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Reconstructing meaning in life: a gadamerian hermeneutic reading of Zainuddin in Hamka's *tenggelamnya kapal van der wijck* through logotherapy

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies of Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* examine adat hegemony and psychological conflict, but not how identity exclusion, love, work, loss, and regret form different pathways of meaning. This study used Gadamerian hermeneutics, with logotherapy as a theory-informed interpretive horizon rather than a diagnosis. The bounded corpus was the complete 1984 edition; the unit of analysis was a context-bounded dialogue, narration, or short episode. A revision-stage verification of three documented reading cycles identified 60 candidate segments, of which 48 met the explicit inclusion rules. Meanings were tested through movement between each segment, its context, the whole plot, and operational logotherapy categories. Trustworthiness was supported through contextualized quotations, a codebook, a decision trail, reflexive memoing, and disconfirming-evidence checks. Four clusters emerged: an identity wound of nonrecognition; love as an unstable experiential value; adat as a sociocultural constraint; and literary work as creative value and self-transcendence. The central finding is asynchronous meaning reconstruction: creative values can develop while attitudinal values remain unresolved. This situates freedom within sociocultural constraints and distinguishes productivity from recovery. Counseling implications are reflective-conceptual, not evidence of intervention effectiveness.



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Introduction

Literary works do not merely present narrative events; they also contain existential experiences that can be read as a human process of interpreting suffering, loss, hope, and responsibility. In the context of counseling, literary texts can become a space for reflection because readers encounter life conflicts through a relatively safe symbolic distance. Recent literature on bibliotherapy and shared reading shows that reading, reflecting on, and dialoguing with texts can support emotional processing, meaning exploration, and well-being, although their use must still be guided by methodological and ethical boundaries (Järvholm et al., 2025; Monroy-Fraustro et al., 2021; Redman et al., 2024).

Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* provides such a reflective space through the figure of Zainuddin. He is born of the encounter between two cultural worlds and comes to Minangkabau in the hope of

finding his father's ancestral land. However, his hope of returning home is confronted by the reality that he continues to be regarded as an outsider in both his mother's and his father's kinship lines. Therefore, the novel's main conflict is inadequate if reduced to a love tragedy. Zainuddin's love for Hayati rests on an earlier wound: the loss of identity recognition and the absence of a social place where he can feel legitimate as a human being (Hamka, 1984).

Previous studies have provided an important foundation for understanding the social and psychological dimensions of this novel. Studies on the hegemony of adat show that the Minangkabau kinship structure functions as a force regulating the eligibility of relationships and the boundaries of a character's social acceptance (Ardianta, 2024; Manugeren et al., 2023). Studies in literary psychology read Zainuddin's suffering through inferiority, inner conflict, and sublimation that transforms wounds into creative energy (Rasyid & Putra, 2025). This direction is important, but it has not specifically explained how Zainuddin's suffering, love, work, and regret are reconstructed into meaning in life through operational logotherapeutic categories.

Taken together, these streams of scholarship explain how adat regulates Zainuddin's social position and how psychological conflict can be transformed into creative activity. They do not, however, explain how identity exclusion, love, literary work, loss, and regret are reorganized into different pathways of meaning, how these pathways may develop at different rates, or how freedom of will operates within sociocultural constraints. The present study therefore does not merely redescribe familiar conflicts using existential vocabulary. It uses a Gadamerian hermeneutic reading informed by logotherapy to identify textual patterns through which recognition, relationship, work, and attitude interact in the reconstruction of meaning.

This gap is relevant because meaning in life has become a central theme in contemporary psychology and counseling. Martela and Steger (2023) conceptualize meaning in life as a multidimensional construct comprising coherence, purpose, and significance. From the perspective of logotherapy, meaning in life has also been shown to serve as a resource, a contributing factor, and a protective factor for life satisfaction, especially when individuals face role pressures and life tensions (Wolfram, 2023). A systematic review shows that meaning-making is associated with posttraumatic growth among individuals experiencing severe adversity (Almeida et al., 2022), while a study of university students indicates that meaning in life can serve as a protective factor against depressive symptoms through its relationship with emotion regulation (Baquero-Tomás et al., 2023). A cross-national study across 26 European countries and Israel shows that meaning in life can mediate the relationship between loneliness and depression among older adults (de Maio Nascimento et al., 2024). Thus, meaning in life is not merely a philosophical theme but also a psychological resource for human beings facing alienation and loss. Consistent with this protective perspective, Arslan and Yıldırım (2021) found that meaning in life and optimism helped explain the association between coronavirus-related stress and depressive symptoms among university students.

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy provides an appropriate lens for reading these dynamics. Frankl emphasizes that human beings are driven by the will to meaning, possess the freedom of will to determine their attitude within the limits of conditions that cannot always be changed, and can discover meaning in suffering when suffering cannot be avoided (Frankl, 2006, 2014; Khairul & Sari, 2025). Contemporary literature on meaning-based approaches shows that logotherapy, meaning therapy, and meaning-centered psychotherapy have been developed in the contexts of psychological health, spiritual well-being, quality of life, and existential assistance (Aiello-Puchol & García-Alandete, 2025; Marco et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2024; Terao & Satoh, 2022). Recent studies also show that meaning-based interventions operationalize the themes of freedom, responsibility, choice, creativity, identity, creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values (Wang et al., 2023), while meta-analytic studies demonstrate the potential of this approach to increase sense of meaning and reduce certain psychological symptoms in clinical populations (Rahgozar & Giménez-Llort, 2024; Shen et al., 2025).

