protagonist, Hannah Baker who descended into despair brought on her by betrayal and bullying. Hannah decides to commit suicide while a young high school student as a consequence to the mistreatment of her colleagues and friends. She documents the thirteen reasons that drove her to end her life in an audio diary that was mailed to her friend after two weeks of her death.

Pauline Sara-Jo Moyes's life

Pauline Sara-Jo Moyes or Jojo Moyes was born on 4 August 1969 in Maidstone, England, and raised in London. She described her parents as “bohemian” and her childhood as “eccentric.” She earned a journalism degree from City University after several years in various jobs, including several as a minicab controller. After she earned her degree she pursued a career in journalism, which lasted for ten years, one of which Moyes spent in Hong Kong writing for the South China Morning Post. She also wrote in the United Kingdom for *The Independent* newspaper. For a period of time, she worked as their Arts and Media correspondent. While she was working nights as a journalist, Moyes began writing fiction to fill her empty days. Her first three books were rejected for publication, but her fourth book *Sheltering Rain* was accepted by an agent and was published in 2002. Currently, Moyes has twelve published novels.

Me Before You is a novel that narrates the suffering of a millionaire named Willaim Traynor or Will. William is portrayed as an adventurous, attractive, and ambitious man. After he makes motorcycle accident, he becomes paralyzed. Accordingly, he becomes agonized, eccentric man, who has negative attitude towards people. Following the accident, he turns into a desperate human who

fell careless towards his social life. William introduces Louisa Clark or Lou as, a caretaker. Ironically, instead of helping William out of his miserable situation, Louisa becomes plighted by a sense of “Meaninglessness” towards life, in similar ways as William.

1.1 Background of the Study

This study discusses the two novels, Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You* with the objective of dealing with the notion of “Meaninglessness” of life. The study deals with both the intrinsic elements of the novel including the plot, character, the setting, and the moral values. All of these elements make the story come to alive. In this thesis, the analysis will be mainly concerned with analyzing the main characters of the two novels; it will also refer to other characters when needed.

Suicide has become a social issue that has psychological, economic and cultural consequences. This study investigates how the two writers, Jay Asher and Jojo Moyes, portray the “Meaninglessness of Life” in their novels *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007) and *Me Before You* (2012), with the intention of focusing on the main characters Hannah Baker in the former and William Traynor in the latter.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Both novels are relatively recent and therefore they both have not received enough critical attention and scholarly examination. This study is concerned with investigating the concept of the “Meaninglessness of Life” in two novels: Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You*. This notion is going to be identified with respect to the theme of death as it appears in these novels and in light of an existentialist perspective.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the circumstances that incited the two protagonists to perceive life as “meaningless” and therefore commit suicide in Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You*.
2. To identify the concept of “Meaninglessness” of life as presented in Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You*
3. To explore the role of the other characters in provoking the protagonists’ suicide.

1.4 Questions of the Study

1. What are the circumstances that incited the two protagonists to perceive life as “meaningless” and therefore commit suicide in Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You*?
2. How is the concept of “Meaninglessness” of life is presented in Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You*?
3. What is the role of the other characters in provoking the protagonists’ suicide?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The issue of suicide among youth has become an alarming subject around the globe. Literature can play a very significant role in raising awareness about suicide and the reasons behind it. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it deals with very timely and crucial issues such as death, suicide, the “Meaninglessness of Life”, and bullying. The current study is an endeavour to analyze how these two novels present and characterize death as a way of an inevitable resolve for release and savior. Moreover, the thesis aims to highlight the role of literature in shedding light on these concerns and in suggesting solutions for them. In terms of its literary style, Asher’s novel presents a unique style as the reader is informed about the life of the main character through

recording she leaves before her death. This technique makes the novel distinguished in terms of its literary.

1.6 Limits of the Study

This study will be confined to analyzing Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You*.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020

1.8 Definition of the Terms

Death: Theoretically, the action or fact of dying or being killed; the end of the life of a person or organism. (oxford, 2011, p.205)

Empirically, it is the last moment of the life and a link between the worlds to transfer the spirits.

Escape: Empirically, going away from anything is familiar, and resort to what is strange or better than real life.

Meaninglessness of life: Empirically, the people who feel that life has no core or value to live.

Existential vacuum: Theoretically, an existential vacuum is a crisis of meaning. A gut-wrenching feeling that makes life meaningless, a place where there's only suffering and disconnection from the external world (oxford, 2011).

Existential vacuum: Empirically, it is a situation of losing the meaning and spirit of the things to make life seems pale, and this situation gives a profound sense of loneliness, meaninglessness, and aimlessness.

Psychological: Empirically, it is the thing that related to thoughts of the human. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019)

Theoretically, it is relating to the human mind and feelings.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

This section is designed to deal with the theoretical literature concerning theories deployed to approach the notions of death, “Meaninglessness of Life” and suicide in Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You*. Previous studies were conducted to examine Jay Asher and Jojo Moyes’s novels in terms of narrative techniques. Certain theories, moreover, were applied to examine the concept of death and its consequences in existentialist literature.

