JOSIP JURAJ STROSSMAYER UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Sanja Matković

THE AFFIRMATION OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN THE NOVELS OF MICHAEL D. O'BRIEN

Doctoral thesis

PRIVREMENA VERZIJA

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Humanities, Philology, History and Theory of Literature (English literature)

Supervisors: Professor Biljana Oklopčić
Dr. Josip Bošnjaković, Associate Professor

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Doktorski rad

Humanističke znanosti, filologija, teorija i povijest književnosti (engleska književnost)

Mentori: prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić
izv. prof. dr. sc. Josip Bošnjaković

Osijek, 2024.

IZJAVA O AKADEMSKOJ ČESTITOSTI

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravio/la te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni. Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasan/na da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi doktorskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

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To all those who believed in me.

"[T]his world of ours has some purpose; and if there is a purpose, there is a person. I had always felt life first as a story; and if there is a story there is a story-teller."
(Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* 108)

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

People have always pondered what the meaning of life is, whether it exists at all, how to find or discover it, who we are, where we come from, where we are going, and why we exist. Coupled with the question on the meaning of life, the question of the meaning of suffering and death often arises. Various scholarly disciplines and religions have tried to answer these questions, as have individuals seeking the meaning of their lives.

For example, the Christian tradition believes that every person's life, as well as every event, including suffering, has meaning, and the ultimate meaning of life is God's salvation, which is manifested through the cognizance of God's love for every person, to which people respond with love for God and for their brothers and sisters. Some of the Catholic thinkers addressing this topic are John Paul II (encyclicals "Evangelium vitae" and "Salvifici doloris"), Benedict XVI (*What It Means to Be a Christian* and *Per amore*), Peter Kreeft (*Three Philosophies of Life: Ecclesiastes: Life as Vanity, Job: Life as Suffering, Song of Songs: Life as Love*, *A Pocket Guide to The Meaning of Life*, and *Making Sense Out of Suffering*), and Tomislav Ivančić, the founder of hagiotherapy, a method of spiritual therapy.

Logotherapy, the so-called "third Viennese school of psychotherapy," and existential analysis, which represents an anthropological theory, were founded by Viktor Frankl, a neurologist and psychiatrist of Jewish origin, who applied his experience of captivity in concentration camps to empirically confirm the theory he had conceived prior to his imprisonment—that life has meaning in all circumstances. After the war ended, Frankl published his book *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, in which he presented the foundations of logotherapy and existential analysis. This book was followed by *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he described his experiences in concentration camps and presented the foundations of logotherapy and existential analysis. In the book *The Unconscious God*, Frankl dealt with the connection between psychotherapy and religion, since logotherapy implies a spiritual dimension in the anthropological image of human beings. The anthropology of logotherapy and existential analysis features numerous links with Christian anthropology, which Donald Tweedie also studied in the book *Logotherapy and the Christian Faith*.

Many authors answer the question of the meaning of life in their works either in a subversive or affirmative way. Given the fact that Christianity seeks to answer this question, the theme of the meaning of life is often found in Christian fiction, for example, in the novels written by Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, Paul Horgan, Evelyn Waugh, C. S. Lewis, Thornton Wilder, Myles Connolly, Alice McDermott, Lucy Beckett, and Michael D. O'Brien.

O'Brien stands out particularly with his realistic novels, which consistently place the affirmation of the meaning of life among their central topics.

1.1. Theoretical and Empirical Starting Points of the Conducted Research

At some point in their lives, the majority of people ask themselves the question of the meaning of life, so it is unsurprising that different scholarly disciplines, such as philosophy, biology, theology, psychology, and literature have been trying to answer that question for centuries. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy and existential analysis were developed as a result of striving to answer the question of what the meaning of life is. These two disciplines actually represent two sides of the same coin: existential analysis refers to an anthropological theory, while logotherapy refers to a therapeutic theory and method as a practical application of existential analysis. The term logotherapy was coined by Frankl from the Greek word *logos,* which has multiple meanings—some of which are "meaning," "spirit," "word," and "wisdom." However, for Frankl, the term means that human existence always refers to meaning (the so-called "will for meaning" is the main driving force of a human being), while simultaneously indicating the spiritual dimension of a person. Namely, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler's school of individual psychology emphasize only two human dimensions: physical and psychological, while Frankl adds a spiritual dimension, which is the starting point of his theory. By doing so, Frankl returns the spirit to the anthropological picture of human beings, thus making his anthropology similar to Judeo-Christian in many ways. According to logotherapy and existential analysis, every person is a free being, but his/her freedom is not a freedom *from* something, but a freedom *for* something, i.e., a person has the responsibility of discovering the meaning of his/her life, and one achieves this by transcending oneself. Frankl claims that people are responsible to their conscience, the "organ of meaning," whose source is God. Furthermore, life can be given meaning by realizing creative values (deeds or work), experiential values (experiencing, for example, goodness, truth, beauty, nature, culture, or a person through love), and attitudinal values (attitude toward inevitable suffering and death). Frankl presented his theory in numerous books, including: *The Doctor and the Soul*, *Man's Search for Meaning*, *The Unconscious God*, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, and *The Unheard Cry for Meaning: Psychotherapy and Humanism*.

In the book *Logotherapy and the Christian Faith*, Donald Tweedie points to the fact that logotherapy is interdisciplinary, since it bridges the gap between psychology and religion and has a preference for a Christian view of a person. Logotherapy and existential analysis deal with the phenomenological manifestation of meaning, for which Christianity provides an ontic

foundation in the person of God. Given that God is love, the experience of meaning is simultaneously an experience of love, and the Christian answer to the question of meaning is summarized in the two commandments of love, which is also at the very center of the Jewish Law (Lev. 19.17–18). Many Christian theologians and philosophers also write about the meaning of life. For example, St. Ignatius claims in the *Spiritual Exercises* that people were created to praise and worship God, serve him, and thus save their souls. In *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, Josef Pieper highlights love as the meaning of life. In *A Pocket Guide to the Meaning of Life,* Peter Kreeft comes to the conclusion that the meaning of life is God. In *Making Sense out of Suffering,* in which he, among other things, refers to logotherapy, he explains why suffering has meaning, while in *The Three Philosophies of Life,* he uses biblical texts to present three philosophies of life: *Ecclesiastes* (life as vanity), *Job* (life as suffering), and *Song of Songs* (life as love). John Paul II also refers to the *Book of Job* in order to explain the meaning of suffering in his apostolic letter "Salvifici doloris" (Tanja Radionov links logotherapy and "Salvifici doloris" in the paper "Smisao života i patnje promatran kroz katoličko-teološku i psihološko-logoterapijsku perspektivu"). In "Evangelium vitae," John Paul II deals with the questions of life and death. In his books *What It Means to Be a Christian* and *Per amore,* Ratzinger asserts that the meaning of Christian life is faith in God and service out of love. Tomislav Ivančić connects theology, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, logotherapy, and medicine into a new discipline called hagiotherapy, a method of anthropological (i.e. spiritual) therapy, which claims that the meaning of life is to love God and your neighbor.

Academic research on the meaning of life in literature has been scarce so far, although this topic often appears in the novels of existentialist and Christian authors. Numerous authors write about the meaning of life in Catholic literature. For example, Walker Percy's novels are a Christian-existentialist critique of society, Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* shows humility and suffering as a path of salvation, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* is a story of conversion, Myles Connolly's novels *Mr. Blue, Dan England and the Noonday Devil,* and *The Bump on Brannigan's Head* show that the meaning of life is to live the Gospel, and Lucy Beckett deals with finding meaning in God in a life marked by suffering in historical novels like *A Postcard from the Volcano* and *The Leaves Are Falling.*

Michael D. O'Brien's novels, especially those of a realistic nature, focus on the question of the meaning of life, the issue of searching for one's own identity and one's place in the world in order to reveal the uniqueness, importance, and dignity of each person. There is no research on the topic of the meaning of life in O'Brien's novels, but Clemens Cavallin wrote O'Brien's biography *On the Edge of Infinity: A Biography of Michael D. O'Brien,* while Gregory Maillet

gives an overview of O'Brien's novels in the book *Word Awake: An Introduction to the Novels of Michael O'Brien*. There are also several articles on various topics in O'Brien's novels, such as: "Deep Realism: A Discussion of Christian Literary Realism with an Analysis of Passages from Michael O'Brien's *Children of the Last Days* Novel Series" by Clemens Cavallin, "Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Literature of Michael D. O'Brien" by Anthony M. Wachs, or "Michael D. O'Brien's Apocalyptic Aesthetics" by Aaron James Weisel.

1.2. Research Objective, Research Questions, and Hypotheses

The aim of this research is to study, describe, and typify the affirmative elements making up the meaning of life in the realistic novels of Michael D. O'Brien and to offer a typology of the affirmative elements of the meaning of life in Catholic literature. The dissertation hypothesizes that the meaning of life in O'Brien's novels is identical to the meaning of life presented in literature from the fields of theology and philosophy, existential analysis and logotherapy.

1.3. Description of Research Methodology

The corpus includes the following realistic novels by Michael D. O'Brien: *The Lighthouse* (2020), *The Island of the World* (2007), *Strangers and Sojourners* (1997), *A Cry of Stone* (2003), *The Fool of New York City* (2016), and *Sophia House* (2005). In the introductory part of the dissertation, Catholic fiction in general, the genre of popular Christian, and the subgenre of Catholic fiction will be described, and their position in literature and science will be determined. This will be followed by the presentation of Michael D. O'Brien's life, worldview, and work. The concept of the meaning of life will then be presented from the viewpoint of existential analysis and logotherapy as well as from a theological-philosophical standpoint. The central part of the dissertation will be dedicated to the examination, description, and typification of affirmative elements that make up the meaning of life in Michael D. O'Brien's realistic novels through a theological-philosophical approach as well as the approach of existential analysis and logotherapy. Specifically, the following concepts will be presented and analyzed in O'Brien's novels: the uniqueness and value of life, spirituality, freedom, responsibility, conscience, self-transcendence and death to self through creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values, the ultimate meaning of life, and helpers. A conclusion will be reached whether O'Brien's novels belong to high or popular literature. The final part will present the conclusions of the conducted research and provide the list of references.

2. CATHOLIC FICTION

2.1. The Catholic Church and Its Influence

According to statistics, with 1.36 billion members in 2020 and the constant increase in the number of believers (Llywelyn), the Catholic Church is the largest branch of the most widely practiced religion in the world—Christianity, whose members represent 31.7% of the world's population (*Countrymeters*). As "the world's oldest continuously functioning international institution" (Noll 191), the Catholic Church has exerted considerable influence on Western civilization in many aspects. Namely, since the fourth century, the Catholic Church has had a significant impact on European daily life, law, economics, politics, science, education, philosophy, culture, architecture, art, music, literature, and other areas. Furthermore, since the end of the fifteenth century, it has also spread worldwide through colonialists and missionaries. Therefore, it is not surprising that even nowadays interest in anything Catholic, such as spirituality, education, philosophy, art, or literature, is not waning. For instance, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius have been used by many for centuries as a method for deepening their relationship with God. Furthermore, the Catholic charismatic renewal has been expanding all over the world for decades, and spiritual popular music has been flourishing.[1] There are also many prestigious Catholic kindergartens, schools, colleges, and universities throughout the world (perhaps the most famous Catholic university in the world is the University of Notre Dame in the USA[2]), and, according to Reichardt, the number of new programs and courses "on the Catholic intellectual tradition" is constantly increasing ("Preface," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XVI). Moreover, the philosophical writings by St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine are relevant and often quoted even today, while the number of contemporary Catholic authors and their works is increasing; there are even specialized publishing houses and bookshops for Christian/Catholic literature (for example, Ignatius Press in the USA, Justin Press in Canada, and Verbum and Kršćanska sadašnjost in Croatia).

As one of the two foundations of Catholic teaching (the other being Sacred Tradition), the Bible (Sacred Scripture) has had an especially strong influence on Catholic literature.[3] Although its primary purpose is religious, the Bible is also "a form of literature, composed of narratives of human experience of the Divine" (Gandolfo 2) and has therefore been studied by scholars employing literary methods. It is indisputable that the Bible has exerted a major

[1] A testimony to this is that the number of visitors of the 2022 concert of spiritual music "Progledaj srcem" in Zagreb, Croatia is comparable to the 2009 U2 concert in Zagreb.
[2] The Catholic University of Croatia has become an important institution in Croatian higher education.
[3] The term "Catholic" refers here to the church of the early Christians founded by Jesus Christ (see Blackburn).

influence on Catholic literature and may also be considered its literary predecessor. Namely, Catholic literature is comparable to the Bible in the sense that, according to Gandolfo, it is also permeated by certain aspects of faith experience (2), and it often presents interpretations of biblical stories, characters, and topics. Starting with the Bible, Catholic literature has a long, unbroken tradition to this day. Some examples of early Catholic writings include biographies of saints and poems from as far back as the fourth and fifth century, as well as works such as *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (about 400 A.D.) and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologica* (published in 1485), while examples of early Christian fiction are Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (written between 1304 and 1321), John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (published in 1667), and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (published in 1678). The Catholic novel appeared by the end of the nineteenth century and blossomed in the twentieth century (Sherry 463). Some of the most notable contemporary Catholic fiction authors are Hilaire Belloc (*The Path to Rome*), Georges Bernanos (*The Diary of a Country Priest*), G. K. Chesterton (*The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Father Brown stories), Shūsaku Endō (*Silence*), Graham Greene (*The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter*, *The End of the Affair*), Alice McDermott (*Charming Billy*), Michael D. O'Brien (*Father Elijah: An Apocalypse*, *Father's Tale*, *The Island of the World*), Flannery O'Connor (*Wise Blood*, *The Violent Bear It Away*, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*), Walker Percy (*The Moviegoer*, *Lancelot*), J. R. R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*), Evelyn Waugh (*Brideshead Revisited*), and many others. Yet, how to define Catholic fiction, and what are its characteristics?

2.2. Definition and Characteristics of Catholic Fiction

It is undoubtedly challenging to define Catholic fiction with its long and diverse tradition and works written by a wide range of authors with different backgrounds. As Reichardt explains:

> Some Catholic writing is distinctly sentimental and pious. Some is didactic, written with the express intent of converting the reader. Some use Catholicism in ways that purposely distort or disparage the faith. Catholic literature has been written by baptized, believing Catholics, by lapsed Catholics, and by non-Catholics. (*Exploring Catholic Literature: A Companion and Resource Guide* 3)

The problem is further complicated by the statements of certain "Catholic novelists" who objected to being referred to as such. Among them are Graham Greene, who preferred being called "a novelist who happens to be a Catholic" (12), and Muriel Spark, who claimed in an interview: "I'm a Catholic and a novelist, but there's no such thing as a Catholic novel, unless it's a piece of propaganda" (144). However, at the same time, various scholars offer their

definitions of Christian and Catholic fiction, thereby acknowledging their existence. For example, when defining Christian fiction, Tischler does not refer to a certain denomination or a writing style under the term "Christian," but rather a worldview recognizable in a literary work, which includes all or some of the following principles:

> 1. The fatherhood of God, the creator and sustainer of life.
> 2. The brotherhood of man, and the value of each human person.
> 3. The saving substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, his resurrection, and his promise of a second coming.
> 4. The power of the Holy Spirit to comfort, to answer prayers, and to inspire believers.
> 5. The existence of an afterlife, a time of judgment, in which Justice will finally be accomplished, and a Heaven and a Hell in which humans will live beyond this time on Earth.
> 6. The temporary nature of time, sandwiched between the Creation and the Last Days. (IX)

Similarly, Mort defines Christian fiction as fiction that involves a conflict related to Christian principles (1), while Gandolfo describes it as "literature that is informed by religious concerns" (XI). If we narrow the field to Catholic fiction, we will again find a wide range of definitions. On the one hand, we will come across Flannery O'Connor's quite liberal opinion that novels depicting reality in the way we experience it in this world are Catholic novels (172), and that "the Catholic novel is not necessarily about a Christianized or Catholicized world, but simply . . . is one in which the truth as Christians know it has been used as light to see the world by" (173). On the other hand, Whitehouse describes Catholic authors as "believing and practicing Catholics whose faith to a varying but recognizable degree informs and shapes their work thematically, imaginatively, aesthetically, and perhaps to some degree ideologically" (173). Mary R. Reichardt offers a more moderate definition than the previous two:

> [A] work of Catholic literature is that which employs the history, traditions, culture, theology, and/or spirituality of Catholicism in a substantial and informed manner. Whether it involves Catholic subject matter or not, and whether its author is a Catholic or not, such literature is substantially grounded in a deep and realistic understanding of at least some aspects of the Catholic faith, Catholic life, or the Catholic tradition. ("Introduction," *Between Human and Divine: The Catholic Vision in Contemporary Literature* 3)

2.3. The Mission of Catholic Fiction

The question arises as to what makes Catholic literature special and what the mission of Catholic authors is. In his "Letter to Artists," Pope John Paul II writes that the source of artistic intuition is to be found in the "depths of the human soul, where the desire to give meaning to one's own life is joined by the fleeting vision of beauty and of the mysterious unity of things" (§6). He further explains that artists can reveal in their art "no more than a glimmer of the splendour which flared for a moment before the eyes of their spirit" ("Letter to Artists" §6). In this way, as Michael D. O'Brien states, artists become co-creators, creating their works of art by using God's gift implemented in their nature as well as divine grace, and such works of art, which are beautiful and true, refer back to God, to "the source of truth, love, and beauty" (*Arriving Where We Started: Faith and Culture in the Postmodernist Age* 167), "evoking wonder at a profound level" (*Arriving Where We Started* 13). It is also possible that they lead to a "clear reflection on the meaning and purpose of things," and even to "reverence and worship" (*Arriving Where We Started* 13). O'Brien elaborates further on this topic and observes how the arts can help us to know ourselves and to view ourselves as God's creatures:

> Here is where the arts can come to our rescue, if they are true and beautiful and faithful to the moral order of the universe. In presenting human dramas in all their variety, a novelist, for example, can help reveal the actions of divine providence (very present but usually mysterious and hidden from our eyes). In this way a reader or a person listening to a symphony or gazing at a good painting can come to know that he is more than he thinks he is, more than the definitions of man given by ideologues and theorists. A true work of art helps him apprehend, by some interior sense, that while Man is damaged he is not destroyed; he is beautiful and beloved by his Father Creator. (qtd. in Hooks)

2.4. Catholic Teachings in Catholic Fiction

Let us now introduce the main aspects of the Catholic teachings to see where such an image of man is derived from. The essence of Catholicism is the belief that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was incarnated in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit and became man to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. He was crucified and resurrected to provide the forgiveness of sins, the salvation of sinners, and the resurrection of the righteous dead at his Second Coming, so that those who believe in him have eternal life. If one lives as a Christian, he tastes the joys of eternal life already on Earth, but after death, he experiences eternal life in its fullness. Through his incarnation, life, proclamation of the Good News, suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus revealed the beauty and goodness of God, who is above all love. Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection are celebrated and re-presented in every Holy Mass in the

sacrament of the Eucharist. Catholics also believe in one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church, founded by Jesus Christ, who made Saint Peter its first head. The doctrine of the Catholic Church has been conveyed for about two millennia through the authority of the Church hierarchy and papacy, which is represented by the unbroken line of Saint Peter's successors.

2.4.1. Sacramentality

Having in mind the importance of the sacraments and Christ's incarnation for Catholics, it is logical that the main characteristics of the Catholic perspective profoundly influencing Catholic fiction are sacramentality and incarnationalism. Namely, Catholics place great emphasis on God's immanence in the world, and the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church reflect this belief (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, Holy Orders). Reichardt explains that in the sacraments, "the supernatural meets the natural and grace is conferred," which is especially indicated in the central sacrament, the Eucharist, where God's intimate presence among the believers is expressed through transubstantiation, in which the natural substance of bread and wine is truly transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ ("Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXIV). By receiving this sacrament, a believer's soul is filled with the mercy of God, and he or she is called to become another Christ, i.e. bread for others.

Though there is a good amount of shared doctrine on grace and its operation among Protestants and Catholics, different tendencies are undeniable, and they become more or less pronounced depending on which denomination of Protestantism one is talking about. A traditionalist Lutheran, who considers sacraments integral to salvation and sanctification, will not have the same outlook as Baptists or Evangelicals, who in general tend at best to consider sacraments such as Baptism a fitting or useful, but ultimately an unnecessary display of faith. With this in mind, it would not be unfair to say that Protestantism comparatively tends to stress God's distance from the world, since his literal presence in the Eucharist and the sacramental modes of his presence that Catholics affirm are generally viewed with suspicion by Protestants (again, with some exceptions). So, it follows that God's presence in the world will be comparatively less stressed than in Catholicism, with its emphasis on God being made present through the senses, actions, and various types of matter at play in the sacraments. This becomes all the more apparent when we consider the type of grace the sacraments are said to communicate; namely, for Catholics, in traditional vocabulary, they communicate the grace necessary for salvation, the so-called sanctifying or habitual grace. The embodying tendency concerning grace is more pronounced in Catholicism (and Eastern Orthodoxy as well).

Reichardt minces no words when describing these differences. She says that, although there are denominational differences in the degree of diminishing the significance of sacramentality or its complete elimination, Protestantism generally stresses God's distance from the world instead of his presence, resulting in "a tendency to see more of a radical dualism between the human and the divine, the flesh and the spirit, sin and grace," while, due to emphasized sacramentality, Catholics have a more integrative approach, with a tendency to recognize a unity between the secular and spiritual dimension ("Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXIV). Whether one agrees with the strong language used here (and qualifies its extent depending on which denomination of Protestantism we are discussing or which theological school one is following), the *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* does seem to put its finger on a real difference.

Furthermore, from a Catholic perspective, although the world is flawed as a result of original sin, it is nevertheless essentially good because it was created by God, who is beauty and good, so the world reflects God's beauty and goodness. According to Labrie, even though the original fall from grace wounded people, "leading them toward concupiscence—the inclination toward evil—human nature has not been totally corrupted and is capable of acts of natural virtue" (4). However, Christ's grace is needed for these acts to become habitual and worthy of eternal salvation (Labrie 4) or, as Thomas Aquinas declared, grace perfects nature (1.1.8). Again, this belief opposes the doctrine of total depravity advocated in many Protestant denominations (Reichardt, "Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXIV). As we have seen, the sacramental manner of viewing the world as a unity of spiritual and material reveals the openness of Catholics to the supernatural, which is one of the main features of Catholic fiction. Furthermore, Catholic fiction calls for "a reconsideration of the purpose and meaning of human life" given that

> Catholicism takes as its premise the fact that humans are created beings, purposely and carefully designed by a Creator for a noble end. Human life, therefore, is precious, and existence on earth an important yet transient one, a journey or a pilgrimage rather than a final destination. Human life gets somewhere—it is positively oriented toward growth to an end and not merely meaningless or chaotic. And the human will is free to accept the challenge of the arduous journey to a high and dignified calling or not—that is, to accept redemption through Christ or to turn toward self and sin. (Reichardt, "Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXIV)[4]

[4] When two or more sentences that contain paraphrases and/or quotes from the same source appear consecutively, the parenthetical reference will be found at the end of the last sentence.

This creates a drama, a battle between good and evil in every man's life, a war that is of paramount importance due to what is at stake—the eternal life of each human being. Reichardt identifies exactly this dramatic sense as an inspiring force behind many works of Catholic literature ("Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXV).

2.4.2. Incarnationalism

As discussed above, sacramentality bears witness to God-created reality. Another major doctrine of the Catholic Church that is closely related to sacramentality is incarnationalism, which has also had a significant influence on Catholic fiction. As Reichardt explains, in order to save humankind [and to reveal God's face in its fullness], Christ was incarnated as a human being, who experienced human life from birth to death in its entirety. Therefore, according to Catholic teaching, everything that has been created and every aspect of human existence on Earth are imbued with meaning and are the setting for our redemption ("Introduction," *Between Human and Divine* 4), which includes ordinary everyday situations as well as life's difficulties that cause suffering. In O'Collins's words, "[t]hrough being ennobled by the incarnation, the material world has become even more the theatre of divine grace and mediates God's blessings" (106). Consequently, Reichardt recognizes Christ's incarnation as an event that gives Christianity a historical dimension, placing it in a real-time and space frame while recognizing both its eternal and spiritual aspects ("Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXV). Moreover, owing to the fact that Christ had and has a body, Christianity does not only attach importance to the human soul, but also to the human body, which, as Reichardt warns, should not be despised, but rather respected and cared for ("Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXV). Another important concept related to incarnationalism is suffering. Namely, according to Reichardt, the Cross serves as a permanent "reminder of God's mysterious connection of suffering and love in his plan for our salvation" (*Exploring Catholic Literature* 5). When we accept all that is human, both the good and the bad, in an attempt to love God and imitate Jesus Christ, grace transforms everything, so that it becomes a means of our salvation (*Exploring Catholic Literature* 5). Due to its crucial significance in the Catholic faith, the Cross (or suffering) occupies a central position in the imagination of Catholic fiction.

The incarnational aspect of Catholicism is the reason why Catholic fiction portrays everything human, whether it is evil and sin or good and beautiful because both sides are a part of human life (Reichardt, "Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXV). Consequently, Catholic authors depict life realistically in everyday life situations, from the joys of life to suffering and sorrow. However, even the representations of the latter are not hopeless

and pessimistic. Namely, due to Christian optimism, Catholic literature is inclined to comedy rather than tragedy and is characterized by hope (Reichardt, "Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXVI). As O'Brien observes, "[o]nly the eyes of Christian hope can gaze unflinchingly into the darkness of our times. The artist of hope creates images of man restored to the *imago Dei*, the image and likeness of God within us" (*Arriving Where We Started* 80–81). In comparison to a significant part of modern literature, whose perspective is chaotic, deterministic, and random, the Catholic worldview rejects despair regardless of how tragic life sometimes seems precisely because of its sacramental and incarnational principles, which makes the Catholic vision deeply affirmative (Reichardt, "Introduction," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XXVI). Furthermore, Labrie notes that Catholic authors believe in general that both literature and religion involve

> the fundamental pursuits of meaning and wisdom. Flannery O'Connor described this pursuit as a desire to "penetrate the surface of reality and to find in each thing the spirit which makes it itself and holds the world together." . . . By submitting to the reality of this world, O'Connor believed, the artist, if receptive enough, would discover the author of Creation and convey the resonance of this discovery to the reader. Such a transmission through art is characteristically done not directly but through symbolism. (15–16)

2.5. Comparison of Catholic Fiction and Mainstream Fiction

When mainstream contemporary fiction is compared to Catholic fiction, fundamental differences become apparent. A significant part of contemporary art, including literature, according to O'Brien, is anti-human. It is characterized by the loss of sense of our identity as human beings and by the "demolition of any manifestation of human dignity" (*Arriving Where We Started* 123). The most dominant feature of the culture in which such art has emerged is rationalism, which "not only dissociates man from God, but, at the same time, separates man from himself, fragmenting his inner life, convincing him that he is a bio-mechanism composed of separated parts such as mind/body/emotions, while denying the existence of that dimension of his being which is eternal" (*Arriving Where We Started* 123). By this, O'Brien alludes to and describes the main characteristics of postmodernism, which is intrinsically intertwined with deconstruction and post-structuralism. In contrast, Whitehouse observes that the viewpoint of Catholic literature on the human person and human life is unquestionably humanistic, positive, and hopeful, since it considers man as "not merely . . . the measure of all things but . . . an image of God" (16). The philosophical implication of this belief is that man has "a status and an eternal

importance which he would never otherwise possess," while literary works "will portray human beings as selves, creatures of great value both individually and collectively, standing in a unique individual relationship with their Creator" (Whitehouse 16–17). Similarly, O'Brien suggests how literature can transmit the Christian message in contemporary times:

> By restoring men and women to an understanding of their eternal value, and at the same time restoring in them a sense of wonder and consciousness of the splendor of existence. We are all involved in a great drama, the Great Story. Yet the nature of the new democratized cosmos fundamentally distorts how we understand the shape of reality.
>
> The truth is, we live in a hierarchical creation that is involved in a vast and complex war zone, we are profound mysteries to ourselves, inherently glorious and potentially tragic. For the most part, modern culture has destroyed this sense of mystery. (*Arriving Where We Started* 151–52)

2.6. Reception of Catholic Fiction

In the modern world that O'Brien describes, it is not surprising that Catholic fiction does not seem to be well-accepted among critics and scholars as well as some general readers. The lack of contemporary scholarship on Catholic literature can be attributed to the dominance of post-structuralist theories in academia over the past few decades. They "have often been antithetical, if not downright hostile, to religious values and hence also to the literature that lends itself unequivocally to a religiously based criticism. Since Catholic literature is literature that, by definition, is open to the existence of the supernatural, deterministic theories cannot suffice for full and accurate interpretations" (Reichardt, "Preface," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Literature* XVI). When writings on Catholic literature do appear, for example by some liberal humanists, they are usually prejudiced, marked by willful ignorance, and often contradictory—"[s]ome condemn it for its naivety and sentimentality and others for its bullying, limited, authoritarian and dismissive tone" (Whitehouse 11). Catholic authors are also sometimes accused of spreading propaganda. Chesterton rejects such accusations, claiming that a "Catholic putting Catholicism into a novel, or a song, or a sonnet, or anything else is not being a propagandist; he is simply being a Catholic. Everybody understands this about every other enthusiasm in the world" ("On the Novel with a Purpose" 112). It is interesting to notice that most anti-religious criticism has been directed in particular toward Catholicism in literature, while other religions have not been the target of such criticism (Whitehouse 17). Moreover, Reichardt warns that even at Catholic institutions, there are almost no courses that analyze literature from a religious, let alone Christian or Catholic, viewpoint. She identifies the reason: to fully understand Catholic

literature, it is absolutely necessary to research it from a Catholic perspective, which many teachers do not do either because they are educated in critical methods that deny or dismiss God's existence, so they do not have a scholarly comprehension of the Catholic faith, or they simply feel embarrassed to discuss religious questions at their institutions, so they just ignore Catholic literature (*Exploring Catholic Literature* 2). She harshly criticizes such an approach:

> But any approach to education that does not consider the whole person, and any approach to literature that is closed off from even the possibility of the spiritual is woefully deficient. If literary works have no foundation in truth or ability to address ultimate concerns, the study of literature and the endless production of literary criticism become only a rarified, elitist game. (*Exploring Catholic Literature* 2–3)

The situation seems to be slowly improving lately, but the aforementioned points to a conclusion that steps should be taken to ensure that Catholic fiction is no longer ignored or misinterpreted but read and interpreted through a Catholic perspective by critics, scholars, teachers, and readers in general.