The use of clinical literature in this article is not intended to make Zainuddin a patient or an object of diagnosis. Logotherapy is used as a conceptual lens to interpret the character's patterns of meaning-making in the text. This boundary needs to be emphasized so that literary study does not fall into anachronistic psychologization. Recent existential therapy literature emphasizes that issues of identity, isolation, freedom, death, and meaning can be read across contexts, but the therapeutic process still requires adequate assessment and intervention design (Menzies & Menzies, 2024). Therefore, clinical references such as logotherapy, meaning-centered psychotherapy, and meaning-based therapy are used to sharpen concepts and the ethical boundaries of interpretation, not to claim therapeutic effectiveness for the study of the novel (Eskigölek & Kav, 2024; Shaygan et al., 2024).

The novel's cultural context deepens the relevance of logotherapy. Zainuddin's rejection stems from the relationship among the self, adat, family, and social honor. Social exclusion is understood as a multidomain process that can weaken social relationships, sense of control, and psychological well-being (Filia et al., 2025).

At the same time, studies of meaning in life from a cultural perspective show that cultural identity, social support, and resilience can serve as important pathways to the formation of a sense of meaning (Zhou et al., 2025). Thus, Zainuddin's story allows logotherapy to be read culturally rather than merely individually. Zainuddin's alienation appears not only as a personal conflict, but also as an existential experience shaped by socio-cultural structures.

This section is positioned as a reading lens, not as a list of variables. In literary-hermeneutic research, logotherapy is not used to diagnose characters, but to sharpen the question of how a text constructs meaningful experience. Frankl views human beings as creatures who can continue to search for meaning through the will to meaning, the freedom to take a stance, and responsibility toward concrete situations (Frankl, 2006, 2014). On this basis, Zainuddin is read as a narrative subject who interprets suffering through relationships, work, and attitudinal choices.

Frankl's three pathways to meaning are used as interrelated analytical categories. Experiential values are used to read moments when love, recognition, and Hayati's presence provide vitality for Zainuddin. Creative values are used to read the transformation of wounds into literary work when Zainuddin builds his identity as a writer. Attitudinal values are used to read the character's response to suffering that cannot be changed, especially rejection by adat, the loss of Hayati, and final regret. These three categories are not treated as linear stages; in this novel, creative values may grow while attitudinal values remain fractured and ambivalent.

Operationally, experiential values are marked by the character's experience of feeling loved, accepted, or given hope; creative values are marked by the transformation of suffering into work or meaningful action; and attitudinal values are marked by the way the character chooses an attitude toward suffering that cannot be changed. Self-transcendence is used when the character moves beyond self-interest toward contribution to others. Unlike Frankl's core logotherapeutic concepts, continuing bonds are positioned as a supporting concept in grief literature for understanding the dynamics of loss, especially when an inner relationship with a lost figure continues to influence the character's meaning-making process.

Supporting concepts such as meaning in suffering, self-transcendence, and tragic optimism are used to deepen the interpretation. Meaning in suffering marks the possibility of meaning when suffering cannot be avoided. Self-transcendence appears when a personal wound moves outward into work that affects others. Tragic optimism helps explain why hope can persist without negating tragedy (Leung et al., 2021; Martela & Steger, 2023). With this delimitation, logotherapy functions as an interpretive horizon that is continuously tested against quotations, plot, conflict, and the whole story.

Accordingly, this Gadamerian hermeneutic study pursues three objectives: (1) to analyze how the text constructs Zainuddin's existential suffering through identity, adat, love, and loss; (2) to identify how experiential, creative, and attitudinal values are configured across his narrative trajectory; and (3) to compare these configurations with logotherapy and contemporary literature on meaning, exclusion, grief, and bibliotherapy. The observable analytical outcomes are context-bounded textual units, operational category assignments, four interpretive clusters, and a theory-informed synthesis of their relationships. The proposed contribution is the concept of asynchronous meaning reconstruction: creative values and self-transcendence can develop through literary work while attitudinal values remain delayed, fractured, or ambivalent.

Method

This study employed a qualitative-interpretative design grounded in Gadamerian literary hermeneutics. Gadamerian concepts of pre-understanding, the hermeneutic circle, dialogue with the text, and fusion of horizons guided the analysis (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Gadamer, 2004). In operational terms, a 'part' was a context-bounded narrative segment, whereas the 'whole' comprised the complete plot, Zainuddin's character trajectory, and the novel's cultural world. Interpretation moved repeatedly between these levels. Core logotherapy concepts were specified a priori as theory-informed sensitizing categories for provisional assignment. The four cross-text interpretive clusters, however, were constructed iteratively from convergent provisional meanings and remained open to revision through part-whole testing and disconfirming evidence. Logotherapy was not used as a clinical diagnosis, a rigid variable model, or a post-hoc label.