In addition, literary theories are going to be used as guidance for analyzing this study as well as the previous ones. The main purpose of literature review is to support the study’s line of argument powerfully through exposing different viewpoints and divergent theories. The review of literature is divided into two general discussions. The first is concerned with the theories of existentialism, while the second displays the previous studies that cover the notion of death and the “Meaninglessness” of life in these two novels: Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You*.

2.1 Existentialism:

Existentialism is the philosophy that makes authentically human life possible in a meaningless and absurd world (Panza, 2008). In other words, existentialism is a philosophical thought that deals with the conditions of existence of the individual person and their emotions, actions, responsibilities, and thoughts. Thus, it can be said that for Existentialists, humans define their own meaning of life, and seek to make rational decisions despite the fact that the universe itself seems to be irrational.

According to Sartre (1948), every human being condemned to be free because human did not create himself. At the moment when he is thrown into the world, he is free to choose every option he wants, and responsible for everything he does. Sartre (1948) is of another opinion in this topic. He did not believe in the power of passion. He never regarded a grand passion as a destructive torrent upon which a man is swept into certain actions by fate, and which, therefore, is an excuse for them.

Freedom has no limits because Freedom itself gives the human being the choices of what they want for themselves. In the novel, William Traynor, a millionaire, has many plenty of choices to make in life. Yet, he is

unable to choose any option in his life because of his illness “quadriplegia”. Moreover, in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah Baker lost her virginity and then her life as a result of the bullying she faced from the students in Liberty High School. When human suffers from the existential vacuum, the person cannot express his goals of life when someone asks him/her about the meaning of life. This condition can lead to a stage which Yalom’s called as a meaninglessness-life.

As Yalom (1980) states in his book *Existential Psychotherapy*, “Meaninglessness is a failure to find meaning in life, the feeling that one has nothing to live for, nothing to struggle for, nothing to hope for ... unable to find any goal or direction in life, the feeling that though individuals perspire in their work, they have nothing to aspire to” (p. 421).

Eagleton (2008) describes meaninglessness-life by referring to a condition when someone cannot recognize the quality of his life. He lives an empty life without any significant purposes, and he cannot comprehend the life that he has been living for.

2.2 Death in Literature:

In general, literature mirrors the social issues that can show us the ways of death and how it is manifested in different perspectives. However, there is not reliable information of death as an experience, because the nature of death is a secret and mysterious event, and still remains inexplicable and unknown (Bauman, 1992).

Tragedy always represents a meaningful and dramatic insight of death when the writer prolongs the scene of dying, as in the case of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (Frank, 2000).

The plot of classical tragedy is based on ever-lasting suffering, and the drama sometimes ends in the premature death of the tragic hero combined with the development of some kind of self-recognition. It is worth-noting that the journalist and novelist Jojo Moyes uses classical tragedy style in her novel *Me Before You*. In the novel, William Traynor (the main character) decides to commit suicide because of his illness "quadriplegia", which makes him unable to do what he wants after the accident. Besides, Asher employed the emotions and thoughts embedded in the character's behavior to write the dialogues and the conversations. Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* shows that sometimes a person loses his/her freedom for a particular reason. Thus, one can argue that the novel

tries to show that Sartre's theories of "Existentialism" may have their own limitations.

For both Heidegger (1927) and Sartre (1943), human is always in a process of becoming, and therefore in terms of time human is always projecting ahead into the future. Human is never the finished article and our death sets a time limit on our existence. As human is limited in time so that we are also limited by other boundary situations.

Jaspers (1951) spoke of limit situations, the limits of human existence which are imposed upon us by the world and which we cannot change. Jaspers believed that we must accept these limits and live our life within them as they are part of human existence.

Among much-treated themes in literature, death is present as a subject, symbol, or plot device. It existed, not just in the novel but in every type of literature as one of the defining elements in the writings of modern poets, dramatists, and novelists. Death usually provokes the human consciousness to think of and to contemplate the concept of existence and the meaning of life. Such issues have gained much literary attention and seem to be a major concern in works of literature (Garipey, 1999).

This study recapitulates that the human being has a balance between pain and hope. Human being is of more freedom whenever he is able to

achieve his goals in easy ways. His feeling of pain makes him think of it as something continuous and endless. The amount of pain that one might feel due to his sense of the absurdity of life can lead to committing suicide.

According to Durkheim (1897), anomic suicide is the suicide committed when the person's daily life is suddenly altered and the individual feels a sort of disconnect and disruption. It is a result of a deregulation of desires, passions, daily lives and roles. When a crisis occurs in society and the social relations are disrupted, personal ethics and social responsibilities are risked. This results in what Durkheim labeled as anomic suicide. The last type of suicide he identified occurs when the person commits suicide due to over-regulation by a social group, then the person commits, what Durkheim labeled, fatalistic suicide. It is the type of suicide caused due to regulation of such an extent that the person feels as though his passions and futures are blocked.