2.7. Popular Catholic Fiction

Catholic fiction is often considered popular fiction. For example, in John Mort's book *Christian Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, a chapter is dedicated to Catholic fiction, and when we look at the other chapters, it is noticeable that they contain other genres of popular fiction combined with Christianity, such as historical Christian fiction, romance, fantasy and science fiction, mysteries and thrillers, young adult fiction, etc. Yet, is all Catholic fiction actually popular fiction? Let us first examine what popular fiction in fact is. Ken Gelder, one of the most prominent theorists of popular fiction, claims that popular fiction is "the opposite of Literature"[5] (11). He further reports that "[t]he key paradigm for identifying popular fiction is not creativity, but *industry*," so popular fiction writers often write one, two, or more novels yearly (14–15). Literature is art, and popular fiction is a "craft" (Gelder 17). "Literature is complex, popular fiction is simple" (Gelder 19). "Literature is intimately connected to life, while popular fiction gives itself over to fantasy. Literature is cerebral, but popular fiction is sensuous (. . .). Literature is restrained or discrete, and popular fiction is excessive and exaggerated. Literature doesn't need a story or a plot, but popular fiction couldn't function without one" (Gelder 19). Furthermore, popular fiction is considered escapist (Gelder 38), and Literature is not. While Literature "transcends" genres, the works of popular fiction fit into a specific literary genre

[5] Gelder uses the word *Literature* with a capital L to refer to high literature. This practice will be followed in this paper when referring to high literature.

(Gelder 40), such as crime, fantasy, horror, romance, and science fiction. However, Gelder admits that things are not all black and white. Namely, canonical (i.e. "respectable") works of popular fiction also exist as well as particular works of Literature that incorporate some features of popular fiction (159). Now let us try to answer the question of whether Catholic fiction is popular fiction. The answer is yes and no. Yes, some works definitely belong to the category of genre fiction, for example, Catholic romances or Catholic crime fiction. However, there are Catholic literary works that do not fit Gelder's description, such as Catholic fiction by Graham Greene, Flannery O'Connor, or Walker Percy. Since the focus of this work are Michael D. O'Brien's novels, the question arises as to whether they belong to popular fiction or Literature.

3. MICHAEL D. O'BRIEN: LIFE, NOVELS, AND MISSION

Michael D. O'Brien is a Canadian novelist, professional painter, and essayist. His Catholic faith is strongly reflected in his novels, paintings, essays, and lectures. Namely, he paints Christian sacred art, writes essays, and gives talks on faith and culture. He was the founding editor of the Catholic family magazine *Nazareth Journal*, but he is most famous for his novels, especially *The Children of the Last Days* series. Because of the many autobiographical elements in his works, in order to understand his art, literature, and worldview, it is important to take a closer look at his life, which is described in Cavallin's biography of Michael D. O'Brien, *On the Edge of Infinity: A Biography of Michael D. O'Brien*.

3.1. Early Life

O'Brien was born in 1948 in Ottawa in a family of English-Irish descent, and this dual heritage later became one of the main topics of his novel *Strangers and Sojourners*. O'Brien's childhood was marked by periods of poverty. He remembers that one Christmas the family members made presents for each other because there was no money to buy them. However, "[d]espite this lack of material abundance, Michael and his siblings remember it as their happiest Christmas. This ideal of simplicity has continued to be a strong theme in his life" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 25).

The family had to move several times because of the father's job, so after moving from Ontario to Ottawa, then to California, and back to Ottawa, they moved to Kugluktuk (formerly known as Coppermine), a small village in the Canadian Arctic. Although it was a dramatic change for the children, they adjusted to the humble lifestyle devoid of technology among the Inuit people. Cavallin reports:

> The barren, but beautiful, Arctic nature, the warm communication of the heart with the Inuit, and their well-developed art and storytelling free from distractions of modern life formed Michael in a profound way. Since the time in the Arctic, he has felt a longing for a materially scaled-down life, which at the same time is full of humanity and art flowing naturally from the closeness to nature. And he has never been able to reconcile himself with high-paced technological city life. (*On the Edge of Infinity* 28)

This beautiful experience was shattered when Michael and his brother were sent to a residential school in Inuvik, where he experienced oppression and abuse by the supervisor, who was later convicted of sexual abuse of other boys in the school. Although, before going to the residential school, O'Brien had disagreed with his mother about the purpose of praying the Rosary and

attending Mass, he felt a mysterious desire to practice both during the difficult times in Inuvik (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 29). He later used his experiences in the Arctic as inspiration for the novel *A Cry of Stone*.

The family returned afterward to the civilization of Ottawa, which was "bewildering and disorienting" for Michael and his brother Terry, who "struggled with loneliness and a sense of existential emptiness" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 33). As a teenager, Michael started reading modern philosophy and existentialism, which, he believed, "expressed a vision of the world as a place of alienation and darkness, of man alone within himself. This harmonized with his own experience of life and, in the process, his childhood faith slowly eroded," so he finally stopped going to Mass when he finished high school (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 40). O'Brien became interested in esoteric religion and sometimes visited friends "who were spiritual seekers in the style of the 1960s" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 41). This movement represented the beginning of the New Age, which originated from spiritualism and theosophy, the latter being a combination of Western esotericism and Eastern religions (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 41). After two disturbing Ouija board sessions, 21-year-old O'Brien was invited to visit a community in Toronto dedicated to exploring the spiritual world. At the time, he was an atheist or "[p]erhaps the proper label for his worldview was an agnostic seeker, as he believed in cosmic forces and that there was some kind of spiritual world" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 42). After a day spent with the community speaking about spiritual matters, especially reincarnation, O'Brien went to sleep.

> In the middle of the night, while sleeping on a mattress, alone in a tiny room, Michael suddenly awoke with the terrible feeling that there was an evil presence in the room. Approaching him, he felt, was an extremely malevolent spirit who wanted to devour his soul. He, who had rejected the personal Christian God, replacing him with vague cosmic forces, was suddenly confronted with an experience of an intensely powerful and hostile spiritual presence, which seemed impossible to resist. Feeling like a defenseless prey in front of a large predator, Michael went through a complete religious transformation. Utterly terrified, he cried out from the depths of his soul, "God save me!" Instantaneously, the evil presence withdrew. It was still there, but backed off, and a supernatural peace filled Michael—something he had not felt for many years.
>
> In that moment, Michael recalls that he saw, as if lit up by a flash of lightning, the inner landscape of his soul and the great darkness that enveloped it, but he also perceived divine grace at work. He now believed that God was real, that everything the

> Church had given him and taught was reality—ultimate reality. (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 42–43)

Cavallin reveals that in this experience, whether real or a figment of imagination, O'Brien became aware that he and all of humanity were threatened by an absolute evil, which was mostly presented as good, but he also experienced God's unmerited grace, which saved him from plunging into the abyss. As a result, later in life, O'Brien has considered himself a "watchman," as he believes that humanity and the Catholic Church must wake up, recognize the looming danger, and return to God, repenting (*On the Edge of Infinity* 43–44). He describes his thoughts of that night: "I realized in that instant that there was a great war in the heavens and that part of it occurred, was occurring in the realm of human individual lives and in the realm of human society. We were at war and we would be at war until the end of time" (O'Brien, qtd. in Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 44). The topic of the dangers of esotericism is present in his novel *Strangers and Sojourners*, while the subject matter of the Great War permeates the majority of his writing, both fiction and non-fiction. His conversion experience was not easy—he, namely, still experienced inner turmoil and struggle, against which he fought with the help of daily Mass and Communion (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 44).

3.2. Art, Family, and Material Simplicity

According to Cavallin, after O'Brien's conversion, his creativity was unleashed: "Nature became for him a medium of experiencing God. The more he drew and painted, the more the inspirations flowed" (*On the Edge of Infinity* 45). He considered studying art in an art school or under another artist but was repulsed by modern art, which often looked like rug patterns to him (*On the Edge of Infinity* 47–48). "In the back of his mind, the experiences in the Arctic served as a powerful antidote to the often-overintellectualized avant-garde" (*On the Edge of Infinity* 48). His first exhibition was highly successful, and he was delighted with the reception of his art (*On the Edge of Infinity* 49), however, he did not want to be involved in artistic "society circles," because he was "afraid of what being absorbed into their perspective in the culture would do to" him (O'Brien, qtd. in Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 50). Therefore, instead of being successful, he wanted to live a life of material simplicity and service to God, which indeed became the main theme of his life. Yet at this point, he felt torn between art and God (50). Art and sometimes modern art society circles became one of the recurring topics in his novels, such as *A Cry of Stone*, *Sophia House*, *The Father's Tale*, and *The Fool of New York City*.

In 1975, he married Sheila, who shared O'Brien's love for nature and a simple lifestyle, and was also a reconverted Catholic. Although O'Brien and his wife had a steady income as weather observers, he constantly struggled with the idea of becoming an artist, as he had done before the marriage. Despite her fear of uncertainty if he were to choose this profession, Sheila told him that he must be an artist because God had given him this gift, but he worried that it would be impossible to support a family as a Christian artist (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 67). However, they decided to give Christian art a chance and to trust in God's providence. "Michael was an unknown artist in a remote village in British Columbia—the odds were clearly not stacked in their favour," and besides, the Western art scene was certainly not Christian (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 68). He nevertheless started earning from doing exclusively Christian art, beginning with icons in the Eastern tradition. His artistic career had its ups and downs, and his path was not easy. The growing family was sometimes on the verge of poverty, but with the help of Divine Providence, they managed to deal with all the problems they encountered. Modest living conditions, lack of material abundance, and reliance on Divine Providence appeared afterward as a frequent motif in his novels, especially *A Father's Tale* and *A Cry of Stone*.

3.3. Literary Beginnings

In 1978, a fictional story appeared in O'Brien's imagination and gradually developed. Although he was in the midst of a "demanding painting period, combining shows and talks" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 100), he felt that he should write a novel, so he paused with painting and dedicated himself to writing. The result was the novel *A Crying of Stone*. Upon moving to rural British Columbia, where his art was even less likely to be the main source of the family's income, besides the icons, he began to paint in a more Western religious style and later developed his own distinctive style (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 103). After some time, he began writing a second novel, *The Sojourners*, and sent *A Crying Out of Stone* (later renamed *A Cry of Stone*) to a Canadian publisher but was rejected (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 104). After meeting several people from Eastern Europe, O'Brien's opinion on certain values formed and has been reflected in his later novels, essays, and lectures:

> With [the] Eastern European experience of intense suffering and the civilizational role of Christianity, Michael felt a spiritual kinship (. . .). The painting of icons had intensified his gaze toward Eastern Europe. For Michael, the West, through its materialism, had an empty centre—the modern liberal democratic society was a splendid construction, one had to admit, but it was morally hollow. Eventually, this

> hollowness would show itself as a lack of resolve in the face of evil, as confusion, whenever what was at stake was more than pleasure and a comfortable life.
>
> In the heroes living under Communism, in their willingness to suffer for holding fast to truth and life, Michael found inspiration to live through his own isolation and marginalization. (. . .) Notwithstanding that the state and the guardians of public culture had decided that you were nonexistent, or at least invisible, you were alive, building a culture in the undergrowth of society. (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 110)

The subject of communism is especially dealt with in his novel *The Island of the World*. He continued to write and paint alternately, but "[t]he problem for his novels, as for his art, was that secular publishers, like galleries, did not accept the explicit 'conservative' Christian message of Michael's writing and art" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 136). As an illustration, an editor-in-chief to whom O'Brien had sent his novel *Sojourners* rejected it, because he claimed that the readers were not interested in its worldview anymore, and added: "If you could rewrite the novel with a more realist view of religion and human relationships, we would be very happy to reconsider our decision" (qtd. in Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 152). O'Brien did not even consider this as a possibility since he regarded "the supernatural as part of a realist description of human life: reality was larger than the secularist worldview maintained" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 152–53).

As he was thinking and writing a lot about modern life, culture, art, and religion, besides giving talks, he eventually started publishing articles and essays. Speaking from an "orthodox" Catholic perspective, he has focused on the secularization of the West and the importance of returning to the sacred and Christ, warning against soft, secular totalitarianism (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 162), which afterward became the main topic of his novels *Father Elijah*, *Eclipse of the Sun*, *Plague Journal*, *Elijah in Jerusalem,* and *Voyage to Alpha Centauri*. In 1990, O'Brien and his friend started publishing a magazine for Catholic families called *Nazareth Journal*, with O'Brien as an editor. Furthermore, in his own small publishing house, the White Horse Press, O'Brien published two books written and illustrated by him: *The Mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary* (1992) and a children's book *The Small Angel* (1993), while his third book, *A Landscape with Dragons* (1994), was published by his brother. In it, O'Brien argues that "[t]here had been a reversal of good and evil in modern fantasy writing" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 203), and this is most evident in the character of the dragon, which, from what used to be the symbol of evil, became a benevolent character. Shortly thereafter, Ignatius Press, the leading Catholic publishing house in the USA, started distributing these books.

3.4. *Father Elijah* and Success

O'Brien began to devote more and more time to writing, but none of his already written three novels were published. Then, one day in 1994, while he was praying, depressed about the state of the Church and the world, the story of a priest who lives in the end times suddenly appeared in his mind. He later recalled:

> This experience was so unexpected, certainly without any prompting from my musings or imaginings, that I was stunned. I shook it off as a distraction. But it wouldn't go away; it just grew and grew in a moment of timelessness, peace, and consolation. I kept kneeling there in front of the Cross, watching the story unfold in my mind, as if watching a film. Yes, it was like that, as if I were merely an observer. With this came an inner sense that I was supposed to write it down, and that I must ask the Holy Spirit for an angel of inspiration. (qtd. in Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 208)

Based on this vision, he wrote *Father Elijah* and sent it to Ignatius Press. Its publisher, Father Joseph Fessio, was interested in publishing it, although he could not guarantee that it would sell well as it was a somewhat controversial story (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 210–11). After a while, it was becoming evident that *Father Elijah*, published in 1996, when O'Brien was already 48 years old, was a genuine success. As Cavallin reports, readers often refer to reading it as a spiritual experience or attribute a prophetic meaning to it (*On the Edge of Infinity* 215). So, having written novels for twenty years, O'Brien finally established himself as "a sensation within Catholic literature" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 217). He continued to write new novels, and both the previously written and the new ones started being published by Ignatius Press, which will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter. An interesting characteristic of his novels is their covers, which feature his own paintings as "iconographic introduction[s] to his narrator" (Maillet 14). As a result, even before starting to read, the readers'

> soul sees and silently hears a non-verbal word, the Word conveyed through a painting that O'Brien has chosen for the cover of his novel. Invariably, the painting acts as an icon that, like much sacred art, conveys not just a "message," not just information, but rather an initiation into mystery, in the specifically religious or theological sense of the word: the mystery of divine being that must by definition be beyond the capacity of any human being to know through their senses. Because sacred art, like all art, must appeal directly to the senses, there is an inherent paradox in any icon; a religious icon transcends its physical qualities, but the mystery of its meaning must evade verbal explication, reaching beyond cognitive formulation and, in silence, stretching towards the soul of the viewer,

seeking to unite the human being with the Infinite Being of the Eternal God. (Maillet 14–15)

After moving from one rented house into another all over Canada, O'Brien and his wife could now finally afford to buy a low-cost house in Combermere that was finally their own (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 224). They had great concerns regarding the schooling of their six children even at Catholic schools because of their program and the negative experiences they had had, so they decided to homeschool them. When it was time for the children to go to college, dissatisfied with Canadian Catholic colleges, they decided to establish the Mater Ecclesia Study Centre, whose students at first met in the O'Brien living room and a neighbor's barn (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 233). In 1999, they registered a Catholic college and named it *Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy* (OLSWA), and in 2017, the government assigned it a "full degree-granting status as a university level college" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 234). In the beginning, O'Brien taught there an art history course and later became a permanent artist and writer in residence (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 234–35). He still paints and writes, and his paintings nowadays hang in numerous churches, monasteries, and private and public collections. He lives a peaceful, simple, and modest life with his wife in their house in Barry's Bay.

3.5. Novels

As mentioned above, after the success of *Father Elijah*, Ignatius Press published his other novels. *The Children of the Last Days* series includes *Father Elijah* (1996), *Strangers and Sojourners* (1997), which was followed by *Eclipse of the Sun* (1998), *Plague Journal* (1999), *A Cry of Stone* (2003), a prequel to *Father Elijah* called *Sophia House* (2005), and a sequel to it named *Elijah in Jerusalem* (2015). Despite the name of the series, not all of these novels deal with apocalyptic events. These seven novels can be divided into two groups: those that follow the European plot and those that follow the Canadian plot. Chronologically, the European plot starts with *Sophia House*, whose main themes are love and sacrifice. The novel takes place in Warsaw during the Nazi occupation. Bookseller Pawel Tarnowski hides David Schäfer, a young Jewish fugitive from the ghetto, in the attic of his bookshop, and they discuss various topics, such as art, literature, philosophy, and religion. *Father Elijah* takes place several decades later, when David converts to Catholicism, becomes a Carmelite priest Fr. Elijah Schäfer, and is called by the Pope to confront the man who is believed to be the Antichrist. In its sequel, *Elijah in Jerusalem*, Father Elijah, now a bishop, again tries to approach the Antichrist. The latter two novels represent true apocalyptic stories written in the light of the Book of Revelation.

Furthermore, the Canadian plot follows the lives of four generations of a family, but it is connected to the European plot through two minor characters in *Strangers and Sojourners*: Jan Tarnowski, Pawel's brother, who emigrated to British Columbia, and Father Andrei, a Catholic priest. The main storyline follows the life of an Englishwoman Anne Ashton, who travels to British Columbia in search of adventure. She was exposed to the occult through her father and is an agnostic searching for faith. She meets and later marries Stephen Delaney, an Irish Catholic, who fled Ireland because of his past. Throughout the novel, O'Brien deals with the topics of love, family, the search for faith and the meaning of life. Anne's and Stephen's grandson Nathaniel Delaney, the editor of a small newspaper, is the central character in *Plague Journal*. In an increasingly totalitarian country, he is one of the few representatives of the media who tells the truth about the government and therefore must be eliminated. Unjustly charged with sexually abusing his children, he is trying to escape from government police together with his children. The plot follows his spiritual growth during the crisis he encounters, shows the meaning of true fatherhood, and, inspired by the soft totalitarianism in contemporary Canada, also gives insight into a potential world, offering a social critique. *Eclipse of the Sun* continues the story of the Delaney children after Nathaniel's murder, in which his youngest son, Arrow, becomes a fugitive before the government. One of the key characters in all three books about the Delaney family is Fr. Andrei, who is the connecting link between this trilogy and *A Cry of Stone*. In this novel, O'Brien presents the life story of a humble native American artist, Rose Wâbos, an insignificant person in the eyes of the world, but a great person in God's eyes. Searching for the meaning of her life, she greatly influences the lives of the people she encounters during her brief life.

O'Brien's other novels include: *The Island of the World* (2007), *Theophilos* (2010), *The Father's Tale* (2011), *Voyage to Alpha Centauri* (2013), *The Fool of New York City* (2016), *The Lighthouse* (2020), *The Sabbatical* (2021), and *By the Rivers of Babylon* (2022), and none of them are related to each other. *The Island of the World* is a historical novel that represents an account of the life of Josip Lasta, a fictional boy whose world shatters as the evil of World War II destroys his village in remote Bosnian mountains. The story follows the numerous sufferings he goes through, dealing with traumatic events, and his search for identity, the faith of his childhood, and the meaning of his life. In *Theophilos*, O'Brien creates a fictional story about a man named Theophilos, to whom St. Luke addressed his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. As St. Luke's adoptive father and an agnostic, he is worried that Luke has fallen victim to the new sect, Christianity, so he searches for Luke and interviews those who knew Jesus in order to understand this new religion. In *The Father's Tale*, Alex Graham, a Canadian

bookseller, leaves the safety of his hometown in search of his missing son, who has disappeared with members of a cult he joined. During his journey, Alex loses everything he has and thereby finds God and himself. In a science fiction novel named *Voyage to Alpha Centauri*, a Nobel Prize winning physicist Neil de Hoyos is a member of a crew that embarks on an expedition to Alpha Centauri. Once again, O'Brien sets his plot within the framework of a totalitarian system. Namely, de Hoyos decides to undertake this voyage in order to escape the totalitarian government that controls all aspects of life on Earth. In this novel, O'Brien tackles the questions of state control, the development of technology, human nature, faith, who we are, and where we are going. *The Fool of New York City* is a tale set in the present day. Billy, a kind giant, brings home a homeless amnesiac who believes he is the 17th-century Spanish painter Francisco de Goya. Billy tries to help Francisco discover who he really is because he himself once suffered from amnesia. This is a story about dealing with trauma and suffering, about the goodness of people who help others, and about the search for identity and the purpose of life. Moreover, the protagonist of *The Lighthouse* is Ethan McQuarry, a young lighthouse keeper who has no family and lives a quiet and solitary life on a small island. Throughout the story, he searches for meaning and finds the ultimate meaning of his life in dramatic events that take place at the end of the novel. In *The Sabbatical*, Dr. Owen Whitfield, an elderly history professor at Oxford, plans to spend his sabbatical year peacefully. Instead, he is invited to a secret conference, organized by Count von Forschtenberg, who hides in Romania after failed assassination attempts. Dr. Whitfield gets involved in a dangerous situation involving the conflict between good and evil. This novel deals with the question of whether determinism or providence controls how history unfolds and what an individual's role is in it. The latest O'Brien's novel, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, is a fictionalized portrayal of the prophet Ezekiel's life. As can be noted from the above book summaries, O'Brien's novels cover a wide range of topics, but what the majority of them have in common is the battle between good and evil, fatherhood, the search for God, one's identity, and the meaning of life. In the novels, "[h]is insistence on sincerity and spiritual purity became integral parts of his aesthetic approach. He was convinced that he had to be true to the story that he saw with his imagination, but also that he had to uphold the moral laws governing both reality and wholesome fiction" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 214).

3.6. Influences

O'Brien's writings are influenced by the ideas of various theologians, philosophers, and fiction writers. Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have had an especially strong impact on him ("Writing for the Eschaton: Q&A with Author Michael D. O'Brien"), and he particularly

emphasizes the former's "defense of the dignity and ultimate purpose of man's existence" ("We Have Not Been Tested"). Among the thinkers who have inspired him the most, he points out Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Max Picard ("Writing for the Eschaton: Q&A with Author Michael D. O'Brien"), G. K. Chesterton, Christopher Dawson, Peter Kreeft, Josef Pieper,[6] and Viktor Frankl.[7] Moreover, several fiction writers who have had a noticeable effect on his work stand out. He, namely, considers Tolkien the best contemporary novelist of all time ("Catholic Writing Today: Michael O'Brien"). Apart from Tolkien, O'Brien's novels have also been profoundly influenced by *The Idiot, Crime and Punishment,* and *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky, *Cancer Ward by* Solzhenitsyn, Dante's *Divine Comedy* as well as Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, but he reports that he also likes reading Paul Horgan, Willa Cather, and a contemporary English novelist Lucy Beckett ("Catholic Writing Today: Michael O'Brien"). Although O'Brien's fiction is quite different from Walker Percy's and Flannery O'Connor's, he nevertheless admires their work, which is based on an implicitly Catholic approach, while his approach is rather explicit (O'Brien, "We Have Not Been Tested"). Unlike their novels, his are not "gritty or dark" (Wachs 55); instead, they affirm the beauty of a life with God, even when it is marked by suffering and struggle.

3.7. Reception

Over the years, O'Brien's novels were translated into numerous languages and became bestsellers worldwide, especially in Croatia, Poland, and the Czech Republic, where he is more popular than in his native Canada. Not only his novels but also his short stories, essays, and other works were published. Justin Press, a small Catholic publishing house, was eventually founded in Canada, and they have so far published his collection of short stories *Waiting* (2010), a biography of painter William Kurelek (2013), the collections of essays *Remembrance of the Future* (2009), *Arriving Where We Started* (2012), and *Fragments in a Season of Fury* (2021), the work *Father at Night* (2011), in which he describes the challenges of fatherhood, *Donkey Dialogues* (2014), a collection of letters between O'Brien and a Croatian writer Mate Krajina, and *Stations of the Cross* (2018), illustrated meditations on the Passion of Our Lord.

Reading the reviews by some of the most eminent contemporary scholars on the covers of his novels, one gets the impression that he is a writer of great reputation. For instance, Michael Coren claims that "[t]he sweet, lyrical, and faithful voice of Michael O'Brien is perhaps the truest and finest in contemporary fiction" (*Eclipse of the Sun*), while Ralph

[6] Michael D. O'Brien, email message to author, November 11, 2019.
[7] Michael D. O'Brien, email message to author, November 15, 2019.

McInerny recognizes “great mastery and wisdom” in his writing as well as “an elegiac style seasoned with wit and erudition and a mesmerizing vision of where we are and where we are going” (*Strangers and Sojourners*). Similarly, Joseph Pearce praises the quality of O’Brien’s writing and storytelling as well as the versatility of his stories (*The Fool of New York City*), while Danielle Bean believes that he “is a masterful storyteller and a gifted artist,” whose “beautiful depiction of human struggle and good versus evil” she finds deeply moving and inspiring (*The Fool of New York City*). Joseph Pearce acknowledges his “major talent, one of the brightest lights in the Catholic literary firmament” (*A Cry of Stone*). Furthermore, O’Brien is often compared to some of the greatest authors of all times: “He creates characters like Dickens, explores human relationships like Austen, and has the epic scope of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky” (Joseph Fessio, *The Father’s Tale*); he is “worthy to join the ranks of Flannery O’Connor, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and C. S. Lewis” (Peter Kreeft, *The Fool of New York City*); his name could soon stand alongside those of Mauriac and Bernanos (Thomas Howard, *The Fool of New York City*). However, although O’Brien continually receives glowing reviews and is a prolific best-selling author highly successful in several European countries, Maillet warns that he occupies a marginal position in contemporary literature, particularly in his native Canada (9). Maillet further observes that, if praise and the intellect of people praising O’Brien’s work are taken into consideration, a fair critic would naturally recognize in the dismissal of O’Brien’s writing the anti-religious intolerance that nowadays permeates a large part of academia, particularly in Canada, and chiefly in literary studies (9–10). O’Brien is aware of this problem. He points out that “[i]n a healthy culture there is surely a place for well-crafted, gripping dramatic tales that are overtly Catholic. Presently, there is a marked absence, or near absence, of such work in the mainstream of Western culture” partly “due to a deliberate ghettoization of authentic Catholic culture” (“Role of Catholic Writer”).