The primary data source was the complete 1984 edition of Hamka's novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*. The unit of analysis was a context-bounded segment: a dialogue, narration, letter, or short episode that altered or clarified Zainuddin's relation to identity, love, adat, work, loss, forgiveness, or attitude. The entire novel was screened rather than sampling selected chapters. Every retained segment was recorded in a working matrix with its page number, speaker or narrative position, immediate context, provisional meaning, candidate

logotherapy category, relationship to other segments, and notes from the whole-text re-reading. Published scholarship served as a secondary interpretive horizon and did not replace evidence from the primary text. Treating the novel as a bounded documentary corpus is consistent with qualitative document analysis, which emphasizes explicit document selection, systematic examination, and reflexive analytical procedures (Morgan, 2022).

Secondary sources were used selectively to build the conceptual foundation and delimit the interpretation, especially literature on logotherapy, meaning in life, hermeneutics, social exclusion, cultural identity, and continuing bonds. Secondary literature was not used to replace the reading of the primary text, but to examine whether the conceptual terms used in the study had verifiable academic support. References that were incomplete, lacked clear authorship, lacked traceable journal or publisher identity, or came only from popular sources without a scholarly basis were not included in the final manuscript.

Textual units were selected purposively using explicit decision rules. Inclusion required that a segment (1) directly expressed or materially altered suffering, alienation, recognition, love, rejection by adat, work, loss, forgiveness, or attitudinal choice; (2) functioned as a turning point or clarified a recurring pattern; and (3) could be linked to an operational logotherapy concept without removing it from its narrative context. Exclusion applied to descriptions that did not affect meaning-making, purely transitional plot material, duplicate evidence that added no interpretive distinction, and quotations too long to function as focused evidence. Because the corpus was a complete, bounded novel, the stopping criterion was corpus closure and interpretive sufficiency rather than statistical or interview-based saturation.

During the revision-stage verification screening, the complete novel was reread as a bounded corpus. The screening identified 60 candidate context-bounded textual segments. Twelve segments were excluded because they were descriptive or transitional, repeated an already established pattern without adding an analytically distinct meaning, or were insufficiently connected to Zainuddin's meaning-making trajectory. Forty-eight segments were retained in the final analytical matrix: 11 primarily supported the identity-wound and nonrecognition cluster, 10 the experiential-value cluster, 12 the adat-constraint cluster, and 15 the literary-work and attitudinal-struggle cluster. Each retained segment was counted once according to its primary interpretive cluster, although more than one logotherapy code could be assigned when conceptually justified.

Table 1. Distribution of Retained Textual Units

Interpretive cluster	Retained segments
Identity wound and nonrecognition	11
Love as an unstable experiential value	10
Adat as a sociocultural constraint	12
Literary work and attitudinal struggle	15
Total	48

Data collection involved three documented reading cycles. The first established the whole plot, cultural setting, conflicts, and character trajectory. The second marked candidate segments and recorded contextual metadata. The third compared segments across the novel, grouped convergent provisional meanings, and actively searched for disconfirming evidence. For example, Zainuddin's success as a writer initially supported a recovery reading, but his later response to Hayati contradicted a total-recovery interpretation. This disconfirming case led to the revised formulation that creative values can develop while attitudinal values remain unresolved.

The analytical protocol comprised eight linked operations: (1) whole-text orientation; (2) selection of eligible textual units; (3) contextual memoing; (4) formulation of provisional meanings; (5) hermeneutic-logotherapy interpretation through category assignment and part-whole testing; (6) dialogue with secondary literature; (7) cluster synthesis; and (8) rechecking against the complete narrative. The four final clusters were accepted only when their member segments shared a defensible meaning pattern, their boundaries could be distinguished using the codebook, and the interpretation remained consistent with both supporting and disconfirming passages. The protocol also made the movement from textual units to progressively more abstract clusters visible, consistent with calls for transparent and reflexive reporting of qualitative data reduction (Nicomanis, 2024).

Interpretive trustworthiness was addressed through transparency rather than statistical reliability. The analysis was conducted by one researcher; therefore, no intercoder coefficient was calculated. Member checking was not applicable because the data were a published literary text rather than participant testimony. Credibility and auditability were supported through verbatim quotations, contextual descriptions, explicit category definitions, a decision trail, reflexive notes, disconfirming-evidence checks, and re-examination of every final claim

against the whole narrative. The absence of an independent second coder or formal external peer debriefing is acknowledged as a limitation when interpreting the findings.

Source limitations were also assessed. A literary character cannot be treated as a clinical patient, and contemporary psychological research cannot be used to claim direct empirical equivalence with the historical and cultural world represented in the novel. Accordingly, studies of social exclusion, grief, and meaning in life were used as heuristic dialogue partners at the level of mechanisms such as nonrecognition, relational disconnection, perceived control, and continuing bonds while the interpretation remained anchored in Hamka's text and its adat context.