Chapter Three

3.0 Methods and Procedures

This study deploys analytical, descriptive approaches. It provides a close reading of the novels with main interest in analyzing the characters and the circumstances around them. To answer the questions of this study, the thesis draws upon theories of existentialism as a method to analyze the concept of the “Meaninglessness” of life in both novels. The study focuses on the concept of “Meaninglessness” of life to diagnose how the protagonists of the two novels, Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You* develop indifferent attitude towards life and fail to find meaning in it and ultimately commit suicide.

As far as the procedure is concerned, in (2008) George said that libraries aim is to help the researcher collect the information and theories that are related to the study. The researcher uses the two novels: Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes’s *Me Before You* as two samples of his study. The researcher surfs the net in order to collect some references such as online academic journalistic papers, books, and articles.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

In this study, the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of these two novels are very important tools for discussion. The intrinsic elements consist of characters, settings, and conflict, while the extrinsic elements include theories of existential vacuum and existential value.

3.1.1 Intrinsic Elements

Intrinsic elements make the reader imagine the events of the story without watching it just by reading the intrinsic element. So, the researcher will analyse the character, setting, and the conflict of the two novels: Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You*.

3.1.1.1 Character

A character is a part of any work of fiction. According to Holman, the term "character" is always used to refer to a figure that appears in a literary work. Characters are a fictional form of human being (Holman, 1980). Accordingly, Dickinson explains that a character is a person who can represent a story in countless ways to deliver its ideas and moral value to the readers (1996).

Character is categorized into major, minor, stock, or type. As for Kenney (1966) in his book entitled *How to Analyze Fiction*, character is categorized into two types: a flat character and a round one. The former is a person who only has a single characteristic from the beginning to end, whereas the latter is a person who goes through a sort of development in a long series of experiences. As a result, a round character is considered changeable, but a flat character is changeless.

3.1.1.2 Setting

Setting always presents detailed information of two things: time and place where the story events take place with slight, full or sharp details. This is clearly attributed to several functions. The authors look upon setting from an important angle because it can be used to build the mood and atmosphere of the novel. The atmosphere helps the authors produce a particular effect on their work of fiction and it is more interesting for the readers (Kennedy, 1991).

Settings can be divided into three types: time, place, and social environments. Time is used to show the readers when the events take place in the novel, while place is devoted to reveal where the events

happen like certain locations based on reality or fantasy. The idea of place always includes the physical environment such as roads, houses, and even regions where the story runs. Social environments always refer to the character's background of life to give the readers information about the traditions and social customs. Those classes of setting help readers imagine what happens in the novel (Meyer, 1990).

3.1.1.3 Conflict

Conflict is a result of a contradiction between two sides and likely to make them create fights to evoke thrill in the story (Kenney, 1966). Conflict is a primary source to make the plot come into being. All of great fictions have a good conflict. If there are no contradiction and plot, then the characters are flat due to the absence of the conflict (Holman, 1980).

Conflict is divided into internal and external ones. External conflicts occur among the characters, while the internal conflicts are entirely embodied in characters' mind. Internal conflicts are the result of binary desires that make the character fight himself, usually known as psychological conflict (Meyer, 1990).

3.1.2 Extrinsic Elements

Extrinsic aspects of this study are about the original meaning of life and about whether or not the life is meaningful or meaningless. In Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You*, there are two main characters, Hannah Baker and Willaim Trainor. Both of these two characters represent the "Meaninglessness of Life", while the characters around them represent the meaningful life.

3.1.2.1 Existential Vacuum

One of the problems that arises during the process of finding the meaning of life is the existential vacuum. Existential vacuum is the product of several reasons. According to Pattakos (2008), fear is one of the main reasons behind an existential vacuum, and "a giant fog" can be impeded in searching for the meaning of life. In this context, "a giant fog" is a metaphorical expression which refers to a person who is unable to actualize a creative value and to experience new things in his life for many reasons. For example, in *Me before You*, when William Trainor is injured by an accident, this causes him to have a quadriplegic. On the other hand, in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah Baker becomes unable to

experience new things in her life because of the bullying that she faced in her school. For being constantly and frequently bullied, she decides to commit suicide.

When a human being suffers from the existential vacuum, he cannot express his goals in life. Thus, this person starts to perceive life as meaningless and empty. This condition can lead to a stage which Yalom called “meaninglessness-life”. As Yalom stated in his book entitled *Existential Psychotherapy*, “Meaninglessness is a failure to find meaning in life, the feeling that one has nothing to live for, nothing to struggle for, nothing to hope for ... unable to find any goal or direction in life, the feeling that though individuals perspire in their work, they have nothing to aspire to” (1980, p.421).

Meaninglessness-life refers to a condition when a person could not recognize the quality of his life because he is hopeless. He lives without any significant purposes, and he cannot comprehend the life for the sake of which he was living. To sum up, a person who lives in meaninglessness-life has no goals and passions, but he just feels painful (Eagleton, 2008).