3.8. Mission

Faith deeply permeates O’Brien’s entire life and work. In *Arriving Where We Started*, he explains that the foundation of his person and life is his Catholic faith: “My faith is the source of all that I do; it is the spring that I drink from, it is what infuses whatever I do with any kind of authenticity. My work flows from my faith” (167). Therefore, his mission as a novelist and painter is the restoration of Christian culture. O’Brien believes that authentic art, as a true sign for incarnate beings in an incarnational universe, has the ability to emerge as a “natural light in surrounding darkness” and stand in stark contrast to the world of “bold lies and intoxicating illusions,” possibly leading to a clearer understanding of the meaning and purpose, but also to

reverence and worship (*Arriving Where We Started* 12–13). In an interview with *Katolički tjednik*, Sarajevo, he describes his aims as a novelist in more detail:

> In the core of my soul is a desire to tell a story that will move the hearts and open the eyes of others to the splendid beauty of existence, and the eternal value of each human life. I hope the readers will see how beloved they are in the eyes of God, even with our weakness and wounds and sins. I hope most of all that readers will come away from my books healed in some way of the terrible demonic lie of our times, which tells God is absent and that our sufferings are meaningless. I pray that my work is an instrument of hope for others, so they will see the greatness of their own personal stories, their own lives.

As we have seen, in his work, O'Brien attempts to convey the holiness of life and the dignity of every human being in an incarnational universe: "Each visual image and each work of prose is an incarnation of a word, a statement of faith. At the same time, it asks the questions: What is most noble and eternal in man? Who is he? Why does he exist? And what is his eternal destiny?" (O'Brien, "Home," *StudiObrien*). In fact, in order to bring a Christian message to the secular society, he suggests that we always ask ourselves the following questions: "What is the human person? What is the purpose of his existence? What is his place and value in the social order? What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility? What is God's will in the mission of my life? And above all, who is the true Lord of this world and source of wisdom?" (*Arriving Where We Started* 153). In his novels, O'Brien tackles these very questions.

3.9. Characteristics of O'Brien's Novels

It is important to notice that his characters are not superheroes or significant personalities who deserve dignity and value because of their worldly significance, but ordinary, seemingly insignificant people who are nevertheless loved by God. As one of his favorite quotations, O'Brien cites Faustina Kowalska's *Diaries*:

> God usually chooses the weakest and simplest souls as tools for His greatest works; that we can see that this is an undeniable truth when we look at the men He chose to be His apostles; or again, when we look at the history of the Church and see what great works were done by souls that were the least capable of accomplishing them; for it is just in this way that God's works are revealed for what they are, the works of God. ("Favorite Quotations," *StudiObrien*)

This point of view is reflected in O'Brien's novels, in which, as he explains, he essentially attempts to convey the great mystery discoverable in every human being: "the dignity of the

human person" ("Interview on *Sophia House*"). Namely, even the most "ordinary" lives involve "heroism and tragedy, suffering and joy, birth and death, love and loss, folly and wisdom" ("Interview on *Sophia House*"). His aim is always to convey the truth that the scales by which we measure greatness and smallness are seriously distorted. Instead, true vision inevitably requires that we develop the ability to see with God's eyes, with the eyes that are composed of both love and truth ("Interview on *Sophia House*"). O'Brien notices that the poor, the weak, and the disabled frequently fall through the gaps of contemporary civilization, individuals whom we may deem unimportant in today's world, "people without power, prestige or education" ("The Hunger for God and the Passion for Art"). Therefore, these types of characters, which Scripture refers to as "the great and the small," appear in all of his stories. In them, he attempts to convey how God especially loves the "small of the earth" in order to help his readers remember that every one of us is the small of the earth since, with his inflated sense of self-importance and nearly godlike abilities, contemporary man has forgotten this ("The Hunger for God and the Passion for Art"). In addition, O'Brien explains that such "small" people take part in Christ's suffering and salvation:

> Several fictional characters in my novels represent countless real people who embrace the Cross and live one or more dimensions of it in union with Jesus, thus participating in the salvation of other souls. They are strong, because they are weak with the "weakness" of Jesus Christ. Most of them, maybe all but a few of them, are completely unknown. But you can be sure that they are very well known in Heaven. These are the people I write about in my books. These are the people who, in fact, change the balance of the world. ("Interview with Avvenire")

As can be seen, a dominant theme of O'Brien's novels (as well as paintings) is the Cross, which is an unavoidable aspect of every life. However, our response to it is the factor that either moves us "toward life or toward death" (O'Brien, "Interview on *Sophia House*"). By embracing the Cross, O'Brien's heroes grow: suffering does not destroy them, but brings them to a rebirth, or, in O'Brien's words: "While my novels are sometimes about the crucifixion of ordinary people, they always point to the resurrection, and the long-range work of divine providence in every life" ("Writing for the Eschaton: Q&A with Author Michael D. O'Brien"). God's providential mercy, as another prevailing theme in O'Brien's fiction, reveals God's love for every human being (Wachs 56), who is unique, irreplaceable, and invaluable in God's eyes, whose life is sacred and meaningful, and whose soul is eternal. O'Brien's stories show that "[t]he human person is made in the image and likeness of God, capable of love, of knowing truth, of recognizing beauty, and of reverence for being itself" (O'Brien, "The Fiction Writer

and the True Story of Man" 25), and therefore, all people are responsible for their lives before God. A recurring motif in O'Brien's novels is also forgiveness, directed both from God to a person, and from one person to another. Forgiveness, according to O'Brien, "frees us to believe in a benevolent God and in the saving power of Christ, and thus to become who we truly are" ("Interview on *Sophia House*").

Even though the realist novel is "fundamentally secular" (Levine 25–26), O'Brien's novels are nevertheless written in a realistic style, as Christian realist fiction. According to Cavallin, a more accurate term to describe modern Christian realist fiction as well as O'Brien's novels would be "religious, transcendental, or supernatural realism" ("Deep Realism: Discussion of Christian Literary Realism with an Analysis of Passages from Michael O'Brien's *Children of the Last Days* Novel Series" 108), which incorporates the supernatural aspects of Christianity into the empiricism of the novel genre, thus widening "the realist framework to include the supernatural" ("Deep Realism" 107). In O'Brien's novels, this means that "the religious content . . . is on a descriptive, discursive, moral or psychological level," whereby it remains within the boundaries of realism but nonetheless demonstrates the validity of the Christian worldview (Cavallin, "Deep Realism" 110). However, O'Brien also introduces miraculous religious elements by employing literary techniques such as dreams or visions, which allow for the supernatural to be present without causing the collapse of the realist framework of the story and the alteration of the novel into a different genre (Cavallin, "Deep Realism" 110–11). Cavallin dubs O'Brien's realism "Deep Realism" ("Deep Realism" 117). Unlike some other Catholic realist fiction, such as Percy's or O'Connor's, O'Brien's novels represent a realistic image of the world in which "the darkness of evil and sin does not encompass all of reality, for the light of goodness and beauty also exists," so Wachs describes them as "romantic" Catholic novels (55), although not in the sense of "idealism, nostalgia, or naïveté," but true realism represented by loving life with all its pleasures and difficulties, especially emphasizing the beauty of accepting one's cross and God's will (Wachs 56). In this way, O'Brien's novels tackle the question of the meaning of life, the issue of searching for one's own identity and one's place in the world in order to reveal the uniqueness, importance, and dignity of each person.

4. THE MEANING OF LIFE

Michael D. O'Brien is not alone in dealing with the issue of the meaning of life. At least at some point in their lives, most people wonder what the meaning of life is, whether there is any meaning at all, how to find or discover it, who we are, where we come from, where we are going, and why we exist. Along with the questions about the meaning of life, the questions about the meaning of suffering and death often arise. People are naturally interested in these subjects because the meaning of life is crucial to human existence, for it determines whether one succeeds or fails in life (Längle 13). Therefore, it is not surprising that various individuals, religions, and scientific disciplines, including philosophy, biology, theology, psychology, and literature, have been attempting to provide answers to these questions for centuries. Viktor Frankl's[8] logotherapy and existential analysis stand out among them considering that their main focus is precisely the meaning of human life. They will therefore be used to analyze this topic in O'Brien's novels. The fact that O'Brien has been greatly influenced by Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*[9] provides additional justification for the use of logotherapy and existential analysis in the study of his novels. Furthermore, since we have seen in the previous chapter that O'Brien's work is deeply rooted in his Catholic faith, a theological-philosophical approach of Christian anthropology will also be employed to examine this subject from a religious perspective, allowing for a more comprehensive study of the metaphysical questions raised by O'Brien. Namely, O'Brien addresses the issue of discovering the meaning of life through deeds, love, faith, and the acceptance of suffering through tales about the spiritual journey of the

[8] Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) was born in a Jewish family in Vienna. He was one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th century. In the beginning, even before he became a doctor of medicine, he was influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, later by Adler's approach, and, as he realized that both had their shortcomings, he decided to develop his own school of psychotherapy called logotherapy and existential analysis, which focused on meaning. At the age of 37, he was sent to the first Nazi concentration camp, where he took the manuscript of his book on logotherapy, but was forced to leave it upon arrival. During his imprisonment in several Nazi camps, his goal was to reconstruct his manuscript and to test his theory that life is meaningful in all circumstances, including those when a person is facing suffering and death. Unfortunately, he lost all the members of his family in the Holocaust. After World War II, he published *The Doctor and the Soul* on the basis of his reconstructed manuscript and *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he described his concentration camp experiences and the main ideas of logotherapy. The latter became a bestseller in the USA and is considered to be one of the most influential books in the United States. Frankl later earned a PhD degree in philosophy with the dissertation *The Unconscious God*, in which he examines the question of unconscious spirituality. A total of 39 of his books were published during his lifetime, and they were translated into about 50 languages. In 1947, he married for the second time (his first wife died in a concentration camp). With his second wife, Elly, he had a daughter, Gabriele. He was a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna and the head of the Vienna Neurological Polyclinic. He also founded the Austrian Society for Psychotherapy and became its first president. He lectured at 209 universities worldwide. Frankl's work was continued by his successors, among whom Elisabeth Lukas stands out. Today, there are many educational and therapeutic institutes for logotherapy worldwide.

[9] Michael D. O'Brien, email message to author, November 15, 2019.

ordinary man.[10] Like his novels, Christian theology and philosophy as well as existential analysis and logotherapy consider the spiritual aspect of man to be their foundation and also discuss the topic of life's meaning, providing answers compatible with those found in O'Brien's stories.

4.1. The Basic Features of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis

Logotherapy, the so-called "third Viennese school of psychotherapy," and its anthropological theory known as existential analysis were founded by Viktor Frankl, a neurologist and psychiatrist of Jewish origin, who applied his experiences as a prisoner in World War II concentration camps to empirically verify the theory he had developed prior to his imprisonment—that every life has meaning in all circumstances. Logotherapy and existential analysis are two sides of the same coin: existential analysis indicates the anthropological approach used to develop the theory, while logotherapy refers to a therapeutic theory and method (Tweedie 27) as a practical application of existential analysis. The term logotherapy was coined by Frankl from the Greek word *logos* "in the twofold sense of 'meaning' and 'spirit'" (Tweedie 28), because he intended to imply the following: firstly, that human existence always points to *meaning*, and secondly, he wanted the name to indicate the *spiritual* dimension of man. Namely, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler's school of individual psychology recognize only two human dimensions: physical and psychological, but Frankl not only adds to them a spiritual dimension but also regards it as the starting point of his theory (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 10).[11] Logotherapy is thus "a psychotherapy focused on meaning," and "a psychotherapy that starts from the spiritual and reaches into the spiritual" (Lukas, "Kratak uvod u logoterapiju: Pitanja Bernda Ahrendta upućena Elisabeth Lukas" 8).[12] In this way, Frankl returns the spirit to the anthropological picture of man, making his anthropology similar to Judeo-Christian in certain ways, which will be discussed later in more detail. According to Lukas, logotherapy is based on three pillars: free will, will-to-meaning, and the meaning of life, and each of them represents the basis of one scientific discipline. First, logotherapy as an anthropology is based on free will, which represents the foundation of the logotherapeutic image of man. Second, logotherapy as a psychotherapy takes will-to-meaning

[10] The use of masculine nouns (man) and pronouns (he, him, his) in this thesis is based on their use in the original English versions to preserve the authenticity and coherence of the expression.
[11] These three dimensions are not separate but meet in every aspect of human existence (Lukas, *Osnove logoterapije* 22).
[12] If not otherwise stated, all the translations from Croatian to English were done by the author of the PhD dissertation.

as the starting point for the treatment of patients. Third, logotherapy as a philosophy believes that the meaning of life exists in all circumstances (*Osnove logoterapije* 20). The first and the third pillar will be the most important for this research.

Logotherapy has its theoretical foundations in contemporary existential philosophy (Lukas, *Osnove logoterapije* 28, Bošnjaković 91), but Frankl attempts to correct and complement the ideas of existential philosophers (Tweedie 35). He considers the question of the meaning of life "an intrinsically human question," "the truest expression of the state of being human, the mark of the most human nature in man" (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 44). Namely, due to the spiritual dimension, inherent only to human beings, humans are able to question what their meaning is, which differs them from animals or any sort of artificial intelligence. However, people have "the prerogative and privilege" not only to search for the meaning of their lives but also to wonder if there is a meaning at all (Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 140). In comparison to depth psychology, which includes psychoanalysis (signified by Freudian pleasure principle or, as Frankl calls it, the "will to pleasure") and individual psychology (Adlerian striving for superiority), Frankl calls his psychology *height psychology*, since it "takes into account the so-called 'higher aspirations' of the human psyche: not only man's seeking pleasure and power but also his search for meaning" (*Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 138). Height psychology focuses on the "most human of all human needs"—man's search for and fulfillment of meaning in life or in particular life circumstances, which Frankl calls *will-to-meaning* ("*Wille zum Sinn*") (Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 139). Will-to-meaning, a desire to find meaning in one's own life, is actually the primary human motivational force (Frankl, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 92). According to Frankl, regardless of how little a man knows about meaning, his existence is driven by it at all times. Namely, a man has at least some foreknowledge or foreboding of meaning, and he believes in some meaning as long as he lives. Even a suicide believes in meaning, though probably not in the meaning of life, but rather in the meaning of death, because if he did not, he could not do anything at all, including committing suicide (*Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 97–98).

In addition to spirituality, which has been introduced above, existential analysis also considers freedom and responsibility to be the basic aspects (*Urphänomene*) of existence (Tweedie 29). Namely, every man is a free being, but his freedom is not freedom *from* something, but freedom *for* something. Man is responsible for fulfilling the objectively meaningful tasks that he, as a unique individual, receives from life, whether they are related to things, other people, or God. In other words, man has a responsibility to discover the meaning of his own life (but not to invent it), which he can achieve through *self-transcendence*

("*Selbsttranszendenz*"). Frankl claims that psychotherapy cannot answer to what man is responsible, since everyone has to decide this for himself. It might be the society, mankind, or conscience, but the question may also be to whom man is responsible, and the answer could be—to God (*Patnja zbog besmislena života: Psihoterapija za današnje vrijeme* 88). It is interesting to notice that Frankl argues that man could be led toward responsibility by his conscience, the "organ of meaning," whose source is to be found in the transcendent—that is—God (*Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 107, 65). Furthermore, the aim of human activity is represented by the realization of values, and Frankl recognizes three types of values: creative, experiential, and attitudinal values. To summarize, the aforementioned will-to-meaning "is the true motivational factor in authentic human existence, while the realizing of values is the true responsibility of man" (Tweedie 68).

According to Frankl, in the modern world, the frustration of the will-to-meaning is globally present. An increasing number of people experience meaninglessness, i.e., existential frustration ("*existentielle Frustration*"), or, in Frankl's terms, the *existential vacuum* ("*existentielles Vakuum*"), which is frequently paired with a sense of emptiness, and whose main manifestations appear to be boredom and apathy. The former is marked by a lack of interest in the world, while the latter is signified by an inability to take initiative and act or to change something in the world (Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 139, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* 24). Frankl identifies industrialization and urbanization as the main causes of the existential vacuum considering that they alienate man from traditions and values (*Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 128). Namely, unlike animals, man does not know what must be done based on instincts, and unlike man who lived in former times, contemporary man no longer has traditions that provide guidance for what should be done, so that, because of such lack of guidance, it frequently seems to people that, in fact, they do not know what they want. Consequently, a person either follows a crowd, which is conformism, or acts as others dictate, which is totalitarianism (Frankl, *Patnja zbog besmislena života* 7, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* 26–27). The situation is further complicated by the focus of contemporary man on consumerism and hedonism, the absence of religion, and the avoidance of sacrifice and suffering, which alienates man from himself, people, and God and makes him experience the existential vacuum. Namely, nowadays,

> [c]onsumerism permeates every aspect of life, dissolving one's identity through popular practices for attaining short-term satisfaction – the consumption of products, food, relationships, and TV programs. In any case, . . . if something does not bring satisfaction,

> it does not have a purpose. Religion, a haven for numerous cultures and generations, is largely absent in contemporary Western society. (Matković 177)

It seems that, surrounded by abundance, "[e]ver more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for" (Frankl, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* 21). It is worrying that the existential vacuum can also result in a new type of neurosis, which Frankl terms *noögenic neurosis* ("*noogene Neurose*"), and it includes conscience conflicts, value collisions, and existential frustration (*Patnja zbog besmislena života* 7–8). The symptoms of existential frustration represent, according to Frankl, the mass neurotic triad: depression, aggression, and addiction (*The Unheard Cry for Meaning* 28).[13] In particular, a high incidence of depression cases and the consequent suicide attempts due to the sense of meaninglessness is concerning and represents "an unheard cry for meaning" (*The Unheard Cry for Meaning* 21). The aforementioned phenomena are perhaps even more relevant today than in Frankl's time due to the even greater alienation of the 21st-century man. Consequently, it appears that at this point the question of the meaning of life is more significant than ever before.

4.2. Christianity: Similarities to and Differences from Logotherapy and Existential Analysis

It is questionable whether logotherapy and existential analysis could be compared to Christianity. Namely, logotherapy and existential analysis represent "a scientific psychotherapeutic theory based upon both empirical and phenomenological data, as well as the results of psychotherapeutic practice," and Christianity is "a religious philosophy of life" (Tweedie 174). Consequently, there are obviously boundaries and differences between them, but they nevertheless do have much in common and often complement each other.

According to Tweedie, "Logotherapy is a religiously oriented theory" (146) that shows an indisputably "close affinity to a Christian view of man" (161). As presented above, logotherapeutic anthropology acknowledges three dimensions of person: body, mind, and spirit, emphasizing spirit as the cornerstone of a human being. It is easy to see the parallels between this understanding of man and the biblical perspective, for Christianity also recognizes "trichotomy" (Tweedie 162) or the tripartite view of man, focusing mostly on the spiritual dimension. A Catholic theologian Tomislav Ivančić explains what spirit is from the Christian point of view:

[13] Frankl bases these assertions on the conducted research (see for example *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* 20–21, 27–30 or *Patnja zbog besmislena života* 6–7).

> Research has shown that the field of our activity was spiritual. Namely, spirit is freedom, and freedom is responsibility, from which arises either a feeling of guilt and meaninglessness or a feeling of meaning and peace. Spirit transcends the psychic and somatic realm in man. Spirit is in man's personality, not some part of man. The very life of man is spiritual and cannot be saved by man. (. . .) Spirit is man's ability to rise above his sufferings, to oppose all convictions, to defy even death itself. (. . .) With spirit, man transcends everything material and physical. Through spirit, man gets to know the Creator of himself, nature, and human history. Being spiritual, man is indestructibly religious. (. . .) With his spiritual dimension, man belongs to all times, all spaces, all beings and the source of all beings, the Creator and God. (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 34)

Several similarities between Christian and Frankl's anthropology can be read from Ivančić's description of spirit. Firstly, the notions of freedom, responsibility, and spirit are also present in logotherapy and existential analysis as the basic aspects of existence. Secondly, in Christianity, the feelings of guilt or peace arise from conscience, which directs man to the meaning of his life, and Frankl recognizes conscience as a similar concept, claiming that conscience leads man in finding meaning, guiding him to a responsible decision (*Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 107, 109). In the same way as Christianity, logotherapy and existential analysis find a transcendental source of conscience—God, "the One [who] assigns to the human being responsible tasks" (Tweedie 35). Thirdly, Frankl's anthropology also views man as an inherently religious being: "in his foundation, in the depth of the unconscious, each of us [is] in fact a believer at least in the broadest sense of the word, no matter how much his faith is suppressed and buried" (Frankl, *Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 145). Fourthly, Frankl agrees with the Christian view that spirit enables man to transcend suffering and even death, discovering meaning even in these situations. Moreover, Ivančić also refers to Danah Zohar and Ian Marshal, who report that the ability to ask existential questions and the need to find the meaning and significance of their lives are indications that humans are spiritual creatures (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 77). Their conclusion coincides with Frankl's, as has been explained above.

One of the differences between Frankl's theory and Christianity is that they start from different viewpoints. According to Fizzotti, in contrast to existential analysis, which views man "from below," from an ontological perspective, and which is concentrated "on contemporary man in his ineradicable and ever-present fundamental possibility of self-transcendence, self-advancement, search for meaning" (*Die Sinnfrage,* qtd. in Fizotti 10–11), theology maintains that one should view human existence from "above:" "from the personal relationship between

God and man, and therefore from the communion founded and realized in Christ" (Fizotti 10–11). In that vein, Ivančić suggests that the fundamental existential questions of where we come from, who created us, why we have to live, or why suffering and death occur can only be answered by the humanities and religion, particularly theology, since these are questions that only God can answer (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 189).[14] To elaborate, like logotherapy and existential analysis, the Christian tradition believes that the life of every person as well as every event, even suffering, has a meaning. However, it is important to note that, in the Christian view, according to Ratzinger, people are incapable of giving themselves or the world meaning. Instead, by becoming a man, God united with the world, and every human being has an opportunity to participate in this unity and thereby achieve full meaning (*O smislu kršćanskog života: tri adventske propovijedi* 36–37). In particular, "[t]o live in grace is the same as to exist in love. (. . .) To live in grace means to live according to the original intention for our existence, to live in accordance with the truth about us, with the creative idea of our existence, to unite our 'yes' with the 'yes' addressed to us, thus uniting our life with God's" (Ratzinger, *Ljubav koja spašava* 12, 14–15). According to Matković and Oklopčić, the ultimate meaning of life is salvation, which is made possible when a person expresses love for God and one's neighbor as an answer to receiving God's love. Given that God is love, experiencing meaning is thus experiencing love, and the two great commandments provide a summary of the Christian perspective on meaning:[15] "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,* and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: *You must love your neighbor as yourself*" (*Jerusalem Bible*, Matt. 22.37–39), which also represents the very core of the Jewish Law (Lev. 19.17–18) (190). The compass for morally right decisions in Christianity are the values contained in these commandments, which are to be kept if one wants to lead a virtuous and meaningful life. On the other hand, breaking God's commandments or committing a sin prevents the realization of meaning in life.

In contrast, Frankl's concept of religion is quite wide: he considers it to be a belief in meaning and argues that true atheists almost do not exist at all because, deep in the unconscious, every person is a believer at least in this broadest sense. Namely, not only does man have the will-to-meaning, but also the *will-to-ultimate-meaning* or *will-to-super-meaning* ("*Wille zum Über-Sinn*"), which represents the meaning of one's life as a whole. Frankl claims that religious

[14] From faith in God, one gains the knowledge that one is created by God and returns to God upon death, that life is indestructible, that one is loved by God, that one should make the morally right decisions in life, and that God responds to a person's prayers through the spirit (Ivančić, *Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 189).
[15] They also summarize the Ten Commandments.

faith is in fact the faith or trust in a super-meaning. He further compares his views on religion with those of Albert Einstein, who said that "To be religious is to have found an answer to the question, What is the meaning of life?" and to those of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who claimed that "To believe in God is to see that life has a meaning." Even though the three of them are from different professions (Einstein a physicist, Wittgenstein a philosopher, and Frankl a psychiatrist), their definitions of religion are quite similar (Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 143, 150, 153, *Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 99, 145, *The Doctor and the Soul* 48–49, Radionov 526).

Since logotherapy is a school of psychotherapy, naturally suitable both for believers and nonbelievers, it has to be neutral towards religion. Namely, "for logotherapy, religion can only be an object – not a point of view" (Frankl, *Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 93). In spite of that, religion is especially important to logotherapy since both are concerned with meaning (Frankl, *Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 96–97), and because logotherapy treats the psyche precisely through the spirit. As a psychotherapeutic method, logotherapy treats people in all aspects of their lives, including their religious aspect. And yet, it is not a religious treatment and does not favor any religion over another. As Frankl explains, naturally, religion and logotherapy have different goals: the primary intention of religion is the salvation of the soul, while the main goal of psychotherapy is the healing of the soul. However, one can have the effect of the other. On the one hand, religion could sometimes have psychohygienic and psychotherapeutic results since it offers the safety of the transcendental. On the other hand, psychotherapy could unintentionally trigger the unconscious, suppressed religiosity. However, the levels on which the healing and the salvation of the soul happen are certainly different: while psychotherapy occurs on a lower, more basic level, religious man enters a higher, more comprehensive dimension, and faith, rather than knowledge, is where the breakthrough into that higher realm occurs (Frankl, *Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 94–95).

In the past, priests took care of a person's soul, and psychotherapists of a person's psyche. It eventually became clear that the human being cannot be split apart that easily, so the gap between religion and psychotherapy has decreased, and logotherapy became one of the ways to bridge it (Lukas, *Što nas u životu pokreće: Logoterapijski pristupi* 82). According to Tweedie, logotherapy does not impose values; instead, through it, patients become aware of a desire for values, including their own unconscious spiritual values. Namely, when patients have a keen sense of conscience, it will become clear to them what their own values and meaning of life are. Therefore, logotherapy makes use of the inherent potential of human nature while guiding patients to the boundary of Transcendence. There they can discover the source of their

own meaning, the foundation for their responsibilities, and the strength to endure their sufferings (151). Nevertheless, "Logotherapy can only lead the patient to the door of Transcendence. He must enter by himself" (Tweedie 152). From this point, religion takes over.[16]

What Frankl terms the existential vacuum is not unknown among other authors. Kierkegaard calls it "sickness unto death" and Heidegger "*die Unheimlichkeit*" (the uncanniness, not-being-at-home), while Christianity sees it as separation from oneself, others, and God (Ivančić, *Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 82). Tweedie compares Frankl's terms with those found in the Bible in this way:

> All egocentric motivational goals, whether for pleasurable, materialistic, or intellectual ends, are also condemned as futile in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, the result of such attempted life patterns is couched in a phrase very similar to Frankl's "existential frustration," the "vexation of spirit." This experience, the direct result of the individual's trying to secure self-centered goals, apart from the demands of responsibility in his spiritual dimension, is described as "vanity of vanities," which may be translated as the "greatest emptiness." This, in turn, brings to mind the logotherapeutic term, "existential vacuum." (164–65)

Seen through the lens of Christianity, the "existential vacuum" is, according to Ivančić, caused by both original sin and current sins, which lead to separation from God. This in turn results in a meaningless life since, in this state, man's "thought does not find the thought of the Creator, in which it would find the meaning of everything that exists," and that causes existential fear in man (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 101). Sin leads to a damaged, wounded relationship with God, in which one does not perceive God's closeness and love in one's life due to the weight and consequences of sin. In other words, sin prevents man from achieving the main purpose of life—salvation. Tweedie points out that, according to logotherapy, the spiritual dimension of human beings cannot be affected by defects or disease. In contrast, the Bible views it as naturally afflicted with the state of sin, which does not inevitably keep man from making existential choices regarding his psychophysicum, but prevents one from fulfilling one's responsibilities. It causes feelings of guilt and despair and frequently leads to the existential vacuum or existential frustration (177–78). Although a person may be in a state of sin, he or

[16] According to the founder of hagiotherapy, Tomislav Ivančić, logotherapy, as a psychotherapeutic method, has entered the spiritual dimension, demonstrating its potent ability to heal the psyche, thus increasing the psychiatry's therapeutic scope. However, hagiotherapy, Ivančić's therapeutic method, overcomes logotherapy by including the Spirit of God into treatment alongside the abilities of the human spirit. In particular, the powers of God's Spirit surpass any human potential for spiritual healing (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 103).

she nevertheless remains God's creature, and no sin can erase this fact. For Catholics, the way to overcome this condition is to realize that one is unconditionally loved by God and to accept God's love, after which one has an opportunity to confess sins in the sacrament of reconciliation in order to be freed from sin and reconciled with God through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Prayer and participation in the Eucharist are equally important means to receive guidance and strength by means of strengthening the relationship with God in order to be able to lead a virtuous and moral life, which is for Catholics—a meaningful life.