Table 2. Operational Codebook for Logotherapy-Informed Hermeneutic Analysis

Concept	Operational indicator	Decision rule	Illustrative application
Will to meaning	Movement toward a reason, direction, or responsibility that enables endurance.	Code only when the segment shows an active search or reorientation, not suffering alone.	Alienation initiates the search through love, learning, faith, and later work.
Meaning in suffering	Meaning considered when unavoidable suffering cannot be removed.	The condition must be represented as irreversible or outside the character's direct control.	Origin and adat rejection cannot simply be chosen away.
Experiential values	Meaning received through love, recognition, beauty, faith, or relationship.	The segment must change felt worth, vitality, hope, or belonging.	Hayati's recognition: 'kau izinkan aku hidup.'
Creative values	Meaning enacted through work, creation, or responsible contribution.	The action must transform experience into a product or contribution beyond passive expression.	Sadness is transformed into literary work.
Freedom of will	Capacity to choose a response within conditions that cannot be fully controlled.	Do not code as absolute freedom; identify both constraint and available response.	Zainuddin cannot choose origin or adat decisions but can choose work and attitude.
Self-transcendence	Orientation beyond self-interest toward a person, task, or contribution.	The segment must show impact or commitment extending beyond private relief.	Shabir's work reaches readers and audiences.
Attitudinal values	Chosen stance toward unavoidable suffering.	Distinguish attained acceptance from an unresolved or ambivalent struggle.	Love and resentment co-exist when Hayati returns.
Continuing bonds	An inner relationship with a lost figure that continues through memory, love, or regret.	Use as a supporting grief concept, not as a core Frankl category; assess both meaning and risk.	The bond with Hayati persists and can sustain meaning or prolong regret.

Table 2 operationalizes the logotherapy concepts used during the hermeneutic-logotherapy interpretation stage. Figure 1 summarizes how these concepts were integrated into the broader iterative analytical cycle. To demonstrate how this cycle operated in practice, the following worked example traces one textual segment from initial identification and contextual memoing to category assignment, disconfirming-evidence checking, and final interpretation.

Worked analytical example. Selected textual unit: Zainuddin is described as an 'orang asing' in both his maternal and paternal social worlds (Hamka, 1984, pp. 18, 27). Immediate context: he arrives seeking ancestral belonging but is not fully recognized within the kinship structure. Provisional meaning: exclusion is experienced as a wound of identity recognition, not merely loneliness. Part-whole test: the outsider motif recurs before the love conflict and explains why Hayati's recognition becomes disproportionately important. Category decision: the segment indicates existential suffering that activates the will to meaning; it is not coded as an attained experiential value because recognition is absent. Disconfirming check: later literary success does not erase this wound. Final interpretation: the loss of a social home becomes the foundational condition from which Zainuddin searches for meaning through relationship, work, and attitude.

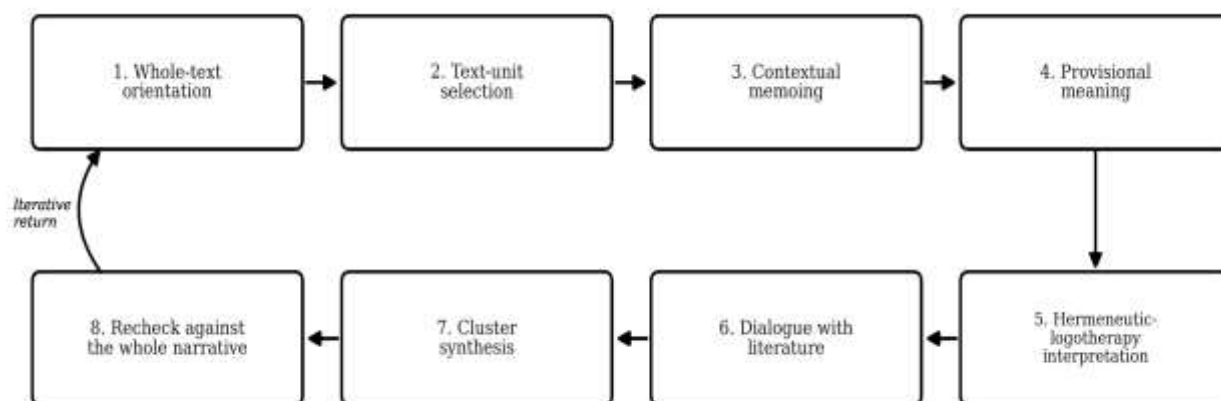


Figure 1. Operational Hermeneutic Cycle Applied to the Novel

Reflexivity was an important part of this study. The researcher's initial pre-understanding was that logotherapy could help read Zainuddin's suffering as a search for meaning. This pre-understanding was not used as an initial conclusion, but as an interpretative starting point that was continuously tested through dialogue with the text. When the text showed that Zainuddin succeeded in producing literary work but still bore wounds toward Hayati, the interpretation was adjusted: the reconstruction of meaning was not read as a total recovery but as a layered, fractured, and ambivalent process. Thus, theory was not forced to close the complexity of the character, but was used to clarify the dynamics of meaning that were genuinely supported by textual evidence. This approach treats reflexivity not as the elimination of subjectivity but as the continuous critical examination of how the researcher's history, assumptions, and interpretive position shape the analytical encounter (McBride, 2023; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

Results and Discussion

The findings were organized into four interconnected clusters derived from the analytical matrix rather than from frequency counts. Segments were grouped when their provisional meanings converged and when they performed a comparable function in Zainuddin's narrative trajectory. Cluster distinctness was checked using the operational decision rules: the suffering-of-origin cluster concerned nonrecognition before the love conflict; the experiential-value cluster concerned vitality derived from love and recognition; the adat cluster concerned sociocultural limits on legitimacy and freedom; and the work-and-attitude cluster concerned the unequal development of creative, self-transcendent, and attitudinal values. The resulting trajectory shows that meaning does not emerge suddenly or progress in a uniform sequence, but is constructed through repeated wounds, choices, contributions, and reinterpretations. The final synthesis was based on 48 retained segments distributed across the four clusters (11, 10, 12, and 15 segments, respectively).