3.2.1.2 Experiential Value

Finding meaning in life is a matter of experiencing something or encountering someone, and both of them entail some sort of power to do it. According to Frankl love is the way for any human to understand and recognize the existence of another human being (1988). Perhaps, love was the solution for Hannah, but she did not get it from her friends. Moreover, Singer (1994) states that love is a fundamental power which underlies the meaning in life. This is entirely something agreeable. However, when suffering the pains caused by his illness, William develops negative attitude towards life and starts to see it as meaningless.

Chapter Four

4.0 Discussion and Analysis

This section presents analysis of the two novels regarding their treatment of the notion of the “Meaninglessness” of life. It focuses primarily on the characters and their behaviours as well as the circumstances in which they live. To achieve this objective, the researcher draws on theories of Existentialism and provides an in-depth-analysis of the characters.

Existentialism is a philosophical current that glorifies human value and its uniqueness. Human is the owner of thought, freedom, has the will to choose and does not need a mentor. Existentialism or human existence takes its name from a philosophical related to the uniquely self-conscious and self-determining character of human life as it is lived, enjoyed, and suffers. Existentialism makes the human realize the real meaning for a lived awareness of time and a relationship to death; explicit understanding of the freedom to act and to interpret the world according to one’s own lights and of one’s responsibility for doing (Michelman, 2008).

Sometimes moments of comfort do not establish the desire to live unless the attempt of survivor assists him to form a larger chance to make him

survive from the suffering to confrontation the central subject of existentialism: to live is to suffer, to survive is to seek out meaning within the suffering. If there is a purpose in life at least a bit, there must be a purpose in suffering and death. But still, every purpose is hidden and different from human to another. Each human must teach himself under difficult circumstances and must accept the responsibility that his answer prescribes. If he succeeded he still grows in spite of all indignities. (Frankl, 1992)

The two novels differ somewhat when it comes to the descriptions of the causes of suicides, but they also have several traits in common. One similarity is that they both take their starting point in factors connected with body problems that are common in real life. Hannah suffered from the bullying of some students at high school and then was raped by one of her schoolmates at a party that was held from time to time at their homes. William, the rich man, suffers from quadriplegia due to the accident that he got exposed to. Thus, one can observe that the two characters have issues that are connected with body.

4.1 *Thirteen Reasons Why*: Plot summary

The novel begins with our narrator, Clay Jensen after he has received a mailed a mysterious package from someone named Jenny. We soon learn that the package contains the audiotaped suicide note of Hannah Baker, a girl that studied with Clay at the same high school. She committed suicide two weeks ago for unknown reasons.

The package contains seven cassette tapes and thirteen stories. On the first tape, Hannah tells her listeners that she held everyone responsible in some way for her death, and that the tapes explain why. Each person must give the tapes to the next one on the list after listening to it. She said that if anybody failed to pass them along, a copy of the recordings will be made public. In addition, there is a map enclosed with the tapes to give directions to the listeners while listening to the tapes.

The thirteen reasons for her decision to commit suicide, the thirteen people and the thirteen different experiences are exposed as follows:

1. Justin Foley: The boy Hannah first kissed. He exaggerated that they did quite just a kiss. This little rumor starts all the mess.
2. Alex Standall: The boy in Hannah's class. He started a pole and voted Hannah as the hottest girl within the class. This incident gave others the chance to try exposure her by their bullying.

3. Jessica Davis: She was Hannah's first friend in the town. Hannah was on Alex's hotlist and she was not. She liked Alex, and started the rumor about Hannah and Alex, though she knew Hannah which previous rumor was false.

4. Tyler Down: He took pictures of Hannah from her window, without her permission. Hannah called him peeping Tom. One night Hannah along with another girl posed for him only to catch him. But before being caught he took more photos of them that gave him more chance for his rumor.

5. Courtney Crimson: A girl who only pose to be nice. For being voted for the yearbook as the nicest person in the school. She started more rumors that Hannah had some bad things in her room.

6. Marcus: A boy with Hannah in school, who has to take Hannah on a date on Valentine's Day because of a survey play. But he came late and tried to misbehave with Hannah.

7. Zach Dempsey: A boy who saw Marcus trying to misbehave with Hannah but did not help her. Only after he went away Zack approached Hannah and asked if she was okay. He tried to comfort her and got angry because she was unresponsive. For that, he took Hannah's

encouragement notes. That was the point that makes her think to commit suicide.

8. Ryan Shaver: Hannah meets him in a poetry class and shared her poems with him until he stole her work and published the poem within the school magazine without mention her name.

9. Clay Jenson: He does not belong to her list of suicide reasons, but Hannah just wanted to confess her feelings to him.

10. Justin Foley: Again, at the party when she was hiding in the closet she heard Justin letting Bryce rape Jessica.

11. Jenny Kurtz: A cheerleader, she gave a ride to Hannah, but while driving she was so drunk then she hit the stop sign and it caused an accident and the death of a person.

