

Hope and Redemption in Liz Curtis Higgs' Scottish Novels: A Study through the Lens of Hope Theory

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Abstract

This study examines the themes of hope and redemption in Liz Curtis Higgs' Scottish historical fiction through the lens of C.R. Snyder's Hope Theory. Focusing on Higgs' trilogy, the research explores how Higgs' characters embody the cognitive processes of goal-setting, pathway thinking, and agency thinking described in Hope Theory. The analysis reveals how these elements contribute to the characters' journeys of personal growth, spiritual transformation, and ultimate redemption. By applying Hope Theory to Higgs' works, this study demonstrates the interplay between historical fiction, Christian themes, and psychological concepts, offering new insights into the author's narrative techniques and the universal appeal of hope and redemption in literature. The research also considers how Higgs' integration of Scottish history and culture provides a unique backdrop for exploring these themes, enhancing the reader's engagement with the characters' struggles and triumphs.

Keywords: Agency thinking; Christian literature; Goal-setting; Hope Theory; Narrative techniques; Pathway thinking; Redemption; Scottish historical fiction.

Literary devices enhance a story's profundity, intricacy, and overall quality. In the context of Liz Curtis Higgs' Scottish novels, these devices contribute to the narrative structure and serve as vehicles for exploring themes of hope and redemption. This paper examines Higgs' works through the lens of C.R. Snyder's Hope Theory, analysing how literary techniques and narrative elements align with and reinforce the components of hope defined by Snyder.

Snyder defines hope as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder, 2002, p. 250). This theory posits that hope consists of three main components: goals, pathways thinking, and agency thinking (Snyder et al., 1991). These elements provide a framework for analysing character development and narrative arcs in Higgs’ novels.

According to Snyder, goals are “the targets of mental action sequences” (Snyder, 1994, p. 5). They anchor hopeful thinking, providing direction and purpose to characters’ actions and motivations. Pathway thinking is “the perceived ability to generate successful plans to meet goals” (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 570). This component involves problem-solving and strategising to overcome obstacles. Agency thinking, “the motivational component to propel people along their imagined routes to goals” (Snyder, 2000, p. 8), represents the willpower and determination to pursue goals despite challenges.

Analysis of Higgs’ Novels

Liz Curtis Higgs is a contemporary Christian writer whose works provide rich material for exploring Hope Theory. Higgs’ strength lies in her descriptive and narrative skills. She has employed numerous literary elements and narrative techniques to enhance her novels’ thematic structure and rhythmical framework. Higgs is a master storyteller in the way she articulates human emotions, fears, and feelings experienced by both men and women. Her novels are heart-capturing and enigmatic, offering a perfect backdrop for examining hope and redemption through Snyder’s theoretical lens.

Higgs’ characters embody the core elements of Hope Theory in various ways. The author has adroitly drawn her characters from the Lowlands of eighteenth-century Scotland, including landowners, parishioners, and middle-class society members who are all god-fearing. This diverse cast allows for a multifaceted exploration of hope within different social contexts. For instance, Jamie McKie’s journey in “Thorn in My Heart” exemplifies the goal-setting aspect of hope. His primary goal of securing his birthright drives much of the novel’s action, illustrating how goals function as anchors in hope-oriented thinking. As Jamie navigates the

Complexities of his situation, readers witness his evolving pathway thinking as he devises strategies to achieve his goals, often grappling

with moral dilemmas.

Leana McBride, in her work "Fair is the Rose," exemplifies the concept of pathway thinking in her quest for Jamie's affection. Notwithstanding the apparent and formidable challenges she faces, Leana persistently formulates plans and strategies to capture Jamie's heart, thereby illustrating the resilience and creativity that are fundamental to aspirational thinking. This is consistent with Snyder's theory of pathway thinking, which posits that individuals can perceive their capacity to devise effective plans in pursuit of their objectives.