Although there are many points of convergence between Christianity and logotherapy and existential analysis, as we have seen above, there are also differences, and an overview of the main differences follows below. Apart from the already mentioned different main goals and the fact that logotherapy leads the patient to his or her own values (which may be religious values), but does not provide them, there are some other differences between Christianity and logotherapy and existential analysis. Namely, in his theory, Frankl merely acknowledges that transcendent reality exists, while Christianity reveals it (Tweedie 175). Furthermore, the question of the foundation for man's objective responsibility is beyond the authority of logotherapy and existential analysis, so it remains unanswered by them, and Christianity finds its foundation in God (Tweedie 175). Moreover, Frankl's theory holds that man is unable to understand the absolute meaning, and Christianity finds it in the "intimate personal . . . knowledge of God in Jesus Christ" (Tweedie 175–76)—therefore, Christianity inevitably goes beyond logotherapy (Tweedie 176). If Frankl's theory is juxtaposed to Christianity, the following might be concluded:

> Logotherapy, while not being a religious system, gives an honest appraisal of the religious factors of human existence, as well as the spiritual dimension of man from which they stem. When related to the specific religious system of a Christian *Weltanschauung* based upon the biblical data, it, as a phenomenological analysis of human existence and an empirically validated psychotherapeutic theory, is seen to be of inestimable value in its complementation. (Tweedie 179)

To sum it up, while logotherapy and existential analysis discuss the phenomenological manifestation of meaning, Christianity provides an ontic foundation for it in the person of God.

4.3. Literature and the Meaning of Life

Reading stories may be beneficial both for the spiritual and psychological development of a person, but also helpful in difficult situations—when coping with a problem or struggling to understand the meaning of one's life. Stories "talk *to us* and *about us*, about fundamental life

experiences, about everything that is the subject of our most intense feelings and values," serving as a role model that we may relate to and follow in our real lives (Sever Globan and Bošnjaković 220). Namely, a person can obtain a fresh perspective on his or her life situation and problems (Sever Globan and Bošnjaković 226) or perceive life as meaningful by reading a story or watching a film. This potential of stories may also be used for therapeutic purposes in bibliotherapy or cinematherapy, which are methods used in different forms of psychotherapy, including logotherapy.

According to Viktor Frankl, by portraying someone reaching the depths of despair over the seeming meaninglessness of existence, literature may help the readers who also suffer because their life appears to them as meaningless "either to feel that they are not alone in this regard or to feel that the *absurdity* turns into a sense of *solidarity*" (*Patnja zbog besmislena života* 108). Of course, this does not hold true for all literature but does for literature that is affirmative regarding the questions of the meaning of life and suffering. In that vein, O'Brien claims that the meaning and purpose of things might be clearly reflected in true, beautiful, and good art, be it a novel or a symphony (*Arriving Where We Started* 13). Similarly, Lukas notes that a book could be therapeutically beneficial if the author loves one's readers to such an extent that he or she is willing to search for ways to survive the turmoil. She adds that the right kind of book is like a friend of the soul: "honest, encouraging, fun, comforting, inspiring," and these qualities in fact describe a good friend (*Što nas u životu pokreće* 123). This is especially true of well-written Catholic fiction, and Michael O'Brien's novels are no exception, but rather quintessential representatives. Furthermore, Catholic novels could have additional effects on their readers:

> A Catholic novel can be an instrument God uses to bring souls to conversion, and indeed it frequently proves to be so. Moreover, it remains in a reader's memory as something like lived experience. Although it is vicarious experience, deep connections are made within the reader's memory with his own personal experience, enlarging his understanding of his sufferings and joys. Such a story remains in his mind as a reference point, a light, a signpost—forgive my mixed metaphors—and even, one might say, an icon in the heart of the soul. (O'Brien, "Interview on *Sophia House*")

Some readers report that reading O'Brien's novels has such an influence on them. For example, Cavallin presents the following comment on Amazon by Daniel C. Harlow, a reader of *Father Elijah*: "Reading this book has been a spiritual experience for me. Only a few times in my life have I found myself reading a book that slowly penetrated the self-protective layers of my soul, and that led me at times to put it aside and just sort of groan in prayer. I am a Protestant, but

reading this book makes me wish I were a Catholic" (qtd. in Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 215).

5. THE MEANING OF LIFE IN MICHAEL D. O'BRIEN'S NOVELS

The affirmation of the meaning of life is one of the central topics in Michael O'Brien's novels. Through stories about the spiritual journey of an ordinary person, they focus on finding the meaning of life and on the issue of searching for one's own identity and place in the world, thereby revealing the uniqueness, importance, and dignity of each human being. The notion of the meaning of life in O'Brien's novels is comparable to the theories on it offered by theology and Christian philosophy as well as logotherapy and existential analysis, so the concept of meaning in O'Brien's novels will be analyzed through the following components: the uniqueness and value of life, spirituality, freedom, responsibility, and conscience as well as self-transcendence and dying to oneself, which are realized through work and deeds, experiences (such as love), and the attitude toward inevitable suffering. In the end, the ultimate meaning of life in O'Brien's novels will be discussed as well as the importance of the helper characters.

4.3.1. Uniqueness and Value of Life

Both logotherapy and existential analysis and Christianity believe that the life of every human being is unique, as each person is a unique and unrepeatable combination of his history, experiences, personality, talents, thoughts, emotions, etc. Frankl also agrees with Christianity that all have their own tasks in life to fulfill and that no other person can replace them, for example, in loving one's neighbors, helping someone, or creating something. Just like George Bailey in the famous movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, who discovers with the help of supernatural intervention that the lives of the people he knows and loves and his hometown altogether would be significantly different if he had never been born (see Matković and Oklopčić), every person can have such a strong impact on the lives of those around him, on art, culture, science, education, or, on a large scale—even on the world itself. However, Christianity also recognizes the value and dignity of every person, which are given to people by God, their creator (see Ps. 8.5 and 1 John 3.1). The value and dignity are not earned by goodness or achievements but are rather bestowed upon every person for being a creature of God, whether one lives like a saint or a sinner.

It is believed in Christianity that God wanted and created each and every human being, and that he loves every person more than we can imagine.[17] This means that God's love is not

[17] See: The Pontifical Biblical Commission. *What Is Man? A Journey Through Biblical Anthropology*. Darton Longman & Todd, 2021.

universal or general but rather personal and individual. This view is contained in Peter Kreeft's question: "Why did God create you? He created billions of other people; were they not enough for him?" and the answer that immediately follows: "No, they were not. He had to have you" (*Three Philosophies of Life* 124), stressing the value of each person in God's eyes. Therefore, God rejoices over the birth of every human being, just as he rejoiced over the birth of his son Jesus Christ. Namely, Pope John Paul II explains that the birth of the Savior is declared as joyful news ("I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2.10–11)), but that Christmas also enlightens the true significance of every human birth; hence, rejoicing over the Messiah's birth is the foundation for the joy at the birth of every child in the world ("Evangelium vitae" §1).

According to John Paul II, the central message of Christ's redeeming mission is: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10.10). This "new," "eternal" life represents communion with God the Father, to which all people are freely invited in the Son through the Holy Spirit. In light of this, every aspect and stage of human earthly existence is permeated with profound meaning ("Evangelium vitae" §1). John Paul II further explains that the call to a fullness of life, which reaches beyond the limits of earthly life, since it represents participation in the very life of God, "reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase" ("Evangelium vitae" §2). Namely, life on Earth represents only the initial phase of the process of human existence, which God illuminated with the promise of divine life, completely realizable only in eternity. John Paul II warns that even though earthly life is "penultimate" rather than "ultimate" reality, it is nevertheless sacred, and we have the responsibility to preserve and perfect it through love and by giving ourselves to God and our brothers and sisters ("Evangelium vitae" §2). By living according to the example of Christ and giving his life for others, a Christian, as well as any other human being, can taste eternal life even during his earthly life. In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "everybody who believes has eternal life" (John 6.47) (i.e. already now), and also "[a]nyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life" (John 6.54). Therefore, with the event of the incarnation, in which Jesus Christ became united with every person in the world, God demonstrated both that he "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3.16) and that every human being is invaluable ("Evangelium vitae" §2).

Christians believe that Jesus Christ loves each of us so much that he died on the Cross for us, and the Cross thus represents "the centre, meaning and goal of all history and of every

human life" (John Paul II, "Evangelium vitae" §50). God loves his children even when they sin and turn away from him, and Kreeft explains how God seeks every child individually in love:

> He will not rest until he has you home. Even if you are the one sheep that is lost, he will leave the ninety-nine (or ninety-nine billion) others to seek you wherever you are. He will come into your thickets and your wilderness and your suffering and even, on the Cross, your sin. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). One of the splinters on the Cross that pierced his flesh was yours alone. And one of the gems in his crown will be yours alone. (*Three Philosophies of Life* 124)

It follows that God calls each man to salvation, since "God wanted him and loves him, and his greatest task is to respond to that love" (Ratzinger, *O vjeri, nadi i ljubavi* 109) in order to gain eternal life in communion with God.

Michael O'Brien often writes about the value of every person in God's eyes, and all the constituents of this value result from God's immense love. He therefore discusses the following realizations: that we are created in God's image, that each life is sacred, that every person is great in God's eyes, and that we are irreplaceable. Firstly, being made in God's image, we are capable of great things: "of love, of knowing truth, of recognizing beauty, and of reverence for being itself" (O'Brien, "The Fiction Writer and the True Story of Man" 25). As God's beloved children, we have the greatest dignity: "[w]e are sons and daughters of the King" (O'Brien, "In Search of the Father" 128). Secondly, O'Brien wants to emphasize that each human life is sacred, regardless of how degraded it may be. Namely, "[m]ysteries and marvels and untold stories are to be found within everyone. Nothing is ordinary. We are loved" ("Writing for the Eschaton"). The third feature is closely related to the second one, and that is the greatness of each person from God's perspective. Namely, O'Brien explains that

> [g]reatness has nothing to do with having one's name on a book cover or one's presence being felt in the forums of the world. Genuine greatness may be to labor at humble and humiliating tasks unnoticed by anyone other than God himself. Such tasks put to death within us the core of selfishness in human nature. Indeed, a lifetime of hiddenness, of anonymity and of being considered to be of little or no consequence, if lived in union with Christ, will lead you to a day when you pass through the gates into Paradise and find, to your astonishment, that you are great in the eyes of the Father. For the Father loves you with a love you cannot now begin to fathom, and in you he sees the image of his Son. (*The Apocalypse: Warning, Hope and Consolation* 144)

Fourthly, according to O'Brien, every individual is loved by God absolutely and thus cannot be replaced by any other person who lived before or will live in the future: "His identity and mission in life is unique. He is not a number, he is not a mechanism. He is created to know truth and to love, and as his ultimate goal to live in the eternal *communion*. He is known and has a name that is his own. He is beloved of God" ("Interview with Avvenire").

Frankl emphasizes the uniqueness of every person in a similar way, albeit without references to God and his love. He claims that every man is unique and irreplaceable, and that no other person in the world has the same potentialities or opportunities, which enhances a person's responsibility toward shaping one's own destiny (*The Doctor and the Soul* 84). He further clarifies: "To have a destiny means in each case to have one's own destiny. With his unique destiny each man stands, so to speak, alone in the entire cosmos. His destiny will not recur" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 84). This places great weight on responsibility to act in given circumstances. Namely, according to Frankl, the more unique a person is and the more singular a situation, the responsibility is greater. Uniqueness and singularity represent fundamental aspects of the meaning of life. Simultaneously, they also contain the finiteness of human existence, which thus must give meaning to human life instead of stealing it from it (*The Doctor and the Soul* 74). This means that, since death is the ultimate end of our lives and given possibilities, we must make the most of our lives by using all particular opportunities we have, because they together make up life (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 75).

Frankl explains the reason why every person is irreplaceable. He, namely, believes that people should not seek for an abstract meaning of life and that everyone is invited to discover the unique meaning of one's own, unrepeatable life. That is, not a single individual can be replaced or a life repeated since every person has to fulfill a specific task in life, which means that everyone's task and the ability of fulfilling that task are unique (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 101). In other words, "[e]very day, every hour with its new meaning awaits every man, and a meaning awaits him that belongs only to him and no one else. Therefore, for each of us there is a meaning, and for each his special meaning" (*Patnja zbog besmislena života* 24). Once one realizes one is irreplaceable, one becomes conscious of the responsibility toward life, i.e., toward loved ones or toward unfinished work, so one can never reject one's life: "He knows the *why* for his life, and will be able to bear almost any *how*" (Frankl, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 78).

4.3.2. Uniqueness and Value of Life in Michael O'Brien's Novels

The Lighthouse

The protagonist of *The Lighthouse*, Ethan McQuarry, has never met his father, and his mother, who neglected and mistreated him, finally abandoned him when she estimated that he was strong enough to live on his own. Because of his parents' behavior, he felt unwanted and worthless. However, in his formative years, there were several good men who encouraged him and inspired him to grow up into a person of integrity. Without any family or friends, distrusting other human beings, he secluded himself on a tiny island, where he works as a lighthouse keeper, far away from people, and considers himself "generally happy" (*The Lighthouse* 14). Since he has very limited contact to anyone in the world, and nobody really knows him, his life might seem worthless and meaningless at first glance. However, O'Brien shows that Ethan's life is unique and that he is irreplaceable as there are tasks that only he can fulfill. Namely, he is indispensable in performing his duties as a lighthouse keeper with dedication and rescuing the lives of unfortunate people at sea. As the story progresses, Ethan starts to open his heart and becomes close to several people. He carves works of art, some of which he gives away to people he cares about as unique and meaningful presents. For example, he carves a model boat for Elsie, the owner of the bed-and-breakfast he sometimes goes to, when she is saddened because her church was burnt down and, with it, the boat that hung above the isle, which she always loved. Although he is not a believer, Ethan also makes a model boat for the new church and leaves it anonymously at Christmas time by the front door. Since he is fond of Elsie and sympathizes with her sorrow, even though he probably does not understand it completely as a non-believer, he seems to feel a responsibility to build a new model boat, as he is most likely one of the few people capable of carving it. He acts in the same manner in other situations he encounters, always taking responsibility, which provides evidence of his unique skills and his ability to fully utilize opportunities through which he finds the meaning of his life. These humble tasks unnoticed by anyone make up the meaning of his life and matter in God's eyes. In the following chapters, a closer look will be taken at other deeds, acts of love, and sacrifices that testify to his irreplaceability.

The events at the end of the novel represent the climax of his life and therefore of his irreplaceability. As Frankl claims, the more unique a person and the more singular a situation, the greater the responsibility (*The Doctor and the Soul* 74). This hypothesis proves to be true in Ethan's case. Namely, during a violent storm, he receives a call for help from boat passengers over the radio. Even though he cannot determine their position, he hurries to rescue them. When he finally finds them, the *Puffin*, his boat, cannot carry all the people, so he decides to take the majority of the passengers to his island, and then to return for the two remaining men. Since one of them does not have a life vest, he gives him his own. Upon reaching his island, he shouts

to the people he saved to throw him a life vest, but they do not hear him, so he hurries without one to get the two men. In the meantime, another ship saves the men, while Ethan's boat wrecks and he drowns. The readers might be left flabbergasted by this development of events, but O'Brien shows that Ethan's death makes sense. After some time, a man drops into Elsie's bed-and-breakfast and tells her that he was the one to whom Ethan gave his life vest, sacrificing his life, and that he will be ordained a priest the following month: "And before the eyes of his heart there passed the countless souls he would serve in the years to come, the weddings and funerals and baptisms, the confessions and counsel, and his own loneliness and joys that would bear eternal fruit. And he thought of the drowned man who had made it possible" (*The Lighthouse* 193).

Although at first Ethan seems to be just a small, unimportant man, O'Brien demonstrates through him that every man, no matter how small he seems, is invaluable and can do great deeds. Apart from that, all the good deeds someone does, small or big, known or unknown to people, matter in God's eyes. According to O'Brien, Ethan

> is a kind of "everyman," though he is living a very unusual life. I wanted to create a character who embodies in his own life what is really at the core of every person's soul. There are extroverts and introverts and all kinds of personality types in the world. But in the heart of the soul of each person there is, acknowledged or unacknowledged, a longing for God, a longing for meaning. Now they may deny that absolutely, but we were created in the image and likeness of God. ("Q@A with *The Lighthouse* Author Michael D O'Brien")

Therefore, every person has dignity and value that God gives to his children. This value is illustrated in the conversation between Ross, one of Ethan's visitors, and his wife, Rachel, when they visit Ethan's island, which Ross inherited after Ethan's death. Ross shows Rachel Ethan's collection of carvings, and she is amazed by their beauty. Ross tells her:

> "All this came out of a quiet man, Rachel, a small man. Some would say an insignificant man."
>
> "There's no such thing," she said with a shake of her head. (*The Lighthouse* 197)

Although Ethan's "soul is awake but he just has not yet met Christ" ("Q@A with *The Lighthouse* Author Michael D O'Brien"), God nevertheless loves him and leads him to the last moments of his life, to salvation. O'Brien reveals that Ethan's life is so valuable (and God's mercy so great) that God saves him, even though he was looking for him his entire life but never met him until the end: in Ethan's dying moments, Jesus appears and tells him not to be afraid, and Mother Mary reaches for him to enfold him. It is revealed thereby that following Christ's

example, always trying to be good, righteous, selfless, and humble, giving his life for others, and reaching for light in the last moments of life, lead Ethan to eternal life. He is so invaluable to God that Jesus himself comes to take him to the Kingdom of God, whereby he discovers the ultimate meaning of his life.

The Island of the World

In the prologue of *The Island of the World*, Josip Lasta, the protagonist of the novel, already an old man, says: "We are born, we eat, and learn, and die. We leave a tracery of messages in the lives of others, a little shifting of the soil, a stone moved from here to there, a word uttered, a song, a poem left behind. I was here, each of these declare. I was here" (*The Island of the World* 11). His words attest to the uniqueness of every human being, who leaves a mark on the lives of other people and on the world by his love, deeds, words, art, and achievements. Every act is significant, regardless of how big or small it may seem, and it contributes to humanity and the world in general, which makes every person valuable. To show the uniqueness and value of every human being in *The Island of the World*, O'Brien focuses on the life of Josip Lasta, who grows up in a loving Catholic family in an idyllic village Rajska Polja (the fields of heaven) in the mountains of Herzegovina. At the age of twelve, however, his world shatters when the Partisans slaughter his parents and all the inhabitants of Rajska Polja, even the children. They also murder and desecrate the priest in a very brutal and humiliating way, leaving Josip the sole survivor of the cold-blooded massacre. Tormented by the profoundly disturbing scenes he has witnessed, he loses his faith and questions his identity and humanity through a challenging life journey of sufferings and losses, but also of blessings, consolations, hope, and love, a journey of rediscovery of faith and of achieving holiness. He often sees his life as worthless and, under the pressure of unimaginable suffering, wishes to die several times. God, however, loves him and has a plan for him. Forging his heart through suffering, he does not let Josip die until he finds Him again and with his help transcends his sufferings, attaining holiness. As O'Brien remarks, "[t]he topic of this novel is a crucifixion of one soul — and its resurrection" ("Hrvatska priča značajna za čitav svijet"). As God, out of love, permitted the suffering and crucifixion of his only son for a greater good in order to resurrect him, so he allows the suffering and crucifixion of Josip, and later resurrects him. Through this, God demonstrates the value of Josip Lasta, his beloved child.

After the slaughter of his village, Josip is haunted by the words of a Partisan who spared his life by pretending he was killing him: "*Be silent! You are dead!*" (*The Island of the World* 122). Hearing the Partisan's words in his head again and again, Josip is in a surreal state of consciousness and believes that he no longer exists. He feels detached from his body, he runs

and runs and goes "into the nothing beyond nothing. Yet he senses that the nothing ahead is where he must go, because the nothing behind is the annihilation of everything" (*The Island of the World* 122). He also believes that names do not exist anymore, that he does not have a name; the narrator, too, does not refer to him as Josip anymore, but only as "the boy." In order to regain his identity, uniqueness, and value, Josip's existence and identity need to be confirmed. The process of affirmation of his identity starts with his aunt Eva, who notices him in the streets of Sarajevo, where he hopes that a bullet will send him up in the sky. She takes him in and looks after him. "So, with time and love, words return to the world. (. . .) He remembers who he is" (*The Island of the World* 138). His aunt uses his name more often than people usually do, and he is pleased with it, "for now that he has found himself again, his body and his mind reunited, he *is* Josip" (*The Island of the World* 139–40). In a hospital, he then meets a patient with whom he experiences a spiritual connection. Josip considers both himself and the man to be swallows: himself to be the Lastavica of the Mountains and the man the Lastavica of the Sea. After Josip introduces himself, the patient says:

> "You are Josip."
>
> "I am Josip", he replies, as if this confirmation has been too long overdue. His aunt began the process, and now this man completes it with an authority the boy did not realize existed anymore in the world. (*The Island of the World* 168)

When they meet years later and talk about their lives, Josip tells him that he is a mathematician, to which the Lastavica replies: "You are not what you *do*, Josip. You are what you *are*" (*The Island of the World* 239). The Lastavica's reply points out that Josip's identity and value do not stem from his profession or other external factors but from his unique essence. Ariadne, who will later become Josip's wife, also acknowledges the value and beauty of Josip's life both for him, and, indirectly, for her: "'Your life was given to you', she whispers. 'And beautiful is this life to me. So much, so much has been given to you, and it is given to me through you'" (*The Island of the World* 303). Finally, when, because of his cultural activity, Josip is imprisoned on Goli Otok, where dehumanization is used to break the spirit of the inmates, a priest called Tata, one of the inmates, helps Josip confirm his identity:

> "You have been here more than three months", whispers Tata (. . .).
>
> This statement of the obvious is not intended as information. It is Tata's affirmation of Josip's existence. He is saying that time and identity still exist—and individual destiny. Josip recognizes this as a gift from the old man, better than bread.
>
> "Thank you", he whispers. "Thank you."

> Tata smiles. This is the first genuine smile Josip has seen since his arrest. The old man understands—understands that Josip understands. (*The Island of the World* 375–76)

Whenever Josip needed a confirmation of his identity and value, someone who can offer it appeared, but after returning to God, he does not need it anymore, because he becomes aware of his identity. He realizes that God is present in all things, taking care of both the damaged and the undamaged, and that people need to learn to recognize God's original intention even in the damaged ones (*The Island of the World* 629). After his conversion, Josip, a damaged creature, transforms into a humble man who leads a life of faith and love, helping others and writing poems. Josip therefore embodies O'Brien's concept of damaged God's children:

> [H]umility would have us rejoice in our powerlessness, for in it we may find again our simplicity and thereby discover our true greatness—that is, as the children of God. And then we will see the proper proportion: we will know that we are damaged but not destroyed. We will learn that within us is a capacity for truth and for love, and a potential for forms of creativity that are practically infinite. ("The Fiction Writer and the True Story of Man" 27)

Namely, after all the hardships and sufferings in his life, Josip acknowledges that he is a child of God called to create through poetry and to love and serve others whom God puts in his way. Josip is also cognizant of the uniqueness of every human being and of the interconnectedness of all people: "'A man is himself and no other', Josip says. 'He is an island in the sea of being. And each island is as no other. The islands are connected because they have come forth from the sea, and the sea flows between them. It separates them yet unites them, if they learn to swim'" (*The Island of the World* 771). Namely, each individual is unique and unrepeatable with his own identity and experiences, but his humanity connects him to other unique human beings. While people are divided by their differences, they should learn to overcome them and establish meaningful relationships with others. Near the end of his life, inspired by St. Jerome's prayer "*O God, have mercy on me, I am a Dalmatian*," Josip wants to pray, but he is confused by how to define himself:

> For once his descriptive powers fail him. What is he, then? A poet? As the Lastavica of the Sea told him long ago, a man is what he *is*, not what he *does*. Yet a poet is what he is, poetry is never what he does. Josip sighs—this kind of self-examination can be quite confusing. Is self-identification ever trustworthy? It is better not to dwell on it overmuch. But is he an ex-Herzegovinian, an ex-Isle of Goli Otokian, an ex-

> American, an exile from exile? No matter, God knows what he is. Have mercy on me, a sinner. Have mercy on me, a Lasta and a *lastavica*. (*The Island of the World* 788)

Faced with the challenges of self-definition, Josip realizes that his true identity is known by God, thus finally completely accepting his worth and dignity as a beloved child of God.

Strangers and Sojourners

The main protagonist of *Strangers and Sojourners* is Anne Ashton, a highly educated young intellectual who leaves behind her sheltered life in England for the rugged wilderness of British Columbia following World War I. There she marries Stephen Delaney, a trapper and homesteader, who fled Ireland from his troubles and sins. While Stephen, a practicing Catholic, is tortured by his guilt, Anne struggles with the satisfaction of her ordinary family life away from the outskirts of Swiftcreek. Her struggles are rooted in transcendental questions: whether God exists and who he is, if he loves her, what truth and love are, and what the meaning of life is.

Anne is a unique combination of her personality, talents, beliefs, and goals. Even the inhabitants of Swiftcreek see her as unique: extremely independent and highly educated with a mind of her own, Anne does not blend in with the crowd but questions many things and draws conclusions herself. Unlike many women at that time, she works as a nurse during World War I, decides to move to Canada on her own to work as a teacher, does not marry until her thirties, eventually marries a man who seems to have nothing in common with her, lives with him and their children in the middle of nowhere, and buys the local newspaper company in order to share her views with the world. She is irreplaceable in all of these roles. Her courage to make big decisions enables her to fully use the potential of life. However, she is unhappy, which leads her to despair. What the readers recognize, but Anne does not, is that she actually longs for God and his love. One of her greatest roles is that of a wife and mother, where she is invaluable. In Anne's moment of despair, her daughter runs to find her, and their encounter reflects Anne's irreplaceability:

> "Mama", cried the flushed, delirious girl. "Mama", she said again, just to say, and merged with her mother's body. (. . .) She was possessing the woman who desired greatly to be claimed. (. . .)
>
> "Emily", she whispered, just to say it, clinging to something so hot and well, so overspilling with light, for safety, while not appearing to. (*Strangers and Sojourners* 263)

Although unaware of it for a long time, Anne is as indispensable to God as she is to her daughter. Just as she basks in belonging to her daughter, God enjoys Anne's existence and desires her to

experience a similar relationship with him. Yet, God does not impose it on her, but loves her and patiently waits for her. As Maillet explains,

> The suffering of Anne and Stephen Delaney, and their brief sojourn on earth, help us to understand who human beings are in the eyes of God: flawed, but beloved, and capable of co-creating lives of great beauty and eternal significance. The art of fiction, of stories well told by an inspired storyteller like O'Brien, reminds us that God's holy purposes often cannot be seen or felt in a moment, but are rather revealed slowly, over the course of an entire human life. The word of Anne and Stephen Delaney's love has eternal meaning, for the Word of Love speaks through them. (93)

Anne recognizes this only in the later years of her life, during which she comes closer to her answers and God, but waits to see if she can be accepted by God, worrying if she is wanted. Stephen assures her that everyone is wanted, because God is love. She realizes this in the very last moments of her life, thus finding the ultimate meaning of life.