12. Bryce Walker: A boy with a bad reputation. At the party, he approached her and Hannah for the first time gave up for him. He is the same boy who raped Jessica.

13. Mr. Porter: The student counselor. When Hannah told him everything, he asked her to leave his office without doing anything.

So the main story begins when Clay Jensen receives a strange package of seven audiotapes by Hannah Baker's voice that contain on thirteen reasons by thirteen characters made her to commit suicide, a girl that he

liked and who recently committed suicide. The story takes the readers into the minds of the characters, Hannah Baker and Clay Jensen as they recall the events that led Hannah to commit suicide by her own voice.

The title of the novel is very interesting and clear as it gives a direct hint of the thirteen reasons on Hannah's death. It points towards the thirteen people and thirteen incidents that according to Hannah caused her death. As Hannah says in the starting tape, "I hope you're ready, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended. And if you're listening to these tapes, you're one of the reasons why." (Asher, p.7)

The title also refers to two important features of the novel, guilt and blame because she was angry and furious about the chaos in her life. Hannah Baker was confused and she blames those thirteen people to make sense out of chaotic situation. As in the start, Clay thinks that he is the one to be blamed but when Hannah says, Clay, honey, your name does not belong on this list (Asher, p.106). He understands that though Hannah did not blame him, he is guilty as he did not do anything to save her.

4.2 Thirteen Reasons Why and the Meaninglessness of Life

One may not endure the difficult circumstances especially when these circumstances affect his/her life and he/she does not find a solution after trying. So that he/she starts thinking in solutions that do not have any link in his/her problems that he/she faces. So he/she should be patients or he/she go under his/her negative thoughts that lead him/her to reckless thoughts to flee from face his/her problems life. With every side of every tape, an old memory gets turned upside down. A reputation twists into something I do not recognize (Asher, p.71).

One of the main things that make Hannah Baker commit suicide is that she does not endure to see her respect and reputation destroyed by her fellows at school. Hannah's tapes changed the way Clay looks at all sorts of things: “Clay, your reputation was deserved. But mine... mine was not. And there I was with you. Adding to my reputation (Asher, p.116).

Hannah tries to elucidate why she turned faraway from Clay the night of the party. There seems to be two reasons. First, she feared that Clay might think of her as a cheap woman. Second, she was afraid that her love to him will turn into a joke and a ridiculous rumor.

The subject of sexuality is bound with respect and reputation. Hannah's reputation made her very sensitive about sexuality and what people thought about her. The rumors rob her privacy and her freedom to explore sexuality at her own pace. Absolutely, Hannah contributed to the problem by letting the rumors control her. So that, she felt powerless to defeat them or to change how they affect her.

Hannah lost her reputation in her school as she got exposed to bullying by her schoolmates. Accordingly, her trust in herself became weaker and her confidence deteriorated. Hannah blames her death on her schoolmates. She experiences thirteen reasons for committing suicide. Despite the fact that these motivations are variable, they all contribute equally to her tragic end. Upon losing self-respect, self-confidence and trust in others, Hannah starts to develop horrendous attitude towards life and her life turns into a hollow, meaningless experience. In the tapes, Hannah holds her fellows responsible for her death and considers them guilty. "I hope you're ready, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended. And if you're listening to these tapes, you're one of the reasons why." (Asher, cassette1: side a)

Hannah's story began with harsh accusation. However, she clarifies that Clay is not deemed guilty. She only feels bad that he did nothing when he listened to her; instead of being supportive, he remained passive and offered nothing to help her. As she records in the tape: "Clay, honey, your name does not belong on this list." (Asher, p.107) Here, Clay breathed a big fat sigh of relief when he heard these words. The problem is that he starts to think that he may be guilty. Thus, he realizes that he let the rumors about Hannah stand in the way of his feelings for her. He ignores her care for him and how much of a difference his love may be made in her life.

As one can notice, instead of dealing with the situation, Hannah decided to kill herself. She did not do anything to sort her problem out; she did not even think about leaving the school and joining another one where she can start a new life and have new friends. Hannah went to an extreme dealing with her problem. Therefore, it can be argued that Hannah lost the meaning in her life; she did not want to change her life, but rather she wanted to end it. Her life seemed to her empty and the only solution for that according to her was death. However, Hannah left a very clear

message to her colleagues; they should be considerate towards other peoples' feelings as being harsh might lead to awful consequences.

Even Clay recognized that Hannah was not reasonable in her thoughts. Alex's list had a very deep and harsh impact on her. But she considered that Alex's list is accountable for everything that happened afterward and that it conveyed the desperation and confusion she felt while recording her story. She intentionally wanted her mates to feel ashamed and guilty. This reflects the amount of pain Hannah was experiencing before her death. "I feel sorry for you, Tyler. I do. Everyone else on these tapes, so far, must feel a little relieved. They came off as liars or jerks or insecure people lashing out at others. But your story, Tyler... it's kind of creepy." (Asher, p.39)

As we learn Tylor abused Hannah by taking private pictures of her while spending time at her friends' room. These pictures were not spontaneous and were meant to blackmail her and to start new rumors about her. Hannah was not aware that Tylor was trying to collect as many pictures as possible to abuse her as she was drunk. However, upon realizing that, she felt vast distress and started to lose trust in her friends. This new

awful experience made her question the meaning of life as she started to doubt her abilities to make friends later on (Asher, p.47).