Rose McBride's character arc across the series is a powerful illustration of agency thinking. Her determination to overcome societal constraints and pursue her desires, even in the face of disappointment and tragedy, exemplifies the motivational aspect of hope. Rose's journey from a sheltered young woman to a resilient and self-aware individual aligns with Snyder's assertion that "hope is learned" (Snyder, 1994, p. 16). Higgs' characterisation technique allows readers to develop a deep understanding and affection for these intricately portrayed characters despite their imperfections. This complexity in character development reflects the intricate nature of hope as articulated in Snyder's theory, wherein individuals are required to navigate both internal and external challenges in the pursuit of their objectives.

The narrative is a primary aspect of Higgs' storytelling, consisting of three distinct sections: introduction, development, and conclusion. This structure aligns well with the process of hope development as described by Snyder, where individuals set goals, develop pathways, and exercise agency to achieve their objectives. Higgs' use of third-person perspective enhances the exploration of hope in her novels. This narrative decision enables readers to observe the internal conflicts and development of various characters, thereby offering insights into their processes of fostering hope. As Snyder notes, "hope theory emphasises the cognitive processing about goals" (Snyder, 2002, p. 250), and Higgs' narrative approach facilitates this by giving readers access to characters' thoughts and motivations.

The author's skilful use of foreshadowing and flashbacks contributes to the narrative of hope by aligning with Snyder's concept of "reminding," where past successes are recalled to bolster current hope (Snyder, 2000). For instance, when Jamie contemplates the challenges he has previously surmounted, it serves to fortify his determination in confronting present obstacles, thereby elucidating how hope can be reinforced through recol-

lection and introspection.

The Scottish setting of Higgs' novels provides a unique backdrop for exploring hope and redemption. As Snyder observes, "Hope is influenced by the lessons of our culture" (Snyder, 1994, p. 16). The rich cultural context of 18th-century Scotland in Higgs' works offers a distinct lens through which to examine how hope operates within specific societal constraints. Higgs' vivid depiction of Scotland, with its landscapes, customs, and social structures, creates a world that challenges and nurtures hope. The author's attention to historical detail and cultural nuances allows readers to understand the unique obstacles and opportunities that shape characters' goals and pathways to achieving them. This aligns with Hope Theory's emphasis on the contextual nature of hope, where societal norms and expectations influence individual aspirations.

The tone of Higgs' narratives is articulated through her choice of vocabulary, sentence structures, and typographical selections. She elevates the uniqueness of her voice by offering vivid descriptions of various elements, including scenes, aromas, tastes, and colors. This rich sensory detail not only immerses readers in the environment but also supplies a concrete context for the characters' aspirations and ambitions, demonstrating how external factors can impact goal-setting and the associated pathways thinking

Higgs' emphasis on spiritual themes in her novels aligns closely with Snyder's recognition of the role of faith in hope: "For many people, their goals reflect their spiritual or religious beliefs" (Snyder, 2000, p. 14). The characters' spiritual journeys, particularly evident in "Whence Came a Prince," demonstrate how faith can be a powerful source of hope and agency. The author's exploration of themes such as forgiveness, redemption, and divine grace provides a spiritual dimension to the hope experienced by her characters. This aspect of Higgs' work illustrates how religious beliefs can shape goals and provide motivation (agency thinking) even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

In the novels chosen for this study, Higgs underlines that there is hope for the hopeless, forgiveness for the repentant souls by placing their trust in God, and reconciliation, redemption, salvation, restoration, and elevation by the grace of God. This theme resonates strongly with Snyder's concept of hope as a positive motivational state, demonstrating how spiritual beliefs can serve as a foundation for goal setting and perseverance.

Higgs employs a range of literary devices that, when viewed through the lens of Hope Theory, contribute significantly to the themes of hope and redemption in her novels.

Similes and Metaphors: Higgs uses similes extensively to reveal deeper meanings in her narratives. For example, “carrying her husband’s heir through the long days of a Lowland summer had ground Rowena down like corn at McCracken’s Mill” (TIH 1). Such comparisons help readers visualise and empathise with the characters’ struggles, which is crucial in understanding their hope journeys.