Suffering of Origin as the Foundational Wound in the Search for Meaning

Zainuddin's suffering begins before he meets Hayati. He comes to Batipuh in the hope of finding his father's ancestral land, but this hope is confronted by a kinship structure that does not fully include him. The acceptance he receives is external, while the social recognition he seeks is never truly present. Thus, Zainuddin's initial suffering cannot be adequately read as personal loneliness; it is an identity wound arising from the social environment's failure to provide a sense of belonging.

"Malang nasib anak yang demikian, sebab dalam negeri ibunya dia dipandang orang asing, dan dalam negeri ayahnya dia dipandang orang asing pula" (Hamka, 1984, p. 18). "Saya akui, saya orang dagang melarat dan anak orang terbuang yang datang dari negeri jauh, yatim dan piatu" (Hamka, 1984, p. 27).

The two quotations show that the phrase "orang asing" refers not only to ethnic or customary position, but also to the experience of not being recognized as a legitimate subject. This interpretation is consistent with studies on social exclusion, which show that relational disconnection, weak social support, and a low sense of control are associated with psychological distress and reduced well-being (Filia et al., 2025). From the perspective of meaning in life, cultural identity and social support also play a role in shaping a sense of meaning through resilience and a feeling of connectedness with a group (Zhou et al., 2025).

Hermeneutically, the expression "orang asing" becomes a symbol of existential alienation. Its meaning goes beyond adat status because it points to a human condition in which one loses a social home. When this part is read alongside the whole story, Zainuddin's suffering becomes the starting point for the search for meaning. Contemporary psychological findings support this interpretation: meaning in life is negatively associated with

loneliness and depression and can even mediate the relationship between the two (de Maio Nascimento et al., 2024). Therefore, Zainuddin's alienation can be interpreted as a condition that activates the will to meaning, namely the drive to search for reasons to endure through love, faith, learning, and later, literary work.

Love as an Experiential Value and the Beginning of a Crisis of Meaning

Love for Hayati marks the next stage in Zainuddin's journey of meaning. After his identity is shaken by rejection, he finds someone willing to hear his inner confession. Their relationship develops through meetings, letters, and dialogues in the dangau sawah. The dangau becomes an in-between space: neither the adat house guarded by the mamak nor the village's public space, filled with gossip. In that place, both can speak inner truths that cannot be expressed in official social spaces.

Hayati berkata, "Saya cinta akan dikau, biarlah hati kita sama-sama dirahmati Tuhan" (Hamka, 1984, p. 35). Zainuddin menjawab, "Hayati... kau kembalikan jiwaku! Kau izinkan aku hidup" (Hamka, 1984, p. 36). Pada perpindahan berikutnya, Hayati menegaskan, "Cinta bukan melemahkan hati... tetapi cinta menghidupkan pengharapan, menguatkan hati dalam perjuangan" (Hamka, 1984, p. 42).

The text positions love as an experience that gives vitality. The sentence "kau izinkan aku hidup" shows that Hayati's love is not merely a sentimental expression for Zainuddin. This love restores his sense of worth and gives direction to his future. In studies of meaning in life, interpersonal relationships, social support, and the experience of being significant to others are important elements in the formation of meaning in life (Martela & Steger, 2023; Zhou et al., 2025). Recent findings also show that social support and self-acceptance are related to both the presence of meaning and search for meaning (Wu et al., 2024), while relational dynamics can influence perceived social support, belongingness, and meaning in life (Moynihan et al., 2023). Thus, experiential values in this novel operate through the experience of being loved, trusted, and recognized.

This experiential value is unstable because, from the beginning, it is under the pressure of adat, social class, and village surveillance. When Hayati chooses the path determined by family and adat, Zainuddin loses not only a prospective wife but also the figure who once recognized him as a valuable human being. Zainuddin's crisis of meaning therefore cannot be reduced to heartbreak. The loss of Hayati collapses the structure of recognition he has been building. From a hermeneutic perspective, love and identity are mutually bound: the wound of identity makes love highly decisive, while the failure of love deepens the wound of identity.

The Clash with Adat and the Wound of Social Recognition

The love between Zainuddin and Hayati does not occur in an empty space. Their relationship exists within an adat structure that determines who is considered legitimate, proper, and worthy of being a partner. Adat in the novel is not merely a cultural background, but also an interpretive force that gives labels to human beings. Through adat, personal experience is transformed into a matter of reputation, lineage, and social recognition.

Mamak Hayati berkata, "Percintaan hanyalah khayal dongeng dalam kitab saja. Kalau bertemu dalam pergaulan hidup, cela besar namanya." Ketika Hayati menyebut Zainuddin sebagai manusia dan juga keturunan Minangkabau, mamaknya menjawab, "Mana bisa jadi, gadis. Menyebut saja pun tidak pantas." Suara adat ditegaskan dalam kalimat, "Adat masih berdiri dengan kuat, tak boleh lapuk oleh hujan, tak boleh lekang oleh panas" (Hamka, 1984, p. 39).