According to the tape, Hannah was exploited by her schoolmate, Bryce Walker, who turns out to be her rapist. As we learn, Hannah was walking past a party at Courtney's. She joins the party and meets with Bryce who was swimming along with his friends in the pool. Suddenly, everybody left the pool, leaving Hannah alone with Bryce, who raped her. Following this incident, Hannah was under total shock and lost her trust in friends. Obviously, this accident played a very significant role in Hanna's decision to take her life. Hanna's decision comes after realizing that life is so painful and that death can be a source of comfort for her.

4.3 Me Before You: Plot summary

The story started when Louisa lost her job as a waitress due to the bankruptcy of the cafe. She went to the Job Centre, then she found a temporary position as caretaker for William Traynor, a successful man who had a motorcycle accident two years ago. Camilla Traynor, William's mother, hires Louisa to take care of her son together with Nathan, for six months. From Nathan's information, Louisa knows that William suffered from the spinal cord with a c5/6 quadriplegic level of

injury that caused him to have a total paralysis of hands, wrists, trunk, and legs.

The relationship between Louisa and William Traynor in the first few days did not go well. William acted coldly toward Louisa's joyful manner in the beginning. Then it took two weeks for them to build a good relationship. Under Louisa's care, William gradually became cheerful and talkative as they communicate with each other. Over the next few weeks, the two of them began to grow closer. Through their frequent discussion, Louisa learned that William's former life was excited. William, on the contrary, started to notice how Louisa's life is limited. He tried to motivate Louisa by giving her a lot of lessons which are related to daily life. Also, William guided Louisa on how to start valuing the meaning of life.

One day, Louisa overheard Traynor's conversation. Louisa knew from their discussion that William Traynor wanted to kill himself through 16 Dignitas six months later. Dignitas is a Swiss non-profit organization that provides a legal suicide under the qualified Swiss's doctors. Then Louisa quit the carer's job since she did not want to be involved in a suicidal attempt. She left the Traynor's house and submitted a resignation letter to

Camilla Traynor. The next day, Camilla Traynor came to Louisa's house and begged her to return. Camilla Traynor informed Louisa that she did her best in six months to make William cancel his death wish. Then Louisa agreed to return and help Camilla to change William's decision.

Louisa went to the library and joined a quadriplegic's chartroom to seek out a quadriplegic's friendly adventures, she created several outing trips for William, and she discussed her plan to William's parents. Overall, Louisa wanted William to feel that his life in a wheelchair is worth living. Through the outing plan, Louisa feels that her job is beneficial for herself and the others.

On the following days, Louisa started the outing plan. She took William to attend horse racing, and they attended the classic musical concert and she has a tattoo. They also attended William's ex-girlfriend wedding party. Louisa and William began to develop strong feelings for each other, which makes Patrick, Louisa's long term-boyfriend, feels jealous and eventually leads to a break-up.

Louisa fails to convince the millionaire, William to leave his wish, while she is in the last month of the carer's employment contract. During a luxurious trip to Mauritius Island, Louisa told William that she loved

him. Louisa admitted that she made a huge improvement in her life by the time she followed William's suggestion. But, William informed Louisa that he still intended to go to the Dignitas center to commit suicide. He asked Louisa to come in his final moment at Switzerland one week later. Louisa was heartbroken and decided to resign from the job as soon as she returns to England. When she came back, she told her family about Traynor's secret. Things get more complicated after Louisa knew that William went to Switzerland to commit suicide. Louisa did not go outside because she reported wait outside her house. Her mother; Josie Clark forbade her to get involved in Traynor's life anymore. However, Louisa still intended to support William since she had a deep feeling for him. Therefore, Louisa made up her mind and goes to Switzerland to see William on his final day.

4.4 Me Before You and the Meaninglessness of Life

Frankl in Pattakos found that the meaning of life can be established by a person (2008). Meaning may be found everywhere and in anytime. Every single thing we do in life is a reflection of meaning. Meaning of life lies within one's self and differs from one to another.

According to Viktor Frankl's "Logotherapy", in order to value the meaning of life the concept formulates the three pathways to meaning. He stated that according to "Logotherapy", we may discover the meaning of life in three different ways: by creating a work or doing a deed, by experiencing something or encountering someone, by the attitude we took toward unavoidable suffering (1984).

William is the center of the discussion in this study. Therefore, the intrinsic elements revolve around the character of William, the conflicts that he faced, and the setting of the story of *Me Before You*.