A Cry of Stone

Tweedie claims that even "[t]he most wretched existence has potential value. There are achievements of worth which only he can perform" (132). His assertion is reflected in the main character of *A Cry of Stone*, a fictional native artist Rose Wâbos. Abandoned by her parents as an infant, Rose is raised by her Catholic grandmother, Oldmary, in the remote wilderness of Ontario in very modest conditions. Rose is an exceptionally spiritual and pious person whose main aim in life is to follow God's will. Her life is marked by many difficulties, sufferings, and sacrifices, which she accepts and offers up for the good and salvation of others. She seems like a small and insignificant person, which is also indicated by her very small height and deformed spine, but she changes many lives, and God shows her throughout her life that he loves and leads her, which is a testimony to her greatness in God's eyes. Perhaps more so than in his other novels, O'Brien hopes that the protagonist of *A Cry of Stone* will evoke in readers a sense of the sacredness of every human life, even if that life is generally regarded as virtually insignificant (*Arriving where We Started* 173). In other words,

> Rose is born out of wedlock, she is physically handicapped, she lives in a remote native reserve in northern Ontario, she has no material resources or influential friends. She is one of the despised and rejected. She experiences a lot of contempt and rejection as she goes through life. Her role is an embodiment of the human greatness reduced to its fundamentals. The "smallest" person, the least significant person, is worth more than the material universe. (. . .) Rose is a person in whom all that is most beautiful about mankind flowers in the desert of the modern age. She is not depicted as a sentimental

character — she has her tough sides, she has a heart, yet hers is not a sweet or pretty story. It is my hope, however, that it is a beautiful story. (*Arriving where We Started* 173–74)

O'Brien weaves together Catholic faith and indigenous culture in this novel. Namely, "[r]ather than being the enemies commonly portrayed in Canada today, historically Catholicism and Native culture have often been mutually friendly and deeply intertwined" (Maillet 168). That is why Oldmary tells Rose a story inspired by native imagery in order to explain how Rose came into the world: the loon begged the moon for a piece of silver, which is both a piece of the moon's heart and his daughter, to bring light to his dark and cold land. From her heart, the moon made a tiny bird of silver, whom she told: "I send you down into the cold dark land to bring it light" (*A Cry of Stone* 9). The moon asked the loon to take the bird "to Mary Wâbos by Threefinger Lake in the Land of Little Trees. There she will grow, and there she will shine her light" (*A Cry of Stone* 9). The moon named the silver bird *Oginiwâbigon*, which means Rose-flower. While flying on the loon, the tiny bird held tightly to his necklace of diamonds. The loon's flight left "shimmering curtains of green in the black northern sky, and the diamonds of his neck fell away, and thus was made the *tchibekana*, the river of stars which the white people call the river of milk" (*A Cry of Stone* 10). The story illustrates Rose's value and uniqueness in a symbolic way, representing her as the moon's heart and daughter, and her flight to Oldmary's home as the origin of northern lights and the Milky Way. As promised in the story, Rose indeed brings light to people wherever she goes. When her grandmother dies, Rose begs her in a dream to let her come to her, but Oldmary answers: "If you were to come to me, a sliver of the light would be absent from the earth. You are sent down into the cold dark world to bring it light, though you are but a reflection. Ogini, in many times and many places you will not see the light that you bring, for it is hidden from your eyes so that others may receive it" (*A Cry of Stone* 232–33). In other words, Rose is irreplaceable on earth, since her unique task is to reflect God's light. After the sacrament of confirmation, she realizes that "her life was clearly not a no-thing, but a something, though its meaning was hidden from all save the Heart that never ceased beating within the tabernacle" (*A Cry of Stone* 249). Namely, she realizes the value of her life as God's child. Although she does not know the meaning of her life, she is aware that God does.

It is common for people to sometimes doubt their worth, and Rose is no exception. In another dream, she wonders if God finds her worthless and despises her, since she is bent, ugly, and not very smart, and all those who love her go away. Yet, God sends her a message that she should not be afraid, affirming his love for her. On another occasion, doubting God's love for

her, Rose prays to Saint Kateri,[18] who helps her by filling her with peace: "It was the peace of calm acceptance, accepting that she was a smaller beloved than all the other beloveds, yet still a beloved. And the lover was so great that even to be least in his eyes was a treasure more vast than one could hold" (*A Cry of Stone* 265). Later in life, aware of her smallness, she tells herself that she has nothing to fear, since God is with her.

O'Brien's belief that every human life is sacred is further demonstrated when Rose visits an institution for the physically and mentally handicapped. Although the sight of the residents' conditions at first breaks her heart, Rose changes focus and notices that each of these people is "an incarnation of a word. Theirs was physical poverty of the most abject and permanent kind. Yet within the flawed forms and limited minds there was something so eternal, so beautiful and holy, that at certain moments Rose was struck immobile with the wonder of it" (*A Cry of Stone* 788). Meeting Jimmy Doe there, a boy with caved-in skull, Rose realizes that "each person was unique, unrepeatable" (*A Cry of Stone* 796), reflecting both Frankl's and Christian teachings. Praying for the boy, she observes: "For you are known in his [God's] mind and are not forgotten. He alone knows who you are, he alone knows your task in the world. He alone sees the full measure of your burning heart" (*A Cry of Stone* 811). In all his novels, but especially in this one, O'Brien tries to testify to the uniqueness, value, and sacredness of each human life, without exception.

The Fool of New York City

The Fool of New York City is an unusual story, set in present day New York, about a friendship between a literal giant and an amnesiac who believes he is Francisco de Goya, both regarded as "fools" in the eyes of the world. Billy the giant helps Francisco regain his memory and discover his past, since he himself once suffered from amnesia and understands the torment of losing one's identity. While every person is unique, the uniqueness of the two of them is especially pronounced as both of them could be described as eccentrics. Namely, Francisco's inability to deal with life difficulties has caused his amnesia, so this twentysomething man finds himself freezing in an old man's clothes, sleeping in an abandoned building. He believes he is the eighteenth-century painter Francisco de Goya, who ages differently from other people. On the other hand, Billy raises hens and pigeons on the roof of a condemned New York building where he lives and keeps a hidden room filled with memories—both his own and those of others—such as old letters and antiques. Yet, his height is his most striking characteristic: he is more than seven feet eleven tall (over 241 cm) as a result of natural heredity and therefore

[18] Saint Kateri is the first canonized Native American.

attracts attention wherever he goes. Even though most people are afraid of him due to his height, he is the personification of goodness and kindness. Therefore, when people get to know him, their fear is replaced by a feeling of awe and admiration. When Francisco's initial fear of Billy vanishes, he notices: "Now you see that he is not only a titanic human being, a continent of bone and muscle, but is excellent in all ways. If you were to see him at a distance, not knowing his height, you would say, this is what a man should be. Yes, this. For here is immense strength, and it is mastered. Here is perfect form and balance, yet it is without vanity. This man does no harm" (*The Fool of New York City* 21). Billy also leaves an impression on the owner of a café he and Francisco visit in search of Francisco's identity, as she remarks: "That is a first-rate man (. . .). A *legend* man. And I don't mean how tall he is" (*The Fool of New York City* 268).

Billy has decided to dedicate his life to a mission of helping people in need, which makes his task unique and him irreplaceable. Initially believing he is a burden to Billy, Francisco realizes that everybody has a certain task in life and that Billy could not help if there is no one who needs help: "Some people become rescuers (. . .). Some become this in order to strengthen what they are. Some become rescuers in order to become what they hope to be. And yet there would be no rescuers without those in need of rescue" (*The Fool of New York City* 21). Throughout the story, except for helping Francisco to find out who he is, Billy also confirms his value, accepting him as he is and respecting him. Billy's following statement especially helps Francisco: "You do not know what you are or where you should be. I understand. But you are here. And you are you" (*The Fool of New York City* 22). Even though Billy does not really know who Francisco is, he affirms Francisco's worth by taking him into his home and dedicating himself to helping him. Billy even shows him his hidden room, which reveals Billy's intimate memories, and which nobody has seen before, showing Francisco that he has trust in him. In order to trigger Francisco's memory, Billy makes for him his own room of memories, tries to take him to Canada (unsuccessfully), and takes him to Vermont (successfully). Francisco is aware that he would not have survived if it was not for Billy, which testifies to the uniqueness of Billy's task and his responsibility.

O'Brien indicates that God's providence connects the two men, revealing their worth in God's eyes. Too remarkable to be merely a coincidence, their meeting is more likely a part of God's plan. Billy, namely, goes to buy a loaf of bread and looks at the abandoned building precisely at the moment when the shivering Francisco is looking through the window. Billy also suffered from amnesia once and lost his family, which makes him the ideal person to help Francisco, who shares both of these experiences. Billy's room of memories hides certain objects that turn out to be keys to unlocking the closed rooms of Francisco's identity. Finally, it turns

out that years ago, Billy found a sock that connects his and Francisco's history in an incredible way. Through his friendship with Billy, Francisco embraces his uniqueness, potential, opportunities, and his responsibility toward shaping his destiny, accepting God's will for his life.

Sophia House

Sophia House follows the life story of Pawel Tarnowski, a Polish bookseller who provides refuge during the Nazi occupation to David Schäfer, a young Jew who has escaped from the Warsaw ghetto. Troubled by traumas from his childhood, Pawel questions his own value for a good part of his life. O'Brien attributes Pawel's feeling of worthlessness to his search for validation from people instead of God as well as to what he considers courage and success. Namely, Pawel believed

> that his life was of little value to anyone. His mother and father had loved him as best they could, but they were gone. His two older brothers were not unconcerned about him, but he was a burden to them, and always had been. They were so much more bold, so successful in everything they did. They were married. He was not. They were strong and aggressive personalities, while he was painfully shy, a fault he overcame daily, but only with great determination. (*Sophia House* 30)

Numerous sufferings in his life only enhance his feeling of worthlessness. For instance, during his search for himself and for an artistic career in Paris, Pawel interprets a rejection from an Orthodox monk as God's rejection of him, which makes him even question God's existence. Furthermore, faced with extreme poverty and homelessness in Paris, he is reluctant to accept an offer to work as a nude model but eventually agrees to do it because of hunger and exhaustion. However, he sees there is more to it than just these two reasons: he feels depersonalization since, as a beggar, he is at the bottom of the society and considers that he has already lost his dignity, so he wonders "why should he hide with scraps of cloth what was not there . . . his privacy, his lost being, his self" (*Sophia House* 67). He feels like an object, and both the painting master and the students he is modelling for intensify this feeling with their comments. Even though Pawel does not sense his worth, especially in these circumstances, he repeats his name in order not to lose his sanity, which indicates that he nevertheless, at least subconsciously, clings to the remains of his identity and value. Regardless of the fact that he will not get paid if he leaves before a full day's work, he leaves the academy in the middle of the day, which also supports the argument that not all his sense of worth has vanished.

O'Brien also tackles the issue of value and dignity through Pawel's art. Later in Paris, Pawel becomes a protégé of the novelist Achille Goudron, who advises him to make a total

break with the "old values—false notions of good and evil" (*Sophia House* 78), which fuels Pawel's abandonment of faith. Following Goudron's advice, Pawel paints the motifs of degradation and humiliation, prostitutes, Notre Dame bombed, etc. However, after Pawel has lost his faith completely, a painting of Christ in agony on the Cross by Georges Rouault moves him deeply, leading to a correspondence between Pawel and Rouault. Rouault is a Christian, and he warns Pawel that in painting the human condition, he must never "forget the dignity of man, even in the most degraded ones. Cher Paul, the artist must always ask himself, am I painting the surface only, or am I revealing the eternal soul of my subjects? Without this, we only add to the agony. We too would be merely using the prostitutes—and worse, for we do not pay them" (*Sophia House* 97). Even though Pawel is impressed by Rouault's compassion, he does not immediately adopt the painter's Christian outlook on human worth, as he is unable to grasp the value of man that Rouault advocates. He, namely, believes that no one would be interested in him, not even God, and that his life is worthless, but Father Andrei tells him that he "is called to an unusual work in the Kingdom of God" (*Sophia House* 115). Pawel does not believe him, so Father Andrei observes that "no one is without value. Even the most wretched" (*Sophia House* 115), but Pawel thinks that he is too wretched to be valuable. Moreover, Father Andrei reveals that God told him about Pawel: "*Here is my little son whom I love greatly. He has been broken. He will do a unique good in this world, but first he will be tested by fire*" (*Sophia House* 119), acknowledging both Pawel's uniqueness and value in God's eyes. However, Pawel refuses to believe this. Only some time after his conversion back in Poland does Pawel start to realize the value of a person in God's eyes, especially his own value, although he initially continues to struggle with it.

Even after the heroic decision to hide David in his attic, Pawel still does not see his own worth and uniqueness, which is demonstrated after his conversation with his brother Jan. When Jan's wife (a Jewish woman) and their child are taken to the ghetto, Jan asks Pawel if he sells books to the Germans. When Pawel confirms it, Jan contemptuously asks him: "God, what kind of a man are you?" (*Sophia House* 161). Jan's question haunts Pawel, who considers himself a coward and "a failure at life. I am no good at being a human being, let alone a man. I am nothing. I am less than nothing, for nothingness is clean and simple" (*Sophia House* 161). Recognizing Pawel's value, even David thinks it is sad that Pawel believes his life is not precious.

Pawel's outlook starts to change during a prayer in which he dialogues with God. God, namely, tells Pawel that he is His son and shows him that he is an important part of His plan for humanity, even though Pawel is unable to see the whole plan. O'Brien believes that

> [m]an needs at the core of his being to know that he is loved—loved absolutely. He needs to know that he cannot be replaced by any other human being who existed before or who will exist after. His identity and mission in life is unique. He is not a number, he is not a mechanism. He is created to know truth and to love, and as his ultimate goal to live in the eternal *communion*. He is known and has a name that is his own. He is beloved of God. ("Interview with Avvenire")

In accordance with that, Pawel later gradually realizes "that a God who permitted himself to be humiliated and brutally executed was demonstrating something about the nature of his love in a way so radical it could not be misconstrued. Pawel saw the immensity of the universe and his own insignificance within it. Yet God had suffered for *him*—Pawel—a small man, a mote of dust" (*Sophia House* 257). Unlike earlier, when he told David that his life was not precious, he now claims that "[a]ll human lives are valuable—beyond price" (*Sophia House* 319). He finally realizes that Christ incarnated in order to teach people that they are greater than they think they are. "Each person is his [God's] icon" (*Sophia House* 328), Pawel remarks, and adds that, if one hurts "even the least of human beings" (*Sophia House* 331), one assaults God. This belief enables him to finally accept the uniqueness, value, and sacredness of his own life but also of the lives of others—even those who are not great in the eyes of people but are in the eyes of God—the Jews, the poor, or the sick. For this reason, he helps David, gives money and food to the impoverished, or hugs and comforts a repulsive man who hallucinates on a train to a concentration camp. The dignity of every human being represents one of the crucial messages of *Sophia House*. O'Brien suggests that no person is ordinary and that "our man-made measures of greatness and smallness are badly skewed," since God sees every single individual with the eyes of love ("Interview on *Sophia House*").

4.3.3. Spirituality, Freedom, Responsibility, and Conscience

As discussed earlier, Frankl and Christianity agree that the spiritual dimension is the foundation of human beings. In logotherapy, it is called a *noetic dimension* ("*noetische Dimension*"), after the Greek word *nous*, which means spirit (Lukas, *Osnove logoterapije: Slika čovjeka i metode* 23). Spirit is what makes people human and differs them from animals. It enables them to question whether there is a meaning of life and what it is. It is the area in which they act and where they search for the meaning of their lives. "Decisions in accordance with one's own will (intentionality), real and artistic interests, creative expression, religiosity and sense of ethics (conscience), understanding of values and love – all these should be included in human spirituality" (Lukas, *Osnove logoterapije* 22). Spirit is the prerequisite for freedom,

responsibility, and conscience—three concepts that are inextricably linked and intertwined, as has been presented above. In this chapter, these concepts will be discussed more thoroughly and their connection with the meaning of life will be explained.

Logotherapy and existential analysis do not consider man to be just a physical and psychological being but rather view him from a transcendent perspective, recognizing spirit as his foundation, and the notions of freedom and responsibility appear in the realm of the spirit. Logotherapy and existential analysis argue that freedom is not *from* something, but *for* something and *before* someone (Tweedie 33). Consequently, an individual is "free only insofar as he fulfills his freedom *to* responsibility" toward the actualization and realization of the meaning of his life and values (Tweedie 61). Namely, Frankl states:

> *[I]t is not really important what we expect from life, but what life expects from us*. (. . .) Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to life's problems and to fulfill the tasks that it constantly sets for each individual. These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, are different for every man, and differ from moment to moment. It is therefore impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 76)

Frankl further clarifies the interconnection of meaning and responsibility. According to him, since all the situations human beings encounter in their lifetime are in fact challenges and problems they have to solve, "the question of the meaning of life could actually be reversed" (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 100). Namely, people should realize that they should not ask life what its meaning is, but that they are the ones being asked what the meaning of their life is. In simpler terms, "life asks every man a question; and he can only respond to life by *responding for* his own life; he can only respond to life by being responsible" (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 101).[19]

As an inherent human characteristic, freedom distinguishes humans from animals. Namely, man is not simply the result of his instinctive drives, heredity, and environment, but he makes decisions for himself: he decides what he will do and therefore what he will be (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 17, Tweedie 60, Lukas, *Osnove logoterapije* 29–30). What is most important, Frankl argues that the freedom to take a certain attitude could never be taken away from man. For example, prisoners in concentration camps can decide how they will deal with given circumstances—whether they will be brave, dignified, and unselfish or no more than an animal (*The Doctor and the Soul* 102, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 67–68).

[19] Viktor Frankl launched an initiative to build the Statue of Responsibility on the west coast of the USA to supplement the Statue of Liberty on the east coast (*Statue of Responsibility*).

When compared with logotherapy and existential analysis, Christian writings reveal a similar view of the concepts of freedom and responsibility. Ivančić claims that spirit is "a divine substance" ("Hagioterapija – model terapijske antropologije*"* 11). It is the necessary precondition of all human action as it grants freedom, responsibility, and conscience but also enables the search for the meaning in life: "Spirit is man's basic constitution. By spirit he is a person, by spirit he is *free* and therefore *responsible*, by spirit he *distinguishes good from evil*, by spirit he thinks, speaks, writes, creates, shapes, and transforms the world, *seeks the meaning of life*, by spirit he is moral, religious, an artist, and a scientist" (Ivančić, "Hagioterapija – model terapijske antropologije" 7, italics mine). In brief, spirit is "freedom, and freedom is responsibility, from which arises either a sense of guilt and meaninglessness or a sense of meaning and peace" (Ivančić, *Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 34), whose basis is conscience. However, freedom is not barely an ability to make decisions but a personal transcendence including the "freedom for" (Tićac 776). It is interesting that Frankl uses the same expression.

Peter Kreeft, a Catholic philosopher, also approaches the question of the meaning of life in a similar way to that of Viktor Frankl but adds a Christian dimension to it. Kreeft writes: "We keep asking life, 'What is your meaning?' and life responds by throwing challenges at us that demand that we respond to them. Life asks *us*, 'What is your meaning?'" (*Three Philosophies of Life* 52). In other words, we are responsible to respond to the tasks that life gives us in order to live meaningfully. Kreeft adds that we shape ourselves with every decision we make, "like statues sculpting their own shape with the chisel of free will. And those selves, souls, characters, are destined for eternity. We are the Kingdom of Heaven" (*Three Philosophies of Life* 55). In like manner, Karol Wojtyła reveals that every person has an obligation to be oneself as a means to fully achieve one's purpose (*Temelji etike* 57), while Ratzinger believes that to live meaningfully is to live in grace—to live in accordance with God's original plan for our life and the truth about us, "to unite our life with God's" by uniting "our 'yes' with God's 'yes' addressed to us" (*Ljubav koja spašava* 14–15).

Also, very similar to Frankl, but in the spirit of Christianity, O'Brien believes that human potentials should be used in freedom but responsibly, in the way God wants us to use them—"for the restoration of creation to the divine order" (*Arriving Where We Started* 120–21). Catholic theology points out that every act of freedom must be followed by responsibility "to the whole truth about man" (O'Brien, *Arriving Where We Started* 132). Specifically, in every sphere of human activity, the human dignity of ourselves and others must be respected (O'Brien, *Arriving Where We Started* 132). Furthermore, in order to follow God's will, we need to submit to it. According to O'Brien, although this word has a negative connotation nowadays,

meaning negating or denying the self, a genuine submission represents the only way of finding ourselves and living a fruitful life (*Arriving Where We Started* 121–22). It means discipleship, which is characterized by "discipline in the responsible use of freedom" rather than denial of freedom (O'Brien, *Arriving Where We Started* 126). By exercising submission in such a way, one develops and gets to know oneself, which leads to a meaningful life (O'Brien, *Arriving Where We Started* 126). Finally, although God expects from individuals to complete the missions he gives them, he does not promise a comfortable life (O'Brien, *Arriving Where We Started* 142). Instead, he promises a meaningful life. Ivančić discusses the notions of freedom and responsibility from a Christian perspective in a comparable way. He claims that freedom does not mean to do whatever one wants but to do what is good, "that which fortifies being, not which destroys it" (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 133). Freedom, in fact, does not represent the power to choose between good and evil, but the ability to opt for good, because choosing evil cannot be freedom. Since a basic ethos and a longing for life exists in everyone, unhappiness is caused by anything that would diminish or terminate that life. In simpler terms, freedom represents choosing life, while choosing evil means "the lack of being and the termination of freedom" (Ivančić, *Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 133). By doing good, one is actualizing oneself and finding meaning in one's life.

We have already briefly touched upon the issue of what lies behind responsibility. In order to respond to this question, logotherapy and existential analysis point out to transcendence, offering a response compatible to the Christian doctrine. According to Frankl, people are responsible to their conscience, which guides them in the search of meaning, so he calls it "the organ of meaning" and defines it as "the ability to feel the unrepeatable and unique meaning that is hidden in every situation" (*Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 107). Frankl argues that conscience makes sense only if it has an extrahuman source, i.e., if human beings are *created* beings, so that they can say: "As the master of my will I am the creator – and as the servant of my conscience I am the creature" (*Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 65). To put it differently, existentiality explains man's freedom, but, if man's responsibility needs to be explained, it is necessary to resort to transcendence, in which conscience resides (Frankl, *Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 65). Although Frankl leaves the decision about the source of conscience up to every individual, he nevertheless finds it plausible that it lies in the area of transcendence—that human beings are responsible to God. The only difference Frankl recognizes between a religious and an "apparently irreligious" man is that the religious man experiences his existence as a mission rather than merely a task, which implies that "he is also aware of the taskmaster, the source of his mission. For thousands of years that source has been called God" (Frankl, *The*

Doctor and the Soul 13). The irreligious man, of course, has conscience and therefore responsibility, but does not ask about what one is responsible to or where one's conscience comes from (Frankl, *Vremena odluke* 50).

The Catholic Church views conscience in a similar way. According to "Gaudium et spes,"

> In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. (Paul VI §16)

In the same line, Joseph Ratzinger warns that God has given us a task in this life, about which he will ask us when we meet in eternity. For that reason, we must always have the eternal life in mind, so that we become successful in this life too (Ratzinger, *O vjeri, nadi i ljubavi* 123). In conclusion, faced with the tasks life confronts us with, by choosing to do objective good, a person exercises responsibility in one's freedom, keeps one's conscience clear, and finds the meaning of life. On the other hand, by choosing to do evil, one is being destroyed by remorse, breaks one's relationship with God and oneself, leaving one's life without a purpose. In each moment of our life, we are invited to decide for one or the other.

4.3.4. Spirituality, Freedom, Responsibility, and Conscience in Michael O'Brien's Novels

The Lighthouse

Although Ethan is not a believer, he is a contemplative person. Through his contemplation, the spiritual dimension of his being comes to light. However, when asked if he believes in God, he answers that he does not know (*The Lighthouse* 73). He has not yet met Christ, but he is aware of the existence of someone or something around him:

> There were times when he was overwhelmed by a quietude so profound that all noises ceased, and then he sensed the overarching *awakeness* of existence. He would have spoken with it, if he could, but there was nothing he could find within himself to say to it. It was enough to sense a presence in the world around him, a *listeningness* he called it, and to think about what it would mean if this were not there—though he had no precise words for it, and fell into silence. (*The Lighthouse* 14)

Listeningness is to him a feeling "[a]s if someone is listening to [him], even when [he is] alone" (*The Lighthouse* 75). He adds: "Someone good, someone with me. Or some *thing*. I don't know what it is, and I don't have any words to describe it. It's like an *awakeness* in the world" (*The Lighthouse* 75). The confirmation that what he perceives as *listeningness* and *awakeness* is in fact God's presence that Ethan feels during his visit to a church, where he has a spiritual experience. There he senses *listeningness* and *awakeness* too, as well as timelessness. He feels such a strong presence of somebody in the church that he looks around him but sees nobody. In addition, not knowing why, he weeps and wonders if the tears were "the overflow of solace or the release of sorrow" (*The Lighthouse* 175). He promises to himself that he will come to the church again and rest there sometimes, listen to the listening. Immersed in contemplation, he reflects on how churches are for good and normal people, like Elsie, and feels that he does not belong there. He is neither good nor a hater. He thinks: "*I am a mistake. I was not wanted when I came into this world. And still I belong to no one*" (*The Lighthouse* 175). Yet, God touches his heart: Ethan listens and waits, still sensing timelessness, "as if he were afloat in a new dimension, along with inner stillness and the cessation of his painful thoughts. He knew that he would return" (*The Lighthouse* 175). Even though Ethan's parents did not love him adequately, God heals him on a spiritual level with His love.

Although Ethan has no knowledge of God, he has a strong sense of conscience. Both Frankl and Christianity believe that every person has a conscience, which is the freedom to be responsible and do good, and whose source is God (although irreligious persons do not wonder about the source). Even as a child, Ethan decided that he would not be mean in thought or deed, which was later in his life realized as "a quiet disposition of integrity" and the truth that he can use his strength to repair what the world damaged (*The Lighthouse* 26). Indeed, when faced with a task, he tries to do the right thing, be it building a model boat for the new church, preventing a drunkard from committing suicide, or sacrificing his life by rescuing people from a storm. Since responsibility arises from conscience, he is guided by the voice of his conscience, which he experiences throughout the novel as somebody good listening to him. As Doby notices:

> Although the protagonist never participates in the Mass or even prays, his calm selflessness, his natural humility, and his sense of duty to his work and to his fellow man speak of the heart of a saint. He navigates through his life cautiously, and with very little concern for worldly possession or achievement. He only seeks to do his best and to be a little better than his forebears who so grievously failed him.

> This is not to say that the keeper is perfect. He has his hangups and flaws, as we all do, but his lifelong dedication to protecting the men and women on the sea comes to a head in the climax of the book, where he shows a heart of Christ's own.

Namely, in the climax, Ethan sacrifices his life for others in a very Christian way, although he is not led by the knowledge of God but by his conscience.

At the beginning of the novel, Ethan isolates himself from the world, since he does not trust other people but only himself, and he holds onto his autonomy as a way of self-protection. The visits to his island are very rare. However, in a brief period of time, there is an uncanny influx of visitors, which forces Ethan to reconsider his interior isolation. In this way, God prepares Ethan's heart to receive Ross, who turns out to be his own son. Ross opens up Ethan's heart and changes it, revealing to him that human beings are created for community with each other. In this process, Ethan becomes free. As Ratzinger explains, "[g]race is not opposed to freedom, on the contrary, freedom is the child of grace. A man who seeks only himself loses himself and loses everything. Only a man who opens himself up, who does not seek his own life, but puts himself at the disposal of eternal love without fear, by finding God also finds himself" (*Ljubav koja spašava* 15). In his freedom, Ethan is invited to act responsibly and to put his life at God's disposal in a selfless act of sacrifice, saving people in trouble. In this moment of complete freedom and responsibility, Ethan finds God and thereby himself: while drowning, he stares down as he descends into the darkness of the abyss, symbolizing sin and death, but then, in the very last moments of his life, he lifts his head, directs his gaze upwards, and reaches for light, which symbolizes God. In this final decision of his life, he chooses God over sin and receives a baptism of desire, whereupon Jesus and Mary appear, and, as he reached for light, Mary reaches for him, which is a sign that he realizes the ultimate meaning of his life.

The Island of the World

One of the main topics of *The Island of the World* is spirituality, reflected in Josip's struggle with faith and his freedom to accept or reject God and his mercy. As a recurring symbol of spiritual concepts, swallows appear throughout the novel. Josip's first trip to the seaside with his father is an unforgettable experience for Josip. He watches swallows (lastavice) there, birds that have always captivated him and share his last name. During the trip, something extraordinary happens: a swallow lands on his fingertips. From then on, swallows appear at significant moments of his life as a transcendental symbol of his soul and God, of love and freedom. As migratory birds, representing a link to Josip's childhood and homeland, they symbolize rebirth and return. Namely, as a child, Josip considers himself to be a swallow; it

turns out that, like swallows, he leaves his homeland and later returns. In addition, on a spiritual level, he suffers and loses his faith, but eventually returns to God.