Alliteration: Using alliteration in phrases like “sleep the sleep of the dead” (TIH 58) creates a rhythmic quality to the prose that can emphasise critical moments in characters’ hope journeys, drawing attention to pivotal points of goal setting or agency thinking.

Paradox: The paradoxical element “Twins but not twins” (TIH 3) in “Thorn in My Heart” serves to highlight the complexity of human relationships and situations. In the context of Hope Theory, such paradoxes can represent the often-contradictory nature of hope, where individuals must reconcile conflicting desires or navigate complex pathways to their goals.

Imagery: Higgs’ use of vivid imagery, such as “The sky was a velvety black, carpeted with stars” (WCP 75), not only transports readers to 18th-century Scotland but also creates a rich sensory backdrop against which characters’ hopes and dreams are set. This aligns with Snyder’s emphasis on the importance of context in shaping hope.

Personification: By attributing human characteristics to inanimate objects, Higgs creates a more dynamic and relatable environment for her characters. For example, “The night air crawled about a like a living thing, nearly smothering him” (TIH 50) is a metaphor for the challenges that test characters’ hope and resolve.

Conflict: The multifaceted conflicts present in Higgs’ novels, encompassing both internal and external dimensions, allow characters to cultivate and exhibit hope. These challenges necessitate the establishment of goals, formulating pathways, and exercising agency thinking, which align seamlessly with the framework of Hope Theory. The resolution of these conflicts frequently mirrors the process of hope realisation, as articulated by Snyder.

Foreshadowing: Higgs’ foreshadowing, such as the prophecy about Ja-

mie's future in "Thorn in My Heart," creates anticipation and sets up future goals for the characters. This literary device aligns with the goal-setting component of Hope Theory, as it establishes future targets for characters to strive towards.

Flashbacks: The utilisation of flashbacks, also known as analepsis, in Higgs' literary works, exemplifies the evolution of hope throughout time. For instance, when Jamie contemplates past adversities, he has successfully navigated, it demonstrates how prior experiences can enhance and fortify present hope. This notion is under Snyder's concept of "reminding" in the context of hope maintenance.

Conclusion

Liz Curtis Higgs' Scottish novels through the lens of Hope Theory reveal a deep alignment between her narrative structures and the core components of hope as defined by Snyder. Her characters' journeys from "disgrace into grace" and "hopeless situation into a hopeful future" exemplify the transformative power of hope. Higgs' writing mirrors the live picture of the world as it is, with her protagonists journeying from innocence to experience. Their journeys change their disgrace into grace, their hopeless situations into hopeful futures, their tests into testimonies, trials into triumphs, and reprehension into repentance, resulting in forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, restoration, elevation, and salvation. This progression aligns closely with Snyder's conception of hope as a learned cognitive process that involves setting goals, developing pathways, and maintaining agency in the face of challenges.

The author's adept utilization of diverse literary devices and narrative techniques significantly enriches the storytelling, thereby offering a robust framework for the exploration of cognitive and emotional dimensions hope. From the vivid Scottish setting that contextualises characters' hopes and dreams to the complex character development that illustrates the nuanced nature of hope, Higgs' novels offer a compelling case study for applying Hope Theory in literary analysis. This study demonstrates the potential for interdisciplinary research, bridging the gap between psychological theory and literary criticism. By examining Higgs' works through the lens of Hope Theory, we gain new insights into both the literary techniques employed by the author and the psychological processes underlying hope and redemption.

In conclusion, Liz Curtis Higgs' Scottish novels offer a rich tapestry of hope and redemption intricately woven through historical fiction. Through the lens of Hope Theory, we can appreciate the depth of her characters' transformations and the universal themes of perseverance and faith that resonates throughout her work. This analysis not only enhances our understanding of Higgs' literary contributions but also illuminates the power of hope as a driving force in literature and life.

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