William's character in this novel is extremely strong in choosing the way of his own life. The most reason that he chose to end his life is that he knew that he cannot stay living confined to a wheelchair. Regardless of the people around him trying to alter his mind, he still insisted on his decisions about his plan to commit suicide. They never comprehend how William stayed through his life in a wheelchair until he decided to commit suicide, even when he found someone who loves him deeply; he did not change his decision. They still never understood William's feelings. Everyone has his own sense of experience in life, and he/she has

different experiences. Everything that William chose for his own life is entirely his choice.

After he got motorcycle accident, William's life turned to be miserable and full of desperation. His inability of doing anything made him hated himself. He felt like being quadriplegic is not his destiny; he tried to run away from the reality by changing his attitude. He chose to isolate himself. He did not want to deal with the people around him, even to the assistant hired by his mother, named Louisa Clark or Lou. William rejected Louisa and tried to make Louisa feel uncomfortable, just the same as the other assistants before, who quit from this job.

'Would you like me to make you a cup of tea?' I said, finally, when the silence became unbearable.

Ah. Yes. The girl who makes tea for a living. I wondered how long it would be before you wanted to show off your skills. No. No, thank you.

Coffee, then?'

No hot beverages for me, just now, Miss Clark.

You can call me Lou.

Will it help?

I blinked, my mouth opening briefly. I closed it. Dad always said it made me look more stupid than I actually was. Well ... can I get you anything?

He turned to look at me. His jaw was covered in several weeks of stubble, and his eyes were unreadable. He turned away.

I'll – I cast around the room. I'll see if there's any washing, then.
(Moyes, P.79)

The above quotation shows how William has negative thinking of the people who are being nice to him. He rudely refuses everything that Louisa offered to him. He just wants her to stop caring for him. Moreover, the above quotation clearly reflects the amount of desperation that William is experiencing. He believes that nothing can make him better. Not even a cup of tea, coffee, or even little care from others.

William never asked much help from his assistant Louisa. He always acted like he felt uncomfortable with the existence of Louisa in his everyday life. He talked in a sharp way to make Louisa stay away from him. However, Louisa always tried to get closer to William even though he acts roughly and always hurts her. It seemed like every single thing she did, always wrong for William and he always has a sharp answer to make her give up. I'm just trying to –

Miss Clark, my life is not going to be significantly improved by a drive around Stortfold's country lanes (Moyes, P.88).

The above quotation shows how William does not want a better situation. Normal people always look for fun activities when they got problems, but not to William. William does not want to go outside since the accident.

He chose to stay at his room, rather than healing his feeling by going to somewhere that probably can make him run away a little bit from his sadness. William keeps thinking that going outside does not make any improvement for his condition; instead, it just makes him worse because he sees so many normal people walking with their busy things, something that he did in the past, something that he did not get back.

William always pushed Louisa away with his words which are like a sword that always hurting Louisa. For so many times Louisa tried to have a good conversation with William and tried to make a topic that may be discussed together. But everything that Louisa did was always considered to be wrong in William's point of view. William showed his expression of desperation by always stating that what Louisa said is useless and did not make him in a better condition.

William chose to isolate himself because he liked being alone rather than having a partner beside him. He spent most of his time by watching movies or maybe listening to music alone. He did not like to have a partner. He enjoyed himself with his loneliness. Once a person deals with loneliness, it may be dangerous as this person proves to find comfort in his solitude. In this regard he says:

In the afternoon I would put a film on – Will had a membership of DVD club and new films arrived by post every day – but he never invited me to watch with him, so I'd usually go and sit in the kitchen or in spare room. I started bringing in a book or magazine, but I felt oddly guilty not actually working, and I could never quite concentrate on the words (Moyes, p.99).

The words above that are spoken by Louisa. They show how William tries to keep himself busy by conducting activities that do not require the involvement of another person; which implies that William is unable to run communal activities any longer and that he has developed a negative attitude towards life; life has started to seem meaningless to him.

This did not happen only to Louisa; William also wanted to push all the people away from him, including his friends and girlfriend. William hated himself after the accident; he tried to deny reality. One of those people is Rupert, who was William's best friend at work. They used to enjoy a strong friendship before William's accident took place. For several times, Rupert tried to support William by visiting and motivating him, but William only pushed him away from his life. William thought that all the people who tried to get closer to him after he has become quadriplegic only felt sorry for him. He thought that they did not really want to be friend with him but only showed their mere sympathy to him.

And that was absolutely not what William wanted. That is exactly why William preferred being alone rather than being with fake people.

Suicide became the best choice for William after he thought that his condition did not get any better. He was unbearable to live the life that he did not want, a life that is always full of pain and agonies. In this respect he says:

I swallowed, shaking my head. you... you once told me that the night in the maze did not have to be the thing that defined me. You said I could choose what it was that defined me. Well, you don't have to let that... that chair define you.