As a child, Josip believes in God and admires their village priest, Fra Anto, who lives ascetically and always prays. He believes that Fra Anto is a saint. A significant spiritual moment of Josip's childhood occurs when he prays before the Blessed Sacrament, and a current awakes in his heart, so that he wants to stay in the church forever. This event is juxtaposed to his avoidance of churches and the faltering of his childhood faith after he experiences a profound trauma of the slaughter of his village. He is especially horrified by the sight of Fra Anto's naked, mutilated body sprawled on the steps of the church. Recognizing it, he vomits several times. In the church, the sacred hosts are scattered on the floor, some bloody, the others muddy, and the imprint of a boot is visible on the large host removed from the monstrance. To save the hosts from further sacrilege, Josip drops to his knees and consumes them.

Scarred by these horrific events, Josip struggles with faith for many years, not being able to enter a church, because he envisions a naked, mutilated body on the steps of every church. Shortly after the trauma, while in Sarajevo, the sight of a church stirs a conflict within him, as "he feels both drawn to it and afraid of it" (*The Island of the World* 144), because of his vision of the dead body on the steps. His uncle returns from the war, and it turns out that he is the Partisan who spared his life. Now he threatens Josip and wants to get rid of him, making Josip dread him. Josip feels a flicker of hope when he gets so sick that he must be admitted to hospital; he, namely, believes that he might die far from his uncle. However, his time in the hospital turns out to be filled with profound spiritual experiences, offering him solace. He talks there to the swallow, who tells him to speak to a blind bandaged patient being so restless that he could burst his stitches. Josip strokes the patient and speaks to him; he tells him that he is the *lastavica*: "The *lastavica* is coming to you. He would speak with you" (*The Island of the World* 162), and the man calms down, joyfully welcoming the *lastavica*. The swallow signifies consolation in the patient's pain, pointing toward transcendence and helping him find piece before death. Josip goes from patient to patient, looking them in the eye, which he believes is a form of touching, and many people appreciate his way of communication. In spite of his own psychological and spiritual trauma, Josip tries to console others by communicating with them on a spiritual level, sensing a responsibility to help people in pain:

> He speaks only with his eyes, and it is a wonder to him that so many—though not all—understand a little of his new language. His task is to remind people that, as they take flight, they are going upward to an open and light-filled place without sorrows. As high as the sea, as deep as the sky—yes it is like that, not the other way around. Whenever it

> is right to do so, he speaks in this way to people prostrate on their bloodied and fouled beds; he also senses when it is not right to do so. The swallow is sometimes with him, sometimes absent, for he cannot make it come or go at will. But when it is present, he may speak. He speaks to all the sufferers in this way. (*The Island of the World* 166)

Josip does not shy away from the sick but wants to get close to them. The swallow represents here the Holy Spirit, who provides spiritual guidance to Josip, giving him discernment and the ability to communicate with the sufferers. Communicating with them, Josip conveys to them the message of God's presence and brings them hope and consolation by reminding them that they should have their gaze directed toward paradise, where there will be no sorrow or pain anymore. Ignoring the hospital rules about infection, he later takes the hands of some patients in his hands. They all become still and start to cry with gratitude. "It is a state in which fear evaporates, and the distance between himself and other souls diminishes almost to nothing" (*The Island of the World* 166).

Then, one day, a new patient arrives in Josip's cellar room. He has a broken leg and no arms, and he spends time by watching a sunbeam entering the room through a small window. Unlike other patients, who suffer from terrible loneliness, this man rests in solitude. "His solitude is composed and peaceful, despite what has happened to him" (*The Island of the World* 168). Josip communicates with him with his eyes and by touching his toes. "With this contact he becomes fully the *lastavica*; all motion dissolves, all noise fades, and there is only presence. The man's eyes slowly register the fingers on his foot, then they rise to meet the gaze of the strange boy who has arrived, out of nowhere it seems, at the end of his mattress. For a time, he looks at Josip in the same way he has regarded the progress of the light" (*The Island of the World* 168). The spiritual gap between them is very small, representing close connection. Josip is convinced that the man is the swallow who landed on his hands when he was on at the seaside with his father. Their conversation is seemingly about the swallows, the sea, and the mountains, but they actually talk about transcendental topics. The man tells him that *lastavice* must fly away, because this is not their home. In other words, there is another home beyond this earthly reality—heaven. Although they are in Sarajevo, the man explains that he is not in the mountains but upon the sea, and that Josip is also upon the sea. He claims that Sarajevo is also within the sea and adds: "Though these hills are waves, they are not the highest" (*The Island of the World* 170). Josip is confused and asks, "What is the highest?", and the man replies: "The highest is within you. It is a country of mountains and valleys, the beds of alpine glens, the crevasse and its fall from which there is no return, and the summit from which one does not wish to return" (*The Island of the World* 170). In other words, the man compares life to the sea and the spirit to

the landscape. According to him, the highest reality is spiritual, within one's soul, where the ultimate meaning of life can be found. The mountains and valleys represent struggles and joys, the crevasse symbolizes damnation and hell, and the summit the union with God in paradise, where one wants to stay forever, which is the realization of the ultimate meaning. The man believes that Josip will remember the truths that are important better if he does not tell him his name, and Josip then claims that he knows his name: he is the Lastavica of the Sea, and Josip is the Lastavica of the Mountains. However, the man corrects him and says that Josip is more: the Lastavica of the Fields of Heaven. This has a twofold meaning: Josip must not forget his origin (Rajska Polja), and he belongs to God as his final destination is heaven. The readers also find out that the man's wife and children are deceased. In spite of this personal trauma, the man has, however, managed to attain deep spiritual strength and inner peace. From his conversation with Josip, it can be concluded that the man draws strength and peace from his relationship with God, which is also symbolically depicted through his focus on the ray of light. Through their conversation, he tries to teach Josip that he should also keep his eyes on God and trust Divine Providence in order to achieve eternal life. God will be with him even in hardships, so that he should not be afraid, and his suffering will bring much good. The man shows him the ray of light coming through the window and further explains:

> "Do you see?"
>
> Josip shakes his head.
>
> "Surely you see", says the man.
>
> "I see the light, but the walls imprison it."
>
> "The light has entered the prison. Nothing can keep it out."
>
> "If there is no window, the light cannot enter."
>
> "If there is no window, the light enters within you." (*The Island of the World* 174)

As Josip is imprisoned by the fear of his uncle and by his traumatic memories, he is paying more attention to the walls than to the light. The man, however, invites Josip to focus on the light, that is, on God's presence that penetrates even the darkest situations, and no suffering or other external factors can stop it from entering. No matter if external sources of God are present (such as the Lastavica) or not, acting as windows though which light can enter, Josip can always find the light of God in his soul, which will then enter the world thorough him.

When Josip enrolls at the University, although there are other things on which he is focused as a student, he still finds comfort and direction in the Lastavica's words, especially when he feels lonely. Encountering Josip again, the Lastavica assures him that he still has the

eyes of the *lastavica*. Since the eyes are considered to be the mirror of the soul, he sees in Josip's eyes that his soul is as virtuous as it was when he was a child, even though Josip is not so sure in that anymore. He explains to Josip that the true meaning of life lies in the submission to God's will, and, echoing Frankl, that we choose who we will be:

> "We will go where the wind takes us", replies the man of the sea (. . .). "For to act with our own purpose, though not wrong, is to limit the actions of life. And for purpose to be true purpose, it must be contained within submission."
>
> "Is not all choice a limiting of possibilities?"
>
> "Yes. This is necessary. We cannot do or be all things. And within the identity that is our own there are a multitude of choices." (*The Island of the World* 238–39)

The Lastavica gives him a carving of a swallow of the mountains, which is supposed to remind Josip of his spiritual nature and responsibility toward his conscience. After that, even though he rejected it resolutely at first, Josip decides to join Antun Kusić's secret group that hopes to create genuine culture, the beautiful and true as the opposite of the ideologically driven culture of Yugoslavia. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the novel, the encounter with the Lastavica does appear to have influenced his decision, as if he wants to become worthy of the swallow the man sees in him.

When Josip falls in love with Ariadne, despite his spiritual doubts, his love for her makes him approach spiritual questions, makes him recall his former insights about the principle of sacramentality and the consequential awe. As a child, he realized that everything in the world, while significant in itself, is interconnected, and that the beauty, harmony, and order of all creation reflect Divine Providence. In the novel, O'Brien demonstrates that Josip's crisis of faith does not stem only from the trauma of seeing Fra Anto's mutilated body, but also from the inability to comprehend why an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God permits evil and suffering of good and faithful people.[20] Josip chooses not to struggle with this question but to ignore it and God altogether, but he will later realize that it is possible to find faith and meaning even in the midst of suffering. Instead, he considers his and Ariadne's love to be his religion, since it means everything to him. Marrying Ariadne, whom he regards the most beautiful woman in the world, he wonders if there is a God after all. Initially skeptical about faith due to the Communist propaganda, Ariadne eventually converts and tells Josip that they must return to Christ. She has realized that "something glorious was hidden from [them], but if [they] wanted it, all [they] had to do was reach up for it" (*The Island of the World* 332). She adds:

[20] This is the question that a branch of theology called theodicy attempts to solve.

"Our part was to reach up, and then everything else would be given—from above" (*The Island of the World* 333). She is sure that Christ is real and that he is present in their love and relationship: "He is here. I feel him all around us. He was in our first meeting and has been in our hearts ever since. He has been with us in a way that I can't explain. But it's incomplete" (*The Island of the World* 333). Despite his initial reluctance, Josip promises to Ariadne that he will go to church for their unborn baby. His love for Ariadne and the baby seems to have awakened his responsibility toward the spiritual reality and given him strength to overcome his fears: "For his part, he is determined to overcome his fears and is gathering strength for it. In a sense, it is his very self that lies spread-eagled on the steps, silent and degraded. He must rise from the dead" (*The Island of the World* 337).

Yet, the night before they were supposed to go to the church together for the first time, Josip is taken into custody for interrogation about *Dobri Dupin*, the secret cultural group that Kusić invited Josip to. Josip is badly beaten and informed that the members of *Dobri Dupin* are either killed or imprisoned. In the prison, Josip remembers his conversation with the Lastavica of the Sea when he was a child, who told him that his suffering would bring much good to others, and that he should not be afraid, since nothing can keep the light out. Enduring severe torture, Josip does not give away any information and is sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor on Goli Otok, where he is also brutally tortured as soon as he arrives. The greatest danger on Goli Otok is dehumanization, so, recognizing the spirit as the source of true freedom, Josip and the group of prisoners he becomes close to try to remain free and responsible despite their imprisonment. Propo, one of the prisoners, tells Josip to "beware of what they do to the mind. First they take away your freedom, then your strength, then your clarity of thought. Finally, when you accept the lie that you are less than an animal, they will rebuild you" (*The Island of the World* 365). The inmates help each other, especially Josip, in the way Frankl's theory and experience propose: these men use their freedom, which human beings retain in all situations, even during imprisonment, to do good and to make sacrifice for others, acting responsibly toward others by helping them. Apart from helping, they offer resistance by developing a clandestine sub-culture on the island in order to maintain their humanity; despite the ban on conversation, they manage to have dialogues word by word when they pass each other by.

Next to Propo, the readers get to know Tata, another prisoner and a priest, who says that "[n]othing is impossible with God" (*The Island of the World* 361). When the guards kill two of their group, anger, hatred, and vengeance awaken in Josip, and he wants to kill them. Tata wants to help him, but Josip refuses his attempts. He wonders about Josip's suffering in life, thinking that "because [Josip] can run no longer, . . . every evil blow [he has] received return[s] to [him],"

warning him that his vengeance will eventually destroy him (*The Island of the World* 397). Tata explains: "A man suffers injustice. He resents it, and his resentment grows and grows and becomes anger. Anger, if it is fed, then becomes hatred. Hatred, if fed, opens the soul to evil spirits. And when they possess a man, he becomes capable of any atrocity. Afterward, he will not know how or why he became like that" (*The Island of the World* 398). Tata's words reveal the danger of spiritual slavery in the form of hatred, which negates freedom and therefore prevents a person from finding the meaning of life. In the course of the novel, Josip repeatedly brushes off Tata's offers to pray with him. By rejecting Tata, Josip refuses God's mercy and remains hard-hearted.

The plot continues with Josip's miraculous escape from Goli Otok. Although he understands that "an unexplainable dimension has intervened in his life, the mystery that man calls divine may be no more than . . . a mathematical tropism, a cosmic force. In any event, he cannot pray to it" (*The Island of the World* 438). He only thinks about Ariadne, as she represents his religion, and believes that he might become more open to considering the idea of God again when he finds her. Upon learning about Ariadne's alleged death, he desires death too:

> As he waits for death with closed eyes, a light appears in his head. It is not in his thoughts, for it is nothing he can imagine, nothing he has ever experienced before. He sees it with eyes that are not the eyes of his head—a red spot approaching, expanding as it comes closer. The spot becomes a little sun glowing and heating his skull. This makes no sense, because the only source of light in the chamber is the entrance behind him.
>
> The little sun pulsates and penetrates his mind, gently, gently, not invading, merely enfolding him and warming him. Now it is heat and light, and tears begin streaming from his eyes, tears without feeling. (*The Island of the World* 466)

When the light fades, he opens his eyes and finds that he is still alive. He realizes that he is in a room full of relics and, afraid, screams and runs away. A closer look at these passages reveals that God approaches Josip in the depths of his despair. He comes in the form of light, illuminating and warming Josip's soul. This gentle and unobtrusive encounter offers divine grace in order to comfort and heal Josip, burdened by profound suffering. Josip's tears signify that God indeed has touched his soul, but, when he realizes that he is surrounded by relics, he is terrified and again runs away from God. The following night, he enters a cave in order to sleep, there he remembers the pulsating light, which warms him a little, yet he cannot find his peace as he is tormented by the memories of the three men he wanted to kill. "And though the little sun fights with the three faces of death, it is no good. For as he slides down into wrath, he

knows that *he* has become Jure and Zmija and Goran" (*The Island of the World* 468). Thus, "choking on the poison within himself" (*The Island of the World* 468), he strikes his breast with a rock again and again in an attempt to kill the evil in his heart. Eventually, he faints, yet God still keeps him alive. Unable to recognize the call of his conscience to repent and accept God's mercy, which happens in the spiritual realm, Josip tries to destroy the evil in himself on a physical level, which is, of course, doomed to failure.

He crosses the border and finds himself in Italy, where he hides in an old tank. During the night, a mysterious person enters the tank, and they talk. He advises Josip not to take the path he thinks is his and offers him riches, strength, beauty, voice, knowledge, and respect. He offers him "[f]reedom without submission" (*The Island of the World* 475). He promises to take fear and pain from him, "if [he] follow[s him] into [his] light, for [he is] master of light and of darkness" (*The Island of the World* 475). Josip thinks the man is Jesus, but it seems to him that something is odd about this man, as he does not feel peace as he did when he encountered Jesus as a child. Josip answers: "I hunger and thirst, . . . but I know that mine is the path of weakness. Be it only hours or days left to me, this is my path and no other—I know it in my soul" (*The Island of the World* 476). He finally recognizes the person—it is "Zmija the snake," who says: "I followed your trail, the trail Cain always leaves in the desolation beyond Eden, for his evil drains out of him but is ever replenished. Yes, you are already like me, for you are me and I am you" (*The Island of the World* 477). Josip is terrified, and he starts sawing his wrists on a spear of metal. A warrior arrives and fights with the snake, who finally disappears. The warrior takes Josip's wrist in his hand and says: "Rise up, . . . for you have work to do" (*The Island of the World* 477). The mysterious person represents the Devil, the tempter and deceiver, who tempts Josip with false promises. Namely, as he tempted Jesus with all the kingdoms of the world (Matt. 4.8–10), he offers Josip worldly gains and freedom without submission. This freedom is actually a false kind of freedom, because it does not imply responsibility and negates God's authority. The Devil makes these promises on the condition that Josip follows him not into *the* light but into *his* light. As tempting as that may sound, the Devil is known to disguise himself as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11.14). Josip has known since his childhood that Jesus brings peace and thus recognizes the Devil by the absence of peace, which leads him to the truth. Interestingly, despite Josip's constant rejection of God, he does not accept the Devil's tempting offers but accepts that he must walk his own path, which is marked by suffering and weakness, thus humbling himself. The Devil is depicted in the form of Zmija (the snake), a guard from Goli Otok, and one of the three men Josip wanted to kill: he bears the name of one of the Devil's personifications—the snake, who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. Although Josip has not

killed the three men he wanted to kill, he considers himself Cain because of his desire to kill them. The Devil uses his self-accusation against him, trying to convince him that he already belongs to darkness. In the moments of Josip's profound terror and despair, God demonstrates his presence and strength in Josip's life, sending a warrior (probably Archangel Michael) to defend Josip against the Devil. His command to Josip to rise up signifies that God has a mission for him and that his life has a meaning despite sufferings and temptations.

While in Italy, Josip arrives in front of the dome of St. Peter, to which his parents once wanted to make a pilgrimage. He is sad that he cannot enter the church and that he is here without the faith of his parents. In his mind, he shapes a bird that will take his prayer into the sky: "*I do not know if what I have lost can be found again. I would ask you for help, if I believed, but I send you this bird instead, for it carries my request. It may be that you are there and will receive my messenger*" (*The Island of the World* 525). As he is about to leave, he catches sight of a friar, who says that Josip's message was heard and invites him to make a confession, but Josip is reluctant. The friar's invitation could be seen as an invitation to God's love in freedom: God has been inviting Josip to return to him through the believers he has met throughout his life, and now this priest tells him that he is free to do it, while Josip was always convinced that he cannot return to God. During the confession, the priest remarks that Josip is afraid of the pain and blood, assures him that he should not be afraid and that he will be cleansed through confession, so Josip starts his confession. During it, the priest reads his soul. He helps him confess that he wanted to kill three men—"he reaches into Josip's damaged thoughts with truth and grace so that the penitent begins to understand the measures of guilt and innocence concerning his life. And so a burden is lifted from him" (*The Island of the World* 528). After Josip confesses his sins, he feels emptiness that brings peace and rest. The friar asks of him the following:

> "For the remainder of your life, do good to those who harm you. Bless your enemies, and do not hate them. Pray for them, and do not hold them to account."
>
> . . .
>
> "In Christ's grace, you can do this. Though the sins committed against you are the most grievous and would test the greatest of souls, you have been given a cross and a blessing that few can receive. Will you ask each day for the grace to forgive?" (*The Island of the World* 529)

Josip's awareness that this is impossible without God's help, for which he will pray, is the realization of his weakness and humbleness. In the spirit of Christianity, precisely this becomes his strength, however paradoxical it may sound. He, namely, becomes free of his anger, hatred,

and fear. Afterwards, Josip does not know whether he has the strength to enter the church, but the friar tells him that he needs the heart of a child. A twelve-year-old boy comes, and, with his help, Josip manages to enter the church. When he receives Communion, peace fills him. After that, the boy disappears. The boy seems to have been the twelve-year-old Josip, since he was that old when his world shattered and he lost his faith. The act of confession provides relief and peace for Josip, so he starts anew with a pure soul and God by his side. He indeed becomes a new person, a believer.

Josip prays often, confesses, and attends Masses. He works at the American Embassy, where a married woman, flirtatious and shallow Mrs. Conway, tries to seduce him. After his rejection, she accuses him of insulting and assaulting her, so he resigns and decides to leave the city. He is afraid that he will be deported and that he will die but hopes for God's help. This is his first opportunity to put into practice the friar's advice, so he prays for Mrs. Conway and visits her in the hospital, apologizes for yelling at her, explaining that he was terrified of "falling back into the island of death" (*The Island of the World* 555). He tells her about his imprisonment, the deaths of his wife and child, about his despair and terrors. He promises her that he will forget what happened and asks her to forget it as well. Before leaving, he gives her a present. In this way, not only does he forgive, not feeding his rage and fear, but he also helps Mrs. Conway to understand her behavior from his perspective and to forgive herself. Following Christ's command to "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly" (Luke 6.27–28), Josip also sets a remarkable example that could inspire Mrs. Conway to change her life and follow Christ.

Josip moves to New York, where he continues his mission to follow Christ and prays for people who are in need of prayer. The principal change of his life is his realization that he should seek God even in suffering. For example, after the Croatian War of Independence, Josip visits Croatia and hires a boatman to drive him around Goli Otok, where he prays for his fellow inmates. There he learns to appreciate pain as an essential part of his life mission, believing that one of the reasons why God let him escape and live was to remember them and pray for their souls. Another of his key insights is the liberating power of gratitude and forgiveness on his soul:

> Beyond all sorrows, he has the fire of Holy Communion with Christ, as well as friends and fishing and the central grace of his life—his mission to forgive. Returning good for evil wherever he stumbles across it, within the streets of the great city where he lives and also within himself. In all of this, he has been blessed with a life of interior riches, with the added gift of poetry. (*The Island of the World* 709–10)

Josip has become a humble and grateful man, who considers his mission to be prayer and forgiveness and whose center of life is Christ. A modest and ordinary life represents freedom for him:

> It is essential to have nothing in order to keep the riches he has been given. Yes, he is rich—he is a man who can distill sight and insight onto bits of salvaged paper; he is a man who can enjoy taking the garbage down to the corner; he can chat with fishermen and carpenters and housewives, never as condescension but as the replenishment of his true self. Every day he can swim in the greatness of the ordinary. This is freedom, and he is very grateful for it. It is all good, just as it is. (*The Island of the World* 777)

In brief, in such an ordinary life of freedom, Josip finds the meaning of his life. In the character of Josip Lasta, O'Brien thus confirms Ivančić's theory: "By doing good, a man realizes himself, finds the meaning of life, and keeps his conscience healthy. By doing evil, he destroys the conscience, the brain, and himself" ("Hagioterapija – model terapijske antropologije" 11–12).

Strangers and Sojourners

Anne has always recognized a need for spiritual reality but has simultaneously struggled with it. Her first experiences with spirituality terrified her: when she was a child, her father forced her to participate in séances in an attempt to communicate with the spirit of her deceased mother, where Anne encountered supernatural phenomena that scared her. Although she has doubts about God and faith, she is sure that the séances were a manifestation of evil. The presence of this evil sometimes materializes itself as a malicious beast who appears in front of her eyes. Through this, O'Brien, himself a witness of occult practices, warns of the influence of evil on one's soul. Unlike him, who was raised in a Catholic Church, to which he could return when he realized the dangers of the occult, Anne does not have this kind of haven. She is left only with a need to seek faith and the meaning of her life. Wondering "Is it love I seek, or truth?" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 58), she is unaware that both are present in God. Anne defends Christianity in conversations with a reverend, Edwin Gunnalls, who, paradoxically, at first believes that good and evil are the opposite sides of the same reality, that all religions are the same, and that the universe is empty, advocating New Age. To the question what her religion is, Anne answers: "I don't really know what it is, except to say it's a listening very closely to growing things, to beautiful things, to true things. I try to understand if there's something they're telling me" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 75). Since the transcendentals, truth and beauty, along with goodness, are believed to denote God, Anne is indeed on the way to finding God.

Her future husband, a Catholic, has his own demons: he struggles with the memory of his father's murder, his guilt, and fear. After the initial happiness in marriage, Anne feels

incomplete but does not recognize the reason. It seems to her that she is in the wrong place with the wrong person. Due to this, they both suffer, but she dedicatedly tries to find her answers. She occasionally sees glimpses of God in life—"flowing beneath verse, lovemaking, the smile of a child, the cycle of seasons" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 190) and recognizes the strengths of faith and the Catholic Church but is still unable to believe. As an intellectual, she wants to "make a god of knowledge" instead of believing in things she has not seen (*Strangers and Sojourners* 441). She does not approach faith until later in her life. She then writes: "I cannot speak like a theologian or like my broken hermit, who has seen and knows. But the presence who comes to me at times is so gentlemanly. He does not hammer for entrance and possession like the shadow presence. No, this spirit is love, and it has utter respect for my freedom to reject it" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 409). She recognizes it in nature, music, her grandson. Anne here describes her encounters with God, who is love, and juxtaposes him to the malevolent spirits from the séances. Specifically, in contrast to the assertive evil spirits, God is gentle and respects her freedom. As O'Brien reveals, "God will force nothing upon us. But if we open our hearts to Him without reservation, and in a spirit of healthy submission, *sub missio*, within the divine mission for mankind's salvation, our lives will change and become more fruitful for others" ("Writing for the Eschaton"). Eventually, Anne exercises her freedom responsibly to discover the meaning of life—she dies believing, thereby finding the ultimate meaning of life. Her struggle and suffering with faith as well as its eventual discovery will be analyzed more thoroughly in the chapter on attitudinal values.

In *Strangers and Sojourners*, the theme of conscience is explored particularly through the character of Stephen. After killing the soldier who murdered his father in Ireland, Stephen is plagued by guilt and fear. His troubled conscience and rejection of God's mercy are illustrated by his dream of the prophet Malachi, who shows him the ocean of God's mercy. In the dream, Stephen "covered his face with his hands, and his hands were red with blood, and he ran, he ran from the sea" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 128). By running from the sea, he symbolically runs from God's mercy. Unable to forgive himself, he doubts if Anne could love him and would want to marry him if she knew about his past. Although he becomes a good husband, his silence about his troubling past bothers Anne and deepens her insecurities. Throughout his life, God teaches him to "trust that the past is forgiven" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 441), eventually freeing him from his troubled conscience.

A Cry of Stone

Rose's spirituality is demonstrated through her piety and rich spiritual life but also through supernatural elements, such as dreams, visions, and inner communication with God.

As a child, Rose hears from her grandmother that she would always have light. The light of divine presence, promised by her grandmother, endures throughout Rose's life, even during times of doubt. In general, Rose acts and makes decisions based on the inner promptings of the spirit. She also has a gift of seeing into people's souls, which she uses only enough to guide her prayer, as advised by Fr. Andrei. Her "supernatural sight here will strike some as unrealistic, but . . . her vision is a gift, a word, given by the eternal reality of the communion of saints, one of the core doctrines of Christianity as expressed in the Apostle's Creed" (Maillet 184). For instance, the boys' supervisor at Rose's boarding school is mean, cruel, sadistic, and abusive in every way, including sexually, which leads Rose's spiritual brother, Binemin—who will be discussed later—to truly hate him. However, Rose has seen into the supervisor's soul and realizes that he does not hate the boys but himself. He is a victim of suffering, poverty, and abuse, so he fills his emptiness with evil. Rose prays for the supervisor in order to protect Binemin from him, urging Binemin not to hate him as it would poison his soul. Advocating mercy for the merciless might seem as justification of the supervisor's behavior, but it is not; it is, instead, Christian love toward a human being who does evil because of his pain, not knowing another way. Mercy is the only hope for his change, but it does not justify the evil committed.[21] Furthermore, Rose has a strong conscience, which impacts her actions. For example, when Binemin finds a secret way to the kitchen of their school and steals ice cream, Rose is unwilling even to try it because of the wrongness of his act. Her soul is very sensitive to all her sins, even to what she, perhaps too strictly, considers wrongful, so she confesses it immediately.

Rose sometimes has dreams rich with spiritual symbols. In one such dream, Rose asks a white bird for a brother, and God answers her prayer in the form of Binemin Edzo, a wild, abused, and abandoned boy believed to be possessed by demons, who enters her community. As his spiritual sister, she feels responsibility for Binemin, so she patiently prays and sacrifices for him, trying to civilize him. In time, she manages to make him laugh and speak, healing his wounds with her love and tenderness. In another dream, after her grandmother's death, Oldmary asks Rose to pray for her, because she is in Purgatory. Throughout her life, Rose prays and offers up her sacrifices for many people. Sensing a responsibility for their souls, she bears their weight.

[21] It is important to note that here O'Brien does not diminish the responsibility of the Catholic Church for the sexual abuse in Native American boarding schools; he, namely, attended such a notorious residential school, and the character of the supervisor as well as Binemin's experience are based on his personal experiences. What is more, O'Brien publicly stepped forward, advocating pursuing justice for the perpetrators but advising avoiding hatred (see "Q@A with *The Lighthouse* author Michael D O'Brien"). This is reflected in the supervisor's arrest, which is presented as just.