The quotation reveals adat as a social boundary. Love, which for Zainuddin and Hayati is a sacred experience, is interpreted by adat authority as disgrace. This rejection does not merely sever the relationship between two young people; it also confirms that Zainuddin is placed outside the recognized structure of honor. The sentence "menyebut saja pun tidak pantas" amounts to a symbolic erasure of the possibility that Zainuddin might be accepted.

This interpretation is placed in dialogue with research on social exclusion, but without equating a contemporary psychological construct with Minangkabau adat or treating the novel as empirical data about present-day populations. Filia et al. (2025) are used heuristically because their multidomain model identifies mechanisms relational disconnection, weakened support, reduced control, and constricted views of the future that illuminate the consequences of symbolic exclusion. Zhou et al. (2025) similarly show that cultural identity, social support, and resilience can contribute to meaning in life. At the level of interpretive mechanism, Zainuddin's rejection by adat damages both his love relationship and his source of social recognition; historically and culturally, however, the meaning of adat remains grounded in the novel's own narrative world.

Within a Gadamerian dialogue, the interpreter's contemporary logotherapy horizon encounters the novel's historically situated adat horizon. This encounter does not erase historical difference; rather, it revises an individualistic reading of freedom of will into a form of situated agency. Within the narrative itself, Zainuddin and Hayati's horizon of love conflicts with the adat horizon of social propriety and lineage. The clash produces an existential wound because Zainuddin is rejected not only as a lover, but also as a worthy subject.

Logotherapy reads this situation in terms of freedom of will, but this freedom must be understood in context. Zainuddin is not free to determine his origin and cannot control adat decisions. His space of freedom lies in how he chooses to respond to that suffering. This interpretation aligns with contemporary developments in existential therapy, which emphasize that human choice always occurs within specific historical, social, and relational contexts (Menzies & Menzies, 2024). Thus, logotherapy does not ignore social structures; it reads the possibility of human attitude within social boundaries that cannot always be changed.

Literary Work, Self-transcendence, and the Struggle of Attitudinal Values

Zainuddin's reconstruction of meaning in life does not occur in a straight line. After experiencing rejection, he moves from the position of victim toward that of a subject who produces literary work. This transformation shows that suffering can be processed into creative value. However, social success does not automatically heal inner wounds. Work and attitude become two fields of meaning-making that are interrelated, but do not always proceed in balance.

"Mengertilah dia bahwa inilah tujuan yang tetap dari hidupnya" (Hamka, 1984, p. 97). Mengenai proses kreatifnya, teks tersebut menyebutkan, "Segenap kesedihan... itulah yang ditumpahkannya ke dalam karangan-karangan" (Hamka, 1984, p. 98). Ketika Hayati kembali dalam keadaan terluka, Zainuddin berkata dengan tegas, "Tidak, Hayati! Kau mesti pulang kembali ke Padang!" (Hamka, 1984, p. 125). Setelah itu, ia mengaku kepada Muluk, "Cinta saya kepada Hayati masih belum rusak, walau sebesar rambut sekalipun!" (Hamka, 1984, p. 129).

Two layers of meaning reconstruction appear in this section. The first layer is the transformation of suffering into literary work. At this stage, Zainuddin finds dignity through creative values. The second layer is the struggle of attitude. When he encounters Hayati again, love and resentment struggle within him. Zainuddin's reconstruction of meaning is tragic: he succeeds in transforming wounds into work, but he has not yet fully transformed them into acceptance.

The chapter *"Jiwa Pengarang"* becomes the hermeneutic key to Zainuddin's transformation. His work does not emerge from an empty space but from reinterpreted sadness. Studies on meaning-making and posttraumatic growth show that efforts to give meaning to suffering can be associated with psychological growth, although this relationship is not automatic and still depends on individual context (Almeida et al., 2022). In logotherapy, this movement demonstrates creative values: human beings find meaning by creating something valuable for others.

Zainuddin's fame as Shabir also demonstrates self-transcendence, as his personal wound extends beyond himself and becomes work that touches readers and audiences. This interpretation is consistent with the idea that meaningfulness is related not only to coherence and purpose, but also to the sense that life has significance and impact on others (Fuhrer & Cova, 2026; Martela & Steger, 2023). Experimental studies on perceptions of meaning show that self-transcendence, namely an orientation toward benefits for something beyond the self, is an important element in how people evaluate a meaningful life (Huang & Yang, 2023). Longitudinal findings also show that meaning in life can encourage prosocial behavior through psychological capital (Zhang et al., 2022).

Creative value is not the same as full recovery. The scene of rejection toward Hayati shows a struggle in the realm of attitudinal values, not the achievement of a completed attitudinal value. Zainuddin is already able to produce work, but his response is still pulled by the wounds of humiliation and betrayal. The literature on meaning-centered therapy presents meaning as a process that can support quality of life and psychological health, but it does not reduce suffering to instant recovery (Marco et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2024). Another meta-analysis also shows that meaning-based therapy may be associated with reduced death anxiety and increased posttraumatic growth, but the results are not always uniform and therefore need to be read carefully (Shaygan et al., 2024; Shen et al., 2025).