But it does define me, Clark. You don't know me, not really. You never saw me before this thing. I loved my life, Clark. Really loved it. I loved my job, my travels, the things I was. I loved being a physical person. I liked riding my motorbike, hurling myself off buildings. I liked crushing people in business deals. I liked having sex. A lot of sex. I led a big life. His voice have lifted now. "I am not design to exist in this thing – and yet for all intents and purposes it is now the thing that defines me. It is the only thing that defines me. (Moyes, p.744)

The conversation between William and Louisa showed the reason why William wanted to commit suicide. He did not accept his destiny to be a quadriplegic. If he did not get his life back like the way it was before the

accident, he better ended his life. Once William was an active person, he had a perfect life and perfect job. He loved the adventurous activity that pumped his adrenaline. But after the accident, he lost everything that made him alive. As he indicates: “I need to end here, no more chair. No more pneumonia. No more burning limbs. No more pain and tiredness and waking up every morning already wishing it was over” (Moyes, p.746).

William's statement in this speech showed that he held back his emotional feeling about his inability, but also that it physically hurt him every day. That pain made him really tired and wants to give up. Every night and day he always consumed a lot of medications, treatments, and therapies, but his conditions never got any better. There was no improvement even when he did so many treatments for two years. There are a number of conditions encroaching on William, and he did not want to be in pain anymore.

Interestingly enough, in *Me Before You*, Louisa learns from her experience as a caretaker to find meaning in life. Her endless endeavours to help William get over his experience create inside her lovely and positive feelings towards life. After spending time with William, she

comes to appreciate life and to enjoy living it. Moreover, her job as a waitress taught her how to spend life happily while enjoying work. Such incidents in the novel can be seen as the author's message to the reader to try always to find meaning in life and to appreciate it.

To conclude, Hanna's decision to commit suicide comes in the novel as a consequence of losing her reputation as well as for losing her trust in the people around her. Being constantly and frequently bullied and abused by her schoolmates, Hanna feels an outsider in her community. She no longer can stand being emotionally and physically violated. Her inability to cope with the consequent accidents in her life, she begins to hate life and to perceive it as meaningless. Instead of facing her dilemma and trying to find a way out, Hannah succumbs to death. She feels that her life started to be hollow and harsh; thus, she resorts to death as an asylum at which she can feel comfort. Through Hanna's story, the author tackles the issue of bullying, trying to show it as a main source for losing meaning in life. Thus, the novel can be seen as a call for awareness about this phenomenon. Moreover, the novel tries to motivate youth to endeavour to find meaning in their life instead of resorting to suicide. In a different style, Moyes presents the issue of the "Meaninglessness" of

life. In this novel, she shows the sudden change in William's life following the accident as a main source for his agony. William, who appears at the beginning of the novel as a lively man who loves life and who has a positive perspective towards it, decides to take his life by the end of the novel. While he is functions as a source of inspiration for Louisa at the beginning of the novel, he ends up a negative person who sees death better than life. Unlike Hannah, William's pain is caused by an accident rather than people. However, both characters views life as meaningless due to the circumstances they experience. *Me Befor You* interestingly provides the reader with tips and advice on how to find meaning in life. Thus, both novels can be seen as social critique.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations for further Studies

This chapter consists of two parts. The first one is the conclusion of the thesis whereas the second one the devoted to recommendation for further studies.

5.0 Conclusion

As the study argued, Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You* deal with a very significant issue, namely the "Meaninglessness" of life. Both novels touch upon the reasons why the main characters commit suicide. The two novels present suicide as an alternative to unwanted life. As it has been manifested, both Hannah and William go through harsh experiences and accordingly develop negative and pessimistic attitude towards life. Their lives start to be meaningless, absurd and shallow. Thus, both characters start to perceive death an asylum that saves them the endurance of life. Hannah, the protagonist of Asher's *Thirteen Reasons*, loses confidence in her beloved as well as her friends; she realises after a series of events that their feelings towards her are not genuine and are not pure. Upon this recognition, Hannah loses interest in her life and starts to view her life as meaningless. Moreover,

Hannah loses her privacy and self-respect, which also adds to her perception of life as meaningless and unworthy of living. The study concludes that suicide as presented in both works can be incited by many reasons such as losing ability, sudden change in life, loss of trust, loss of confidence, being bullied and being violated. Both novels can be seen as literary attempts to raise awareness about the aforementioned issues. Moreover, Moyes's *Me Before You* interestingly offers through the character of Louisa some suggestions on how one can add meaning to his/ her life. Furthermore, both novels show disagreement with the idea of suicide and invite people to try to find meaning in life rather than succumbing to death.

5.1 Recommendations for further Studies.

The researcher recommends the following points:

1. More literary attention to be devoted to both novels as they are still in need of further academic examination.
2. More scholarly attention should be exerted to tackle issues of suicide, death, life, Meaninglessness of life, and bullying in literature. Literature can be an effective tool to raise awareness about such issues.
3. The other works by Asher and Moeys should be scholarly examined as they prove to be interesting authors.

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