Rose's longing for God is, among other things, embodied in her wish to become a nun. Her desire is the expression of her deep faith and readiness to dedicate her life to God. Yet, she is afraid to express her wish, because she feels "too small and unworthy of the religious life" (*A Cry of Stone* 254). When she finally submits a request, she is rejected because of her poor health, since the Mother General thinks that the order should have novices "who are strong, strong enough to meet the demands of the coming times" (*A Cry of Stone* 259). Paradoxically, Rose's incredible spiritual strength is rejected when the Church needs it most. Though heartbroken, Rose remains as humble as ever and accepts the Mother General's decision as God's will. This event is followed by a period of desolation and God's absence, which Rose does not understand and feels abandoned. Nevertheless,

> [s]he learned to send the beam of her love to the Beating Heart regardless of his response. She told him that she would never cease to love him, for he was beautiful beyond all imagining; and she had tasted his fire, and it was good. If he chose to keep it from her, this was good also; she thanked him for it, because it gave her a chance to show him that she loved him for himself, and not for his gifts to her. (*A Cry of Stone* 265)

The nuns at the boarding school believe that Rose should attend an art school, because she has a responsibility to use her gift. Trying to make Rose aware of her responsibility, sister Madeleine says:

> "Is there not a duty . . . to give to the world what God has given to you? If you can go farther in life, then you must, for then the harvest will be greater."
>
> "What do you mean, harvest?" Rose asked.
>
> "The good that you will do for the souls who look into your pictures—*non*, who fall into your pictures." (*A Cry of Stone* 268)

With God's confirmation, Rose accepts her responsibility and decides to study art. During this time, she continues to feel desolation, but there are occasional spiritual consolations. An example of this is her joy during the Christmas she spends alone: "The Lord was pouring out an unusual amount of consolation. As if she were crossing the last stretches of the desolate land, and in the near distance an inn of refuge now appeared" (*A Cry of Stone* 337). The periods of desolations and consolations alternate, and Rose notices that Christ's consolations "were more frequent just before particular sufferings or humiliations" (*A Cry of Stone* 486), which are many.

Every time she seems lost, not knowing what to do, she prays, and God answers her prayers, though not always in the way she expects. For instance, she prays to God for a father, and in an unexpected turn of events, a painter working at a theater, Hugo Dyson, and his wife,

Ester, take Rose in. Rose rejects her doubts about relying on Hugo's generosity, seeing it as God's gift, given with the intention of keeping her trust in him. Rose is aware of their mutual support, which bears witness to a sense of responsibility that exists between them.

When Rose prays for a child of her own, God leads her to Jimmy Doe, a boy living in the institution for the handicapped who has a deformed skull. At the sight of him, she comes to certain realizations. She understands that God's grace and her attempts to conform to God's will have helped her to survive, but she now realizes that she falsely thought that "this submission . . . cost her everything" (*A Cry of Stone* 796). She becomes aware that "in many aspects of her life she exercised her will freely" (*A Cry of Stone* 796) and that during the unavoidable trials she faced, she experienced resentment and envy toward those who were strong and whole, feeling sorrow due to her back pain and heartache. In other words, her submission has not been complete. Looking at Jimmy, she sees a human being "deprived of all choice. He simply existed. From the beginning, he had been reduced to absolute being in a way that she never had. Yet he slept in peace, and dreamed" (*A Cry of Stone* 796). Rose sees a perfect example of total submission in Jimmy, who is deprived of all choice but one—to accept his condition. This acceptance despite the lack of other choice fills him with peace, and he becomes a role model of conforming to God's will.

The Fool of New York City

Both Billy's freedom and responsibility are reflected in his dedication to helping others. Since he was not allowed to become a paramedic because of his size, he studies paramedicine on his own and volunteers at shelters, but most of the time, he wanders the streets of New York, searching for people in trouble to help them. O'Brien portrays him as a Christ-like character, as a rescuer who realizes the meaning of his life through acts of mercy, so that the readers inevitably wonder what they would do in his place, whether they would take a stranger suffering from amnesia into their home, providing for him and taking him all the way to Canada and Vermont, because there are some subtle signs that Francisco's identity might somehow be connected to these places. However, as the readers later discover, at one point of his life, Billy wanted to die. After a car accident in which his parents died, he was in the hospital in pain, encased in plaster, unable to move, and had amnesia, so he could not remember his deceased parents. Due to all of this, he wanted the doctors to let him die. Nevertheless, one day, when a strong pain in his skull awoke him, a woman whom he could not see, but whose beautiful fragrance he scented, put her hand on his forehead, and the headache disappeared. Although O'Brien does not identify the woman, it is suggested that she was the Mother of God. After this spiritual experience, Billy woke up a changed person, embracing his responsibility toward life:

"When I awoke it was morning. My first awareness was a feeling of amazement over the goodness there was in the world, the presence of so many kind people in the world. Then came the conviction that I did not want to die" (*The Fool of New York City* 229). This mysterious woman appeared once again, giving him a vision of the Twin Towers burning, so he did his best to warn people, but nobody took him seriously. When the towers fell, he was at the site, trying to help people. It turns out that Francisco's parents and little brother died in one of the towers and that Billy found his brother's sock, which he keeps in his room of memories. The events of September 11th make Billy ponder the responsibility and conscience of the human race:

> People helped each other. I remember that. Yes, people helped each other.
>
> I know there were selfish individuals among the survivors. I saw things they did. But they were few in number. Many turned their hearts to the needs of others. The strong helped the weak.
>
> On that day we were revealed to ourselves. We had thought we were indifferent, and we learned it was not so—most of us, I should say. Most of us remembered who we were. We saw that we had forgotten important things, that we had lived as if great things were small and small things great. We had been asleep, or forgetful of the state of man and his vulnerability. We awoke for a moment, an hour, a day, and knew ourselves as better than we thought we were, knew for a brief burning instant that we might yet become what we truly are.
>
> But why did we fall back into unremembering, Max?[22] Why did we resume our older ways? I do not know. And now I wonder if I will ever know. (*The Fool of New York City* 249)

However, Billy seems not to have forgotten, as he still remembers what is important, leading a simple and humble life devoted to being a responsible human being—responsible in helping others, even intentionally searching for those who are in need of help. He also inspires Francisco, whose real name is Paul Maximilian or, shortened, Max, to remember what is important, and Max consequently acquires a simple lifestyle focused on the important things. Discussing with Billy the eternal question of suffering and death, Max concludes that there is "[n]o explanation for why some people die and some are rescued," and Billy replies:

> "None that would fit into our little minds, Max. But we can choose to do what we can."

[22] Francisco's real name is Paul Maximilian Davies (also known as Max).

"And we can choose to remember them."

"Which is a way of loving them. So that nothing is lost, nothing is wasted, and the goodness they left behind is still alive in the hearts of others." (*The Fool of New York City* 250)

Faced with an inexplicable reality, Billy and Max realize that people are free to do what they can, echoing Frankl's idea that "[b]eing human is being responsible because it is being free" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 85). They can, namely, choose to remember and love, thus realizing the meaning of life, which both Billy and Max decide to do.

Max is initially neither free nor responsible. Burdened with his parents' and his little brother's deaths in the attack on the Twin Towers when he was a child, with his grandfather's irrational blaming him for their deaths, and with his unsupportive girlfriend's ultimatums, he starts to drink heavily until he loses his memory. Not knowing who he is, he worries about what he will do if he discovers that he is not good, but Billy wisely reminds him of his responsibility toward life:

"Even if what you discover about yourself is sad or humiliating or even tragic, it's still better than losing yourself. We have to be who we are, Francisco. There's no running away from ourselves—not in the long run. And when a person faces himself—truly faces himself for what he is—he can make a new start, deal with the weakness and work in strengthening the better parts." (*The Fool of New York City* 68)

Max is not a spiritual person. Although his Catholic grandparents prayed for his conversion and took him to church when they had become his guardians, he does not accept their faith. However, Catholicism seems to have influenced his conscience and morality. When he moves to Paris and starts a romantic relationship with Françoise, she makes fun of him for not wanting to sleep with her because he respects her. She questions the source of his morality and the reason why he needs it. Max believes that it is instinctive and infused in him from birth, yet this instinct is nothing else but conscience. After the return of his memory, influenced by Billy's outlook on life and lifestyle, Max learns to deal with his trauma, embraces his responsibility, and decides to become who he is, to finally grow up. He does that by disposing of all unnecessary things and by living a simple life, like Billy. Eventually, he even becomes a believer.

Sophia House

Sophia House is, among other things, a story about Pawel's loss of childhood faith and its rediscovery in his adulthood, after a long struggle with spirituality. Following the traumatic experience of sexual abuse by his grandfather's brother in early childhood, Pawel withdraws into himself and feels the darkness overwhelming him, while faith offers him the only haven of

peace and light. In time, his faith weakens, so that he is left only with "an abstract conviction that what he had been taught about Christ was true" (*Sophia House* 51–52), even though his emotions do not align with this rational conviction. Nevertheless, prayer alleviates his loneliness, since in prayer (and art), he does not feel as alone as usually. After he leaves for France in a "desperate need to escape his origins" (*Sophia House* 56), he becomes attracted to the new culture and involved in art, gradually ceasing to pray and attend Mass. Yet, he occasionally thinks about God. For instance, he wonders if God uses his failures to aim him in the direction of more spiritual art such as icon painting, but when an Orthodox priest Photosphoros declines Pawel's request to be his apprentice, Pawel is desperate and questions God's existence. He is constantly being drawn to a basilica he sees in Paris but consciously suppresses this thought, reminding himself to go forward and not backward, since he is convinced that religion is a matter of the past. Rouault's painting of Christ in agony moves Pawel, but he seems not to hear God's voice speaking to him through the painting. Disappointed and feeling that he does not belong to France, he decides to return to Poland. He finally decides to pray again when he does not know what to do; namely, he does not have enough money to continue travelling from Vienna, and God indeed helps him. He is again touched by a painting, and this time the motif is the Last Judgment. The painting seems to address his state, and he realizes through it that "even when everything appears lost, there is help," but then immediately dismisses the thought, saying that "we are foolish if we wait for help to come from the heavens" (*Sophia House* 104). The man he meets in front of the painting tells him: "I know nothing about you other than that you have been through a great suffering. I think you will do much good in the world. Do not lose hope. Find your way home" (*Sophia House* 104). He turns out to be the author of the painting, and he leaves Pawel money for the ticket to Warsaw. In this way, God answers his prayer and encourages him to persist in the search of meaning.

However, he is still quite certain that God does not exist, but nevertheless decides to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Mother of God at Czestochowa at the urging of his brothers, where he has a spiritual experience, after which he confesses for the first time in years. His confessor, Father Andrei, tells him that God is love and will not abandon him. When they meet some time later, Pawel has been practicing faith, but his heart is not in it. Despite this, Pawel uses his freedom to choose responsibly and opts for God, regardless of his emotions. Father Andrei ensures him that he should trust God and not to be afraid, but he continues to struggle with faith. Not believing that God exists and thinking that even if he does, he would not speak to someone like him, Pawel decides to talk to God as if he was real. Surprisingly, God answers and gives him a vision, which marks a major breakthrough in his search for faith.

A priest he talks to describes how God is changing him little by little in order to live meaningfully:

> "Each day you go to the one who loves you, and each day you ask him for the grace to do good, only good. He gives it. Slowly, slowly—maybe a lifetime—deeper, deeper goes the understanding that he is there, he is your Father and Lord, he loves you with a total love, he will never abandon you. You and he make this union of trust together. Trust is not magic. Trust is built slowly, slowly, with patience and care." (*Sophia House* 397)

One of the scenes in which O'Brien perfectly captures human freedom is when Pawel seems to be forced to work as a nude model. Being homeless, he is convinced he has no choice but to accept the offer, and standing naked in front of the students who perceive him as nothing more than an object is an agonizing experience for him. During it, he thinks about what he will do later—he does not know, but he consoles himself with the thought that "at least *he* would choose it" (*Sophia House* 69). Shortly thereafter, he decides to leave even though he will not get paid if he leaves before a full day's work, choosing his freedom over humiliation. Furthermore, one of the central topics of the novel is Pawel's decision to hide David in his attic, protect him, and feed him. He does this freely, acting responsibly toward another human being, accepting the unique role that God gives him by saving another person's life. However, Pawel does not see his act as heroic but as the right thing to do, while David sees a deeper significance in this act: "But to do the right thing is to speak a word, and to shift, a little, the balance of the world" (*Sophia House* 266). Pawel also helps other people in need from the little he has and only later discovers what a huge impact his responsible acts have had on their lives. Moreover, when he is tempted by the devil, who keeps telling him that he will betray Jesus, a priest reminds him of his freedom to decide: "You are free. Your will is your own. At every moment choose the truth" (*Sophia House* 398). It is interesting to note how critically Pawel reflects on his atheist period, recognizing how clouded his judgment had become. He, namely, thought he was grasping reality and presumed that he had gained freedom, but his conscience was changed—it was blinded by the lack of belief, though he did not realize it. In other words, he became a slave to his disbelief, mistaking it for freedom. Now he is genuinely free, putting his life at God's disposal—accepting poverty for the sake of a higher good: bringing truth to other people's lives. As he explains:

> "I made a promise to God that I would forgo any consolations that men usually expect from life. I asked only that I be an instrument for placing good books into people's hands, so that their lives would be enriched by truth. I asked only for enough

> income to survive. I was content to be a poor man. (. . .) God has taken me at my word, you see. I am a poor man not only in my possessions but in my very self. I live in this poverty and I make it my offering to him (. . .). Long ago I took the solitary path, and I cannot depart from it." (*Sophia House* 418)

The peak of Pawel's realization of freedom and responsibility comes near the end of the novel, when he acts responsibly in order to save David's life and freely offers his own life in exchange. Namely, when Count Smokrev discovers that Pawel is hiding David, he blackmails Pawel by offering to give David sanctuary under the condition that he can sexually exploit the boy, but Pawel refuses, demonstrating his moral integrity and Christian love. Smokrev therefore reports Pawel and David to the Nazis, and when they arrive, Pawel helps David escape and pretends that he is David, which leads to Pawel's deportation to a concentration camp. In this act, he dies to himself, embracing the likelihood of death in a concentration camp. Unattached to his own life, he sacrifices it for the greater good—to save the boy's life, thus realizing the meaning of his life and his transcendent assignment. Through Pawel's example, O'Brien reveals:

> [W]e would lose our life in the wrong way if we throw off the responsibility of our human nature, that is if we refuse to bear burdens in love for the sake of others. If we seek comfort and security at all costs, we cannot learn to truly love. (. . .) By contrast, if we accept our human destiny, with all its glories and all its trials, in this way we are ennobled and become more conformed to the image of Christ the Son. ("Interview with Famiglia Cristiana")

4.3.5. Self-transcendence and Dying to Oneself

The Church believes that "'coming out of oneself,' instead of focusing on oneself, helps to align with Transcendence and to encounter the mystery of God" (Calavia 136). This concept is implied by a more familiar term—dying to oneself. For a Christian, dying to oneself is the path of following Jesus Christ, who gave himself completely, out of love, for man (see Phil. 2.6–11). When someone seeks only himself, he loses himself, but when someone puts himself boldly at the disposal of God's love, he finds God and thereby himself (Ratzinger, *Ljubav koja spašava* 15). To put it differently, the more one loses himself, the more he finds himself in Christ (Ratzinger, *O vjeri, nadi i ljubavi* 115)—he self-affirms and transcends himself (Ratzinger, *O vjeri, nadi i ljubavi* 109) and thereby achieves holiness. Contrary to popular opinion, holiness is not reserved only for extraordinary people; instead, God wants every human being to lead a holy life. A holy life does not need to be spectacular—it can be an ordinary life focused on God, family, friends, community, and people in need. Kreeft reveals that God calls us from the safety

that is so familiar to us into his arms. Setting aside our plans, God "forces us to choose between him and ourselves, between the God of surprises and the idol of same old self, between God the gazelle and self the slug. It is ultimately the choice between Heaven and Hell" (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 126–27). In other words, transcending oneself requires humility and obedience to God, surrendering one's will and reason to God. It is a fight with oneself. There are many forms of dying to oneself, such as loving, suffering, doing a good deed, or sacrificing oneself. For example, one of its forms, mercy, according to Kasper, transcends one's egoism and places the needs of others (for example, those in need) above one's own (36). Such forgetting oneself embodies strength and freedom, considering that, when being merciful, one is not enslaved by one's ego, but freely self-determines, and thereby self-realizes oneself (Kasper 36). Moreover, for a person who has learned to die to oneself in love for someone else and to sacrifice one's life for truth and justice, death will not seem foreign but close and intimate (Hadjadj 61). Michael O'Brien describes dying to oneself in this way:

> Man's true self emerges only through self-denial, which he experiences not only as suffering, but at times as a suffering very much like death. His instinctive feeling about death is that it is the radical loss of self. In the life of God this is not so, for death is the passageway to ultimate realization of one's true and eternal identity. But man in exile from his true nature cannot yet fully know this, except by an intimation or by "blind" faith. Thus, in order to be restored to the apotheosis of Love, he must die, and die continuously until he reaches Paradise. (*Remembrance of the Future* 15)

A similar concept in logotherapy and existential analysis is self-transcendence, which is, according to Bošnjaković, one of the "two fundamental features of logotherapy," the other being self-detachment (which involves humor and heroism) (93). Frankl considers self-transcendence to be "the essence of the human existence" (*Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 138) and logotherapy considers it "the highest level of development of human existence" (Lukas, *Osnove logoterapije* 46). With this term, Frankl refers to the idea that "human existence . . . is always directed to something, or someone, other than itself, be it a meaning to fulfill or another being to encounter lovingly" (*Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 84). The unintentional consequence of self-transcendence is what Frankl refers to as self-actualization (*Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 84). Specifically, in his life, man does not normally search for *himself* but for *meaning*, because "[t]he more he forgets himself—giving himself to a cause or another person—the more *human* he is. And the more he is immersed and absorbed in something or someone other than himself the more he really becomes *himself*" (Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 84–85). Moreover, seeking pleasure is not a natural goal for man,

since pleasure and happiness represent by-products of self-transcendence. Namely, while happiness occurs by itself when serving a cause or loving someone, will-to-pleasure is contradictory to self-transcendence; it is impossible to pursue pleasure and happiness, because, in this way, they will be missed. Instead, they must emerge from life marked by self-transcendence (Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 89–90). In brief, the meaning of life is achieved by self-transcendence, and it can be discovered in three ways: "(1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering" (Frankl, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 102).

4.3.5.1. Creative Values

In logotherapy and existential analysis, one way of discovering the meaning of life are creative values, which represent doing deeds or working. This can include many different acts: from admirable achievements, such as scientific and technological innovations and inventions, art masterpieces, or heroic deeds, to everyday activities like being dedicated to work, raising a child, taking care of the sick and weak, helping or comforting someone, being kind, or creating something as a hobby. A deed does not need to be extraordinary—it can be small, but it is important that the circumstances of the deed turn it into a permanent value that gives meaning. Längle observes that this refers to "the situations in which a person contributes to the preservation of some value or supports an idea by his act, decision, and bold determination. (. . .) By standing up for something or someone, a person fulfills his service toward some good, thus feeling himself fulfilled by that good" (43).

If we focus on work in the context of one's job, this is the domain "in which the individual's uniqueness stands in relation to society and thus acquires meaning and value" (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 120). In Frankl's opinion, work has meaning and value due to its contribution to the society, while the occupation itself is not important. It cannot thus be claimed that a certain profession is fulfilling while another is not, because any job can provide a meaning and make a person irreplaceable: "The work in itself does not make the person indispensable and irreplaceable; it only gives him the chance to be so" (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 120). Instead, "[t]he indispensability and irreplaceability, the singularity and uniqueness issue from the person, depend on who is doing the work and on the manner in which he is doing it, not on the job itself" (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 121). According to Tweedie, in order for an occupation to fulfill a person, one must regard it as "a calling, a true

vocation" (138). One needs to believe that this vocation requires one's unique talents, and that only this person is capable of doing it properly (Tweedie 138).

From a Christian point of view, the human spirit is creative (Ivančić, *Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 119). Namely, human beings participate in God's act of creation as they "are created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2427). In addition, through work, people can grow spiritually, since "[w]ork can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2427). Therefore, people are created to work and create and thus serve God and their neighbors, by which they can develop spiritually. The Bible teaches that one should be devoted in any work one does, because God rewards those who work: "Whatever your work is, put your heart into it as if it were for the Lord and not for men, knowing that the Lord will repay you by making you his heirs. It is Christ the Lord that you are serving" (Col. 3.23–24). This will, in turn, make human efforts meaningful. According to Hadjadj, living with the awareness that death is inevitable does not mean that people should not have fun, plant trees, or work in a bank, for example, but that they should do it seriously, with getting their priorities straight. In that manner, they will do everything in the best way they can. For instance, they will greet a client who arrived to their bank to open an account as if he were the Savior arriving to open their souls (Hadjadj 40). In brief, logotherapy and existential analysis consider work as a means of discovering the meaning of life, while Christianity regards it as a way of spiritual growth through serving God and others, through which meaning is found.

4.3.5.2. Creative Values in Michael O'Brien's Novels

The Lighthouse

There are four areas in which Ethan realizes creative values: acquiring the mastery of things, helping people as the lighthouse keeper, artistic expression, and acts of kindness. Through them, Ethan participates in God's act of creation and contributes to the society, growing spiritually and finding the meaning of his life. Firstly, he enjoys learning and reading. He eagerly learns about all aspects of lighthouse operation and about his tasks as a lighthouse keeper. After listing all the things Ethan learns about, O'Brien remarks: "He found satisfaction in accumulating the mastery of things" (*The Lighthouse* 12). Since satisfaction, like happiness or success, cannot be achieved if one aims for it, but is a byproduct of finding meaning, it follows that these achievements represent a meaning of Ethan's life. One of his projects, on which he spends ten years, is fixing a wrecked boat. Although he enjoys the process of repairing the boat, which he names the *Puffin*, apart from the solely practical purpose, it later serves two more important

purposes: it brings him close to his son, and he uses it to save people in the storm in which he eventually loses his life. Furthermore, even during his school years, he loved books, because they provided a solace and distraction from his problems. “Now, all these years later, he continued to stock his mind with interesting tales, with practical knowledge, and with vocabulary, learning and remembering. To learn is to survive. To learn is to come closer to finding the key. To learn is to feel the immensity of life, and its sweetness, even in its awe and sadness” (*The Lighthouse* 33). For Ethan, learning represents an experience connected to survival, purpose, and appreciation for life. Of course, learning also provides him with knowledge that enables him to do his job efficiently and flawlessly.

Secondly, Ethan also finds meaning through his job as a lighthouse keeper, in which he devotes his life to helping people and rescuing them. Although he is not the Coast Guard or the Canadian Armed Forces Search and Rescue, he nevertheless rescues people, because he believes that it is also his duty. He is very passionate about his occupation. His avidness makes the job his calling in the full sense of the word and makes him invaluable, which in turn fulfills him. There are several examples of his help described in the novel. Namely, he prevents a catastrophe related to a cargo ship and from time to time saves lesser vessels in fog or storm. However, he is constantly risking his life, because he does not have appropriate rescue equipment but uses a rubber dinghy with an unreliable motor. After rescuing people, he feeds them and gives them blankets and cots. On one occasion, two boys get stuck with their boat in the shallows. He instructs them on how to be safe while driving a boat, helps them push the boat out of the shallows, and advises them against their overly enthusiastic plan for an adventure. Instead, he gives them a far better and safer suggestion, which they gladly accept. It is important to notice that, even though the boys are thoughtless and incautious, Ethan does not treat them like incompetent children but approaches them with respect, which the boys appreciate. Furthermore, jumping in the cold sea, he saves a drunkard, Esau Hurley, from committing suicide. He takes him to hospital, freezing in wet clothes, and stays there until Esau regains consciousness. He asks Esau why he wanted to kill himself, and Esau tells him about his life and why he considers himself a bad person. Esau is bitter and wretched, and Ethan seems to be the first person in years who cares for him and listens to him, respecting him as a human being instead of condemning him for alcoholism and his wickedness. In rescuing Esau, Ethan develops bronchitis, but he believes the following: “A life saved in exchange for a few hours lost and a bad case of bronchitis. A good trade” (*The Lighthouse* 108), demonstrating his appreciation of every human life as well as his altruistic and self-sacrificing character. He later finds out that Esau died, but that he had confessed before death. Saving Esau’s earthly life,

Ethan also gave him a chance (and by talking to him perhaps an encouragement) to repent for his sins, which implies that not only did he save his earthly life, but he also had an influence on saving his soul. After Esau's death, Ethan wants to buy Esau's motor at Biggs' shop, because it "would be a reminder of the importance—and the consequences—of rescues" (*The Lighthouse* 108). He also negotiates with Biggs in the way that he wipes out Esau's debt to Biggs. Based on the evidence presented, it is reasonable to assume that being a lighthouse keeper does not represent only a job to Ethan, but a true calling, a way to help people and to save them in every possible way, appreciating them as valuable human beings. He does this with an admirable sense of responsibility, which makes him invaluable. However, the hardest task set in front of Ethan is what turns out to be his last rescue. He feels the responsibility to help, even though it represents a danger for him, as he neither knows where the boat in distress is nor does he have the appropriate equipment. Similar to rescuing Esau, Ethan's act has more far-reaching effects than saving earthly lives—among others, Ethan, namely, saves the life of a future priest, who will have a share in saving many souls for heaven. Before his death, Ethan bought the island to be able to stay on it since he was to be replaced with an automated beacon. In a time of technological advances, O'Brien shows that technology will never be able to replace humans: if Ethan as a lighthouse keeper had been replaced with an automated beacon, nobody would have saved the people on the boat, which is the best evidence of Ethan's indispensability. However, it is not the job that makes him irreplaceable, but his irreplaceability comes from his person and the way he is doing his job.

Thirdly, Ethan, as a self-taught woodcarver, finds a meaning through his art. As O'Brien claims, "any . . . art form that is true and beautiful and good . . . may bring about clear reflection on the meaning and purpose of things" (*Arriving Where We Started* 13), and Ethan's art is just like that. Ethan is very passionate about his carvings and puts his soul into them. He first makes a figurehead for the boat and O'Brien describes the dedication with which he does it:

> Day after day, he sat in a corner of the kitchen that he had cleared for the purpose, examining the lines and grain of the log (. . .). Tentatively at first, with uncertainty of hand, he tapped with wooden mallet and steel chisels, learning the art by trial and error. Though he suffered cuts and splinters, he saw that his droplets of blood absorbed by the wood were part of his investment in the boat, in the figurehead which represented it, for instinctively he knew that any abiding love would have a cost.
>
> . . . The curl of a wood shaving doing what it should do as it parted from the main form, fulfilling hopes and estimations, gave Ethan joy—sometimes a laugh of pleasure.

Oh, now I see how you will be, what you will become. You will be beautiful, and I will love you always. (*The Lighthouse* 33–34)

Isolated from people, Ethan directs all his love to his art. His blood that the wood absorbs represents a part of him, his essence, but also his love and sacrifice that he builds into his carving. In a way, it becomes like his child (as in the expression "his blood"). In the descriptions of carving and painting the puffin, Ethan almost seems like God in the Book of Genesis—creating carefully and seeing that what he created was good. However, humble as he is, he does not become arrogant with pride when he sees how perfect his puffin is. Instead, he gazes at his creation in wonder and does not understand how it came from him (*The Lighthouse* 36), which implies that somebody else stands behind the act of creation—the first Creator, in whose act of creation people participate with their creative spirit. However, creating is not merely art for Ethan; it enables him to understand life. He, namely, sees the wood shavings as "*the losses that make it* [the puffin] *what it will become*" (*The Lighthouse* 34), just like the losses shaped Ethan into the person he is. Moreover, as already mentioned, he gives his carvings away as meaningful presents that show how much he cares about certain people. For example, he carves a boat for Elsie, whose husband never returned from the sea and whose boat was just matchsticks when it was found. Ethan wants to say: "*It's for your husband, for you to remember him by. So that his boat is not matchsticks, that he is not lost forever at the bottom of the sea, that he's with you still*" (*The Lighthouse* 116). Elsie is amazed with the beauty of the carving and so overwhelmed with gratitude that her eyes fill with tears. She kisses Ethan on the top of his head and places the carving in pride of place. Similarly, when Ross sees Ethan's carving of a dolphin, he is genuinely delighted and says that it is "fantastic," "beautiful," a masterpiece (*The Lighthouse* 122–23), and "*fine* art" (*The Lighthouse* 126). When he is about to leave the island, Ethan gives him the dolphin carving as a sign of gratitude for his help and company, and Ross is so touched that he is at a loss for words. These examples show that Ethan finds the meaning of his life in the act of creating, which he enjoys, and he also enriches the world with the beauty of his art. Through it, he also connects to people he cares about, showing compassion and solace or expressing gratitude.