The theoretical contribution of this analysis is more specific than the general claim that meaning-making is nonlinear. The text supports a text-grounded interpretive formulation of asynchronous meaning reconstruction in which three pathways can develop unevenly. First, creative values and self-transcendence emerge when suffering is transformed into literary work that reaches others. Second, experiential values remain vulnerable when recognition is concentrated in a single relationship. Third, attitudinal values may lag behind external achievement because resentment, grief, and regret continue to shape the response to irreversible suffering. Read hermeneutically, logotherapy identifies the pathways of meaning; read through the whole narrative, the novel shows that the pathways do not mature simultaneously. This contextualizes Frankl's freedom of will as situated agency: Zainuddin cannot choose his origin or abolish adat, but he retains a limited capacity to choose work and attitude within those constraints. It also establishes that productivity is evidence of creative meaning, not proof of complete psychological recovery. This formulation is proposed as an interpretive proposition derived from one literary text, not as a general psychological model of meaning reconstruction.

The final part of the story also shows that Hayati's loss does not necessarily sever Zainuddin's inner relationship with her. Zainuddin's confession to Muluk, "*cinta saya kepada Hayati masih belum rusak, walau sebesar rambut sekalipun*" (Hamka, 1984, p. 129), shows that his relationship with Hayati does not end with the failure of love or with a social decision. This emotional bond continues to work through love, memory, regret, and the character's reinterpretation of his suffering as the plot moves toward loss. At this point, continuing bonds can be used carefully to read that a relationship with a lost figure is not always severed, but can become both a source of meaning and a source of new suffering if it is dominated by idealization and prolonged regret (Hewson et al., 2024).

Reflective Implications for Counseling from a Logotherapy Perspective

In this article, logotherapy is used as a framework for understanding how Zainuddin seeks meaning in life. This study uses hermeneutic analysis of a literary text; therefore, the implications proposed are not intervention protocols, character diagnoses, or therapy modules ready for application. The implications of this article are more reflective-conceptual in nature, namely to help counselors understand how human beings make meaning of alienation, love, loss, work, and regret. Thus, the novel can be used as a dialogical medium for reflecting on meaning in life, while decisions in counseling practice must still be based on assessment, counseling contracts, the client's psychological condition, and the counselor's professional competence.

First, Zainuddin's story can be used to open a dialogue about the meaning of suffering and the will to meaning. Zainuddin's suffering is not only heartbreak but also a wound of recognition arising from rejection of social and adat norms. In logotherapy counseling, counselors can help clients concretely name the sources of their suffering before inviting them to search for possible meaning. Meaning must not be imposed as moral advice, because the will to meaning operates as a personal drive to find reasons to endure and take responsibility within the situation faced (Frankl, 2006, 2014). Contemporary psychological evidence strengthens this understanding, as meaning in life can serve as a protective resource for life satisfaction and for mitigating depressive symptoms (Baquero-Tomás et al., 2023; Wolfram, 2023). Thus, meaning in suffering is understood as a possibility that is discovered, not an obligation to immediately see wisdom in pain.

Second, the relationship between Zainuddin and Hayati clarifies the function of experiential values. Hayati's presence provides the experience of being loved, recognized, and given hope; therefore, love in the novel is not merely a romantic motif, but a source of meaningful experience. In counseling, such experience can serve as an entry point to explore relationships that help clients feel seen and valued. However, Zainuddin's case also shows the risk when experiential values depend too heavily on a single figure. When Hayati is gone, Zainuddin's structure of meaning collapses as well. Therefore, sources of meaning need to be understood more broadly, for example through other relationships, responsibility, spiritual values, work, service, or personal commitments (de Maio Nascimento et al., 2024; Martela & Steger, 2023; Moynihan et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2024).

Third, Zainuddin's clash with adat helps counselors understand the context of freedom of will. Freedom of will in logotherapy does not mean absolute freedom to change every condition. Zainuddin is not free to choose his origin, cannot control Hayati's family's decision, and cannot abolish the adat structure that rejects him. His space of freedom lies in the choice of attitude and life direction after experiencing rejection. In counseling, this principle helps distinguish conditions that can be changed, conditions that need to be accepted gradually, and meaningful responses that can still be chosen without blaming clients for social structures beyond their control (Frankl, 2006, 2014; Menzies & Menzies, 2024; Rahgozar & Giménez-Llort, 2024; Terao & Satoh, 2022).

Fourth, Zainuddin's transformation into a writer affirms creative values and self-transcendence. A wound that was initially personal moves outward into work that is valuable to others. In logotherapy counseling, this finding can be read as a reflective basis for understanding creative activity as a space for reconstructing meaning, such as writing reflections, composing life narratives, or designing small actions that benefit others. However, creative values must not be equated with full recovery. Zainuddin's productivity does not automatically resolve his wound toward Hayati. Therefore, creative work as a form of meaning reconstruction should be distinguished from work used primarily as emotional escape. Self-transcendence becomes healthy when clients not only move beyond themselves through work but also have space to process unresolved wounds (Almeida et al., 2022; Fuhrer & Cova, 2026; Huang & Yang, 2023).

Fifth, the novel's final scene underscores the importance of attitudinal values and continuing bonds. Attitudinal values appear in the way a person chooses an attitude toward suffering that cannot be changed, but in Zainuddin this realm of attitudinal value remains a field of struggle. He still loves Hayati, but he is also wounded and once rejects her presence. In counseling, this finding reminds us that attitudinal value is not the same as instant acceptance. Counselors do not need to force clients to forgive immediately, accept immediately, or become optimistic immediately. In the experience of loss, continuing bonds also need to be understood

carefully: an inner bond with someone who has been lost can become a source of meaning, but it can also prolong suffering if it turns into idealization, extreme regret, or romanticization of death (Eskigölek & Kav, 2024; Hewson et al., 2024; Shaygan et al., 2024).

Sixth, *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck* can be used as bibliotherapy material to open conversations about alienation, love, choice, work, loss, forgiveness, and responsibility of attitude. Its use should be guided by dialogue, not merely by assigning reading. The text can help clients reflect on parts that resonate with them, emotions that arise, values that feel lost, and meaningful actions that remain possible. The literature on bibliotherapy and shared reading highlights the potential of reading and discussing texts to support reflection and well-being, but its effectiveness depends on design, context, and facilitation methods (Järvholm et al., 2025; Monroy-Fraustro et al., 2021; Redman et al., 2024; Zanal Abidin et al., 2023).

Ethical boundaries need to be emphasized because this novel contains death, regret, unfinished love, and intense grief. Clients experiencing acute crises, suicidal ideation, severe grief, or psychological symptoms requiring clinical treatment should not be encouraged to identify uncritically or intensely with Zainuddin. Counseling questions must be directed toward understanding, strengthening responsibility for life, and searching for safe, meaningful responses, not toward the romanticization of suffering, death, or self-sacrifice.

Table 3. Reflective Map of Hermeneutic Findings and Counseling Implications

Logotherapy concept	Hermeneutic findings	Direction of counseling implications	Ethical boundaries in counseling
Meaning in suffering; will to meaning	Zainuddin's alienation of origin shows suffering as a wound of recognition, not merely heartbreak.	Helping clients name the sources of suffering and find reasons to endure that arise from within themselves.	Not forcing clients to see wisdom before the wound is understood.
Experiential values	Hayati's love gives the experience of being loved, recognized, and brought back to life.	Exploring relationships, experiences, or values that make clients feel seen and meaningful.	Not making one figure the sole source of meaning.
Freedom of will	Zainuddin is not free to determine his origin or adat decisions, but still has room to choose his response.	Distinguishing conditions that can be changed, conditions that need gradual acceptance, and attitudes that can still be chosen.	Not blaming clients for social structures beyond their control.
Creative values; self-transcendence	Zainuddin's wound moves into literary work through his identity as Shabir the writer.	Using creative activity as a space for reconstructing meaning and contributing to others.	Not reading productivity as a sign of full recovery.
Attitudinal values; continuing bonds	Zainuddin's attitudinal struggle toward Hayati remains ambivalent, while the inner bond after loss continues to work.	Accompanying clients in choosing attitudes gradually and processing lost bonds without having to erase them.	Not romanticizing death, extreme regret, or prolonged suffering.

With this mapping, the use of the novel as reflective material needs to be situated within a dialogical pedagogical-counseling domain. Literary texts do not work as recipes for healing, but as prompts to delay overly rapid conclusions, re-examine clients' emotional responses, and expand ways of viewing suffering without separating it from socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, counselors need to ensure that the process of searching for meaning continues to move from the client's concrete experience, not from the romanticization of a character's fate or the imposition of a single interpretation.

Conclusions

The analysis shows that Zainuddin's suffering begins as a wound of identity recognition rather than as romantic disappointment alone. Hayati's love provides an experiential value that restores hope, while adat transforms private love into a conflict over lineage, legitimacy, and social honor. His literary work demonstrates creative values and self-transcendence, yet his response to Hayati's return shows that attitudinal values remain a site of unresolved struggle.

This interpretation is limited to one literary text and does not test a counseling intervention, diagnose a character, or establish causal psychological effects. The quotations reported in the article are evidentiary ex-

amples from a complete-novel reading, and the interpretation remains open to cultural-historical, gender, reader-response, and alternative hermeneutic analyses. Because the analysis was conducted by one researcher without an independent second coder or formal peer debriefing, its claims should be treated as transparent and theoretically grounded interpretations rather than mechanically reproducible measurements.

Within those boundaries, the combined framework yields the concept of asynchronous meaning reconstruction. Hermeneutics prevents isolated quotations from being detached from plot and culture, while logotherapy differentiates experiential, creative, and attitudinal pathways of meaning. Together they reveal that creative achievement can precede attitudinal transformation, that freedom of will operates within sociocultural limits, and that productivity should not be equated with recovery. The study therefore contextualizes and refines the application of logotherapy to literary meaning-making rather than claiming to refute Frankl's clinical theory.

Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck may consequently be used as carefully facilitated reflective material for discussing alienation, recognition, love, work, loss, responsibility, and the gradual choice of attitude. Such use must remain dialogical, ethically safe, and subordinate to assessment and professional competence. Future studies should examine reader or client responses, test the feasibility of a structured logotherapy-bibliotherapy module, and compare this interpretation with cultural history and reader-response evidence.

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