Fourthly, Ethan also realizes the meaning of his life though creative values by doing random acts of kindness. Some of them are the aforementioned carved gifts. Furthermore, Mr. Biggs, the chandler, is represented in the novel as a gouging salesman who fleeces Ethan on one occasion. However, when Ross recovers a bell from an old ship wreckage, and Ethan concludes that Biggs' great-grandfather was the only survivor of the wreckage, he gives the bell to Biggs, who is touched by the present. Ethan never judges people but does what he believes

is the right thing—he gives Biggs the bell because he believes it should belong to him. Even though Ethan's carvings or the bell might be valuable to him, he is not attached to material things, but generously gives them to others, and people are often moved by Ethan's kindness. In fact, when Ethan visits the church in which the model boat he carved hangs, his thoughts reflect the reason why he made the boat, but also why he gives and tries to be kind on every occasion:

> He looked upward to the great wooden roof beams and was pleased to see the new *Star of the Sea* hanging on a golden chain above the central aisle. *Peter's Bark* or *Norbert's Boat*. She was beautiful, he now realized. And perhaps she consoled some broken hearts. He felt very good about that, and was thankful that no one would ever know who made it. It was enough to have done a thing that shifted the imbalance in the world. Some people stole, but others gave. Too many takers, and the boat capsizes; enough givers, and she rights herself. It was a matter of choice what kind of person you would be. (*The Lighthouse* 174)

Ethan again shows his humbleness, since he does not seek recognition for his carving, even though he is aware of its beauty. What is important to him is to do good deeds, even anonymously, to do those acts of kindness that will make a positive impact in the world. His acts of kindness are deeds that do not seem particularly significant on first sight, but that will still make a difference, like consoling broken hearts, which makes him happy. Although Ethan is not a Christian, he acts like one in this aspect. Finally, the last sentence of this paragraph is completely in the spirit of Frankl's philosophy, as he believes that we have the freedom and responsibility to choose who we will be, and Ethan chooses to be a giver in order to shift the imbalance in the world. All that he does regarding creative values makes him indispensable and irreplaceable in the world. Through his learning, work, art, and good deeds, Ethan truly serves God and his neighbors, which God rewards by making his efforts meaningful.

The Island of the World

Creative values in *The Island of the World* are represented not so much through work but through good deeds and art. Even as a child scarred by anguish, Josip opens his heart toward the needy, both physically and spiritually. An example of a physical act of mercy is illustrated in the event when Josip lets an old, very thin man have the entrails of a fish he has caught, although Josip and his aunt would have eaten them. A spiritual act of mercy is depicted in the earlier described spiritual consolation of hospitalized patients who yearn for peace.

Moreover, Josip finds a meaning in playing football and swimming but, most of all, in his major subject, mathematics, which he intertwines with poetry:

> Without knowing it, he is integrating the disciplines of astronomy, mathematics, and physics into a zone of astrophysics with metaphysical innuendos. When he is able to jot down on pieces of paper his intuitions about this emerging sense of reality, they manifest themselves as phrases that, even to their author, have a certain beauty. He would not dare to call them poems. They are not poems, and he certainly no longer entertains any interest in a world beyond this one. Yet he does not dismiss these fragments out of hand. He feels that they may at some point in the future find their place in a purely physical cosmology that he hopes to develop. (*The Island of the World* 213–14)

He writes down his intuitions and questions in a little book titled *Fragments*. Although Josip does not consider his fragments poetry, his friend Antun Kusić does, so he invites him to become part of a group producing culture alternative to the Yugoslavian censored culture. The group decides to publish an illegal journal, *Dobri Dupin*, which is a very risky and dangerous venture in the communist regime. This artistic activity eventually leads to Josip's imprisonment on Goli Otok. Despite everything, Josip continues to write poems until the end of his life. His poems become published in several collections, and, in his old age, he becomes a famous poet. In this way, Josip's uniqueness enriches both Josip's life and the society and hence acquires meaning.

While on Goli Otok, Josip tries to stay human by helping others and in this way repays the kindness and help he received when he arrived on the island. For instance, every few days, he shares half of his daily bread with one of the six men who helped him. In order to rebel against the inhumane treatment, he suggests developing a secret sub-culture and lead dialogues. In the end, he promises his companions that he would never forget them—indeed, even as an old man, he remembers them and prays for them. In this way, Josip develops spiritually by serving other prisoners, which in turn gives him a meaningful existence.

After escaping from Goli Otok, he is hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic, where he helps other patients. He manages to restore speech to the speechless, movement to the immobilized, and an occasional smile to the despairing. Therefore, after his recovery, he is hired as a volunteer gardener there, but he also helps addicts with the stories from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. He tells one of them that, in order to return home, it was necessary for Odysseus to conquer the monster within himself. He explains: "when you return, you find that you have returned with your whole self" (*The Island of the World* 512), but the boy does not have a home. Josip's answer to that is strongly reminiscent of the Lastavica's advice to Josip many years ago: "Then you must make your home in your own heart" (*The Island of the World* 513). In other words, by finding God in himself, he will find meaning. He thinks that "[t]hese are noble

sentiments. He plants them wherever he may, and perhaps life will permit them to sprout in the damaged lives of these children. (. . .) And maybe the seed he plants will grow into a big tree and bear its proper fruit in time. He hopes for this. What else can he do?" (*The Island of the World* 513). Although his wife and child are dead, and he can do nothing about it, he can still help others at least a little, which is an attempt to find meaning in his own life, but also to help others find freedom from their addictions and demons, enabling them to find the purpose of their own lives. After his conversion, he continues to be kind. For example, he talks to beggars about their lives, plants seeds also in their minds, gives them coins, and buys them food. Yet, one of his most frequent good deeds is prayer for others.

When he moves to New York, he works as a janitor. Even though he has a PhD in mathematics and was working as an assistant professor of mathematics at the University of Split, he does not consider the job of a janitor to be beneath his dignity and does it conscientiously. For example, he tries to get close to his problematic, fatherless neighbor Caleb and teach him to be a good man. When the two of them see a teenage drug addict, Josip gives her some food that he had with him and prays for her. She elbows him aside, but he blesses her before continuing on his way. Caleb thinks that Josip is crazy to help her, but Josip explains to him that he knows the girl—that she is himself, since he was her age when he was sitting in the same posture, having nowhere to go. He is aware that he cannot save her, but he can at least offer her some food. With this, Josip's life gains a meaning as the girl's realization that somebody cares might influence her life; Josip's deed has, however, the most striking effect on Caleb, as he suddenly buys some things and goes in search for the girl. Since Caleb is bad at school but has outstanding potential, Josip tries to interest him in studying in various ways. Josip has become like father to Caleb, and it turns out that his yearlong efforts with the boy have paid off—from a street rat and school dropout, he becomes an exemplary citizen, professor, and a good man. The effect of Josip's good deed is twofold. In the first place, through his help and love for Caleb, supported by his own exemplary behavior, Josip discovers the meaning of his life. Additionally, the success of his attempt to raise Caleb has another effect: he manages to prove to Caleb his uniqueness, worth, and potential, which leads to Caleb's realization of the purpose of his own life and their mutual love.

Josip finds creative ways to help other people even when they are not interested in receiving help, or when they hate him, or both. These extremely difficult but noble Christian undertakings prove to be a blessing both for Josip and the people in question. Such a person is a woman who sells fish at the market and who is extremely rude to Josip but not to other customers. Despite Josip's belief that she is a Serb, he keeps coming in order to tame her. Even

if his attempts at taming her fail, he is prepared to spend his entire life enduring her as a form of reparation:

> He can accept the insult as a mild form of humiliation offered for her soul and offered as payment for sins committed against her people by Croats. The disproportion in this, however, seems incredibly unfair, because most of the victims of Yugoslavia's confusion were not, are not, and probably will not be Serbs. Even so, she has an eternal soul, and he feels pity for her. Whenever she throws a dart, he takes it in the chest and says a silent prayer for her. (*The Island of the World* 601–02)

Each Christmas he thanks her for her services and gives her a box of biscuits, but she ignores him. Eventually, she starts to cry and yells at him to leave her alone, as she thinks that he is from UDBA[23] and that he killed her son. It turns out that her son was Ante, the prisoner on Goli Otok who kept Josip alive and helped him escape. He tells her that Ante "was one of the few who did not lose his honor—on an island where there was little honor" (*The Island of the World* 612). Josip's persistence with the woman paid off—not only did he tame her or endure as reparation, but he also managed to reveal his real identity to her and to console her with the information about her son, freeing her soul of hatred.

Josip tries to practice mercy every time he gets the chance both as penance and charity. There are two boys that he is merciful to through his good deeds. Firstly, in Josip's building lives Jason, an eight-year-old boy who suffers from a severe mental disability, epilepsy, and hyperactivity, which makes his parents perpetually exhausted. Friends, doctors, teachers, and especially family members believe that he should not exist and do not help Jason's parents at all. Yet, because he sees the purity of Jason's soul, Josip sees how evil their thinking is and decides to help his parents by loving and caring for the boy. When, unfortunately, Jason dies, Josip looks at his body, which he sees still for the first time, thinking: "It is easy to see how magnificent he would have looked like if he had not been given his crosses. As Josip prays before the body, he comes to understand that Jason *was* a magnificent human being" (*The Island of the World* 621). Josip's recognition of the value of the boy's life, which so many people fail to recognize, enriches both his and the lives of Jason and his family. What is more, one morning, Josip finds a dead infant with the umbilical cord attached. Feeling only numbed horror, he takes the baby to the church and kneels before the tabernacle. "[I]t seems to him that he is presenting not only this child to its creator, but himself also" (*The Island of the World* 650). One of the friars baptizes the baby conditionally, and Josip gives him the name Abel Kristijan Bogdan.

[23] The secret police of Communist Yugoslavia.

Josip and the friar bury the baby, performing an act of mercy: to bury the dead. Through these two acts of mercy, O'Brien shows that every life is meaningful and valuable: Jason, although ill, is worthy of love and life, Abel is a beloved child of God even though his mother rejected him, and Josip, despite his sufferings, is merciful to both, for which he is rewarded with discovering a meaning of life.

Finally, during the Homeland War in Croatia, "Josip prays fervently for proliferating intentions—the preservation of innocent lives, the conversion of guilty lives, for the survival of a nation, for democracy" (*The Island of the World* 675). Since the Croatian army needs money, Josip decides to make sacrifices: he lives on bread and water for weeks and sells some of his belongings in order to send as much money as he can to Croatia. In conclusion, with his good deeds, Josip gives his share in building a civilization of love but also finds a meaning of his life.

Strangers and Sojourners

Anne once declares: "I believe I would have died in one way or another had I not been able to make (babies, ideas, words, moments of meeting). In creating we are made strong, we sort order out of the chaos of existence. We learn to play again, like the child" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 409). As the quote indicates, she achieves creative values, so important to her, in various ways: through her family, work, environmental and social activism.

One of Anne's good deeds is instrumental in creating her family. Namely, a set of circumstances brings her to the home of Stephen Delaney, the mysterious man she has been drawn to since seeing him with horses. Sick with typhoid, Stephen lies unconscious in a serious condition, and she needs to take care of him in a completely unromantic and extremely unpleasant way: she must wash him due to his incontinence. Even though they fight over English-Irish politics in the beginning of their acquaintance, they become close and decide to marry. She raises their children with love and care, teaches them, reads to them, provides tenderness. "Her children thirsted for her smiles and received them. She touched them often with her hands" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 197). Anne takes loving care of the household, her husband, children, and grandchildren, realizing a meaning of life in the roles of a wife, mother, and grandmother.

Moreover, when Anne travels to Canada to work as a teacher, she doubts that she can be of any use to the children "bred for toil, to clear the forest, to question nothing" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 45). On her first working day, it turns out that the children in Swiftcreek indeed lack any previous education, and she fears staying there permanently, but then, all of a sudden, sun shines through the windows of the classroom, and she sees the beauty of her pupils. She

realizes that they are hungry for knowledge, although they are unaware of it, and that she can feed knowledge to them. This job fulfills Anne, and she loves her pupils. One of the brightest ones is Maurice L'Oraison, a poet at heart. However, he eventually becomes a cold-hearted businessman thirsty for power who wants to flood the valley in which his parents and Anne's family live. Even though Anne's realization of the meaning of life through her job might be questioned due to this, Maurice's actions do not influence it. Anne's efforts to educate her pupils were meaningful for her due to her devoted work. The value of her work also made a contribution to the society, which was enriched with knowledge, but Maurice's actions are his own responsibility and influence only his own meaning of life or the lack of it.

After marrying Stephen, Anne writes a column for the local newspaper, *The Echo*, and later becomes its owner. Writing is for her "a pleasure of words—of making" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 394). Her forthright approach to social and political issues often incurs the displeasure of her fellow citizens. "Couldn't they understand? She was crying out, not in condemnation of their mean and narrow ways, but to protest the state of their imprisonment, to call forth a civilization of love" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 257–58). Reflecting on the meaning of her vocation as a journalist, she writes in her diary:

> Is it possible that a failed poetess, a lapsed child, may finally become what she does not dare to define—a truth-sayer. If self-appointed roles of prophecy are distasteful to the observer, then even more distasteful and downright tragic is a calling abandoned, a gift extinguished. (. . .)
>
> For a brief burning moment I saw the depth of my call. (. . .) My powerlessness is necessary. There is much truth to be said. The world is crowding up with despair, with lies, with power. For most people, not only "*Gott*" is dead, but man too is dead. The reign of fear, the day of fire approaches. (*Strangers and Sojourners* 409–10)

Recognizing an acute crisis of meaning and values in the world, reflected in the Nietzschean concept of the death of God, which she believes has paved the way for the death of man, Anne realizes the importance of her calling. Foreseeing apocalyptic times, she realizes that speaking the truth is her responsibility in order to find the meaning of her own life and to help to prevent the existential crisis of the world. Anne's articles represent perhaps the sole resistance to individuals like MacPhale, "who run their businesses without regard for human life" (Maillet 82). In addition, she becomes a voice for her fellow citizens against the government, which wants to flood their farmland for electric power, but in vain—the men of power win. In fact, she fails in all her attempts to fight for or against something. Nevertheless, she believes that

"truth must be spoken even if no one will listen, no one will hear" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 533). Despite her failed attempts, her grandson acknowledges her achievements:

> But had she forgotten that prime ministers and cabinet ministers from the Atlantic to the Pacific were now reading her little sheet? Most of the twelve hundred *Echo* subscriptions went elsewhere than Swiftcreek. From sea unto sea people chuckled over her wit and insights, reprinted snippets in the larger journals, and sat back, some of them, to think about what she said. Not too bad for an old lady. (*Strangers and Sojourners* 533)

Her grandson's observation witnesses a possible influence of Anne's articles on high-ranking officials, foreshadowing her impact on the world and its values. Exercising her freedom, responsibility, and conscience, Anne fulfills her vocation of a journalist with a mission to speak the truth.

A Cry of Stone

Father Andrei's words predict the mission of Rose's life: "I believe she will do much good in this world and bring back certain souls from the region of the lost" (*A Cry of Stone* 124). Rose realizes creative values through good deeds, prayer, and art. Although her sacrifices also qualify as good deeds, they are a combination of creative and attitudinal values, and will be analyzed in the chapter on attitudinal values. As previously mentioned in the discussion of spirituality, Rose sometimes prays for her own intentions but often prays for others.

Many of her good deeds are related to Tchibi, as she calls Binemin. Rose knits socks and her grandma a wool tuque for him, because his clothes are torn and he has no hat. When he receives their presents, he is at a loss of words and just stares at the clothes while his eyes fill with tears. Rose incessantly prays for him and guides him to God, but he becomes a shaman and abandons Christianity. Yet, since Rose has devoted her life to prayers and sacrifices for him, God nevertheless saves his soul in the end.

Rose performs an especially touching good deed for Mrs. Boyle, the tyrant cook in Rose's residential school, who is hated both by the personnel and by the students. Her fierce temper, insolence, and vindictiveness over food complaints make everybody fear her. In addition, she struggles with alcoholism. However, Rose decides to buy her a strawberry ice cream spending a gold coin her grandmother left her after death, although it is painful for her to part with it. When Rose arrives to bring her gift to Mrs. Boyle, the cook is initially rude and insulting. But when Rose gives her the ice cream, Mrs. Boyle begins to cry and sob, asking Rose how she knew that on that day, eighteen years before, her son had died in a car accident. Mrs. Boyle offers Rose a scoop of the ice cream, but Rose refuses, since she has bought the ice

cream for Mrs. Boyle. She says: “For me? All of it, then, for me? You’re a strange orfin t’be sure, fer never have I knowed a nipper t’be turnin’ down the ice cream” (*A Cry of Stone* 246). It turns out that her son’s favorite dessert was strawberry ice cream. Mrs. Boyle enjoys Rose’s company and invites her to visit her again, which she does. The results of Rose’s good deed soon become visible: the notorious Mrs. Boyle softens, gives Rose a Christmas present, begins to drink less, the food becomes better and is finally served in generous quantity. “In this way, even former enemies were disarmed without a struggle, for Mrs. Boyle had forgiven them with as much absoluteness as she had once hated them” (*A Cry of Stone* 247). With this small act of kindness, Rose manages to transform Mrs. Boyle and to help her overcome her demons. Mrs. Boyle leaves part of her inheritance to Rose, which she uses to attend an art school.

Another of Rose’s noteworthy good deeds occurs at the art school. In one of her art classes, the students are supposed to draw a nude model, who is covered only with a pair of underpants. Rose recognizes the man’s fear and shame as he undresses. Rose “tried to draw the magnificent torso, but her hands would not do it, for that would be an act of reduction, of pushing him deeper into the realm of things. For a thing to be a thing was good. For a man to be a thing was to be degraded into less than a thing, into a no-thing” (*A Cry of Stone* 324). Unable to draw this suffering man, she prays for him. However, the students want him to take his underwear off, which he unwillingly obeys, obviously agonized. During a break, Rose approaches him and offers him lunch. She asks for his name and talks to him, aiming to restore his dignity and a sense of worth. Rose learns from their conversation that the man is compelled to work as a model to send money back home to his wife and children in Jamaica. She therefore gives him all the money that she has on herself, two hundred dollars, and says it is for him from the Beating Heart, stating the reason: “You will know you are not a thing, you are not a no-thing, you are a good man, a father, a husband, a man who went naked for his babies” (*A Cry of Stone* 330).

Furthermore, art is one of Rose’s major realizations of meaning. For her, it is “both an aesthetic and a spiritual practice” (Maillet 181). Art offers her consolation, as time and pain seem to disappear when she paints or sculpts. An example of the transcendent quality of her pictures can be seen in her drawing of a new teacher, Euphrasia Gorrel, to whom Rose becomes attached as a child. Rose paints her asleep but in anguish, with broken wings, from which blood dribbles, and with an ugly black stone instead of her heart. A large bird protects her from above. On the right side a monstrous creature wants to devour her, while on the left side a young man with pure and strong eyes calls her to awake. The narrator says: “It was disturbing, yet permeated by a dreadful beauty. The execution was a mixture of amateurishness and flashes of

genius" (*A Cry of Stone* 78). Rose's iconography depicts Miss Gorrel's state of soul in a life without God—the blackness of her soul and the forces of good and evil fighting for it. Rose's pictures, including this one, convey truthfulness and a call to conversion. They are not merely art but means of seeking God, truth, and meaning, both for Rose and others. As one of the nuns from the residential school observes, Rose's pictures have the power to do good to the souls of those who look into them, guiding them towards the realm of love, hope, and rising (*A Cry of Stone* 268). Looking at her own pictures, Rose sees the following:

> If there was a unifying theme in them it was that the earth was afire with beauty, a savage beauty, falling and rising and ever changing into other forms. Birds swam, fish flew, trees danced, the sky breathed. All things moved as the poetry in them thawed.
>
> The pictures of people were insideness pictures, the states of their hearts, their souls, their minds. Their shattering beauty. Grandma and Tchibi as they were, Kateri as she imagined her, Jesus as she saw him with the insideness seeing, not the seeing that is confused by the eyes. (*A Cry of Stone* 269)

In this regard, Hugo and Esther, both artists, recognize Rose's original voice in her pictures, and Esther describes them in this way: "It's all grounded in a passionate reality suffused with some kind of metaphysics" (*A Cry of Stone* 435). During the period Rose lives with them, her art reaches its fullest meaning both for herself and others, revealing its evangelical mission. Hugo and Esther are Jews, though not religious, and while they affect Rose's artistic development, it is Rose who exercises the biggest influence on them. Rose finds out that Hugo was once a gifted realist, but after a nervous breakdown, he embraced abstraction as therapy and does not understand that abstraction is killing him. His nihilism leads to an existential crisis, as he no longer sees life's magnificence. In the conversations among the three of them, O'Brien implies that realism, especially Christian realism, is meaningful, while abstraction conveys meaninglessness: "Absurdity and darkness and destruction dissolving into one lie—that there is nothing but death" (*A Cry of Stone* 505). As suggested, Rose's Christian realistic art gives her life meaning, unlike Hugo's abstract nihilistic art, which leads him to existential crises. Suffering profoundly, he destroys his paintings. Seeing Rose's paintings reminds Hugo of his artistic beginnings, and Esther's prediction uttered to Rose comes true: "This is a gift to us, because your pictures have spoken to something long buried in him. It may even awaken him" (*A Cry of Stone* 485). He, namely, begins a new era of his art and returns to realism, which is followed by a positive change in his outlook on life, marked by his statement: "I decline to accept the end of man" (*A Cry of Stone* 489). However, Hugo does not transform his outlook on life completely; although he senses the existence of the Creator and abandons

the nihilistic philosophy, he appears to be reluctant to embrace this realization, remaining an agnostic. Rose has an impact on Esther too. A Holocaust survivor, Esther is aware that "[t]o suffer is to live. To live is to suffer. This I have accepted. This is the price of the paintings" (*A Cry of Stone* 462). As Maillet observes, "[r]ealism is thus at the core of the aesthetic that produced Esther's most famous wartime painting, 'Birds in Wartime.' Perhaps this painting, and her current realistic practice, allow Esther to appreciate Rose's aesthetic, despite not accepting the metaphysis that lies behind it" (191). Esther returns to painting this old motif of hers, and the change induced by Rose's presence and art is symbolized by Esther's newest painting found on the easel after her sudden death: it was "a depiction of a woman selling crated pigeons. Similar to the earlier work, it was different in that the woman gazed at the birds with great love, her hand resting on the open doorway of the cage. The birds, ruffling their wings, took flight" (*A Cry of Stone* 540). After Esther's death, Hugo is desperate and the only thing preventing him from suicide is Rose. Another existential crisis, however, causes Hugo's mental breakdown, during which he burns all his realistic paintings and demolishes the house, ending up in a psychiatric hospital. Before he dies, he writes Rose a letter in which he admits that she may be right for being a believer and that she saved him. In other words, Rose's art and their discussions about art seem to have ignited a spark of faith in Hugo.

The interconnectedness of Rose's art and faith with the meaning of her life are illustrated in the following passage:

> She drew and painted each day, and this labor forced her to be attentive to the core of her life's meaning. She often admonished herself that life was not about exposure, or shows, or people's opinions. Life was faithfulness to the word that surfaced within you. Regardless of whether you were making a picture of birds and animals, the more mysterious scenes of the heart, or the struggle between good and evil, life was speaking a word, and your task was to repeat it as closely as possible. (*A Cry of Stone* 577)

For Rose, art is a way to discover the meaning of life, which she views as an internal, spiritual quest for God's truth rather than something external. She strives to remain true to this divine truth by faithfully expressing it through her pictures. During her exhibition, she prays that her artwork touches the souls of those who see them. God speaks to her: "*Now do your labors and your sacrifices become visible* (. . .). *Words for the blind to see.* (. . .) *Many will look without seeing, hear without understanding. Some will see and hear, but it is not for you to know*" (*A Cry of Stone* 585). In other words, God promises that her art will guide other people to him, to meaning. As she explains, her pictures are not merely her own expression: "My way is to be a beloved twig in the hands of the Creator. We make the pictures together" (*A Cry of Stone* 588).

This is the reason why the gallery does not want to exhibit her art anymore: paradoxically, even though all her paintings were sold out, the curator of the gallery condescendingly claims that no one is interested in Christian art and that Rose does not understand what she loves, openly accusing the Church of being "a necrotic tumor on the social body" (*A Cry of Stone* 609). Namely, Rose "is expected to express what has become a familiar narrative: Christianity suppressed Native religion so that White Europeans could colonize and control Native culture" (Maillet 194). The curator disdainfully states that Rose needs to be authentic, "like the true native artists" (*A Cry of Stone* 609). Ironically, the majority of those artists mostly paint the mythology of shamanism, opening themselves to demon spirits and thus to evil, which is not only utterly unoriginal but, as Rose notices, also very dangerous. By failing to recognize that Rose's pictures are indeed the authentic expression of Rose's inner reality, the curator voices the postmodernist disdain for the sacred, revealing her ignorance of the most profound kind of art—the art from the soul, which gives meaning to the artist and enriches the observers.

At the same time, Mrs. Morgan, who later turns out to be Euphrasia Gorrel, recognizes the true value of Rose's pictures: "The gallery seriously undervalued them. These are very important works of art (. . .). Your work contains genuine insight and a harsh beauty. It is presently considered of little account in the world of commercial and public art. Those worlds are dominated by politics, influence, and greed" (*A Cry of Stone* 616–17). She buys many of them at a significant price, showing her appreciation of Rose's art. In a letter she later sends to Rose, Mrs. Morgan reveals her real identity and sends Rose a small black pearl to dispose of, alluding to Rose's old picture of her, writing: "It is torn from my heart. I never want to see it again. Now I am empty, waiting to be filled" (*A Cry of Stone* 609). Through this, O'Brien hints that, as God promised, among the unknown others, Rose's art has transformed Euphrasia's heart, and she is now ready to change and accept God in her heart. Although unsigned, Rose's pictures are bequeathed to a gallery by Mrs. Morgan, where they continue to speak Rose's word of transcendence to their observers even after her death.

The Fool of New York City

Billy realizes creative values through helping people, and the plot of *The Fool of New York City* focuses on his help to Francisco. When he sees Francisco in an abandoned building, he takes him to the hospital, where they cannot admit him without identification. Then he takes him to the police, but they cannot discover who he is. Instead of leaving him in a shelter, he decides to buy him food and take him to his modest home. He usually sleeps on two joined mattresses because of his height, but now he gives one to Francisco. Even though Francisco notices that Billy is poor, Billy disagrees and generously shares everything he has with his

guest. Not only does he provide for him, but he suggests that they together discover who Francisco is. Billy is extremely generous and compassionate toward Francisco and does not let him believe he is a burden to him. In his humble way, he explains: "It makes me happy when I can do any small thing. So you see, you're doing me a favor" (*The Fool of New York City* 28). Although Francisco has a feeling of lifelong solitude, Billy's kindness offers him a sense of companionship: "I feel as if I have always been alone. But not today" (*The Fool of New York City* 30).

Billy is ready to do anything to discover Francisco's identity, even to hire a driver to take them to Toronto, since it seems to him that Francisco might be from Canada. However, their attempt to cross the border comes to an inglorious end when they are refused entry to Canada due to the lack of documents and accused of being terrorists. Whenever Francisco feels down, Billy consoles him. As eccentric as he is, one day, Billy brings home a stuffed hooded merganser in a bad condition and asks Francisco to help him to repair it. This seems to be Billy's way of making Francisco feel useful, which is revealed in Francisco's observation: "I am feeling more confident because now I can contribute something to Billy's life. It is a terrible thing to be locked into the role of the constant taker" (*The Fool of New York City* 88). Billy also includes Francisco in his helping endeavors: the two of them volunteer at a soup kitchen and make and distribute sandwiches on the streets to poor people. Paradoxically, people are more likely to take a sandwich from Francisco because they feel intimidated by Billy's height, but Billy does not seem to mind, incessantly finding new ways to help others. Billy even redecorates one of the empty rooms in the building to be filled with Francisco's "mnemonic prompts" to help him to remember and puts there a Matchbox racing car, which is one of Francisco's memories. On the trail of another memory, Billy takes Francisco to Vermont, where they find the clues to Francisco's identity, and shortly afterwards, his memory returns. It is important to notice that Billy is remarkably compassionate, considerate, patient, and gentle with Francisco, who has difficulties first to accept his amnesia and then his rediscovered identity. As he is dedicated to helping Francisco now, Billy devoted himself to saving people from the catastrophe of 9/11. He tried to warn the guards in the skyscrapers, but they did not believe him. He was warning people day by day, but they would not listen. When he got some money, he spent it for printing warnings. After being arrested for all these attempts, he got locked in the psychiatric institute to which he had been admitted due to amnesia. On the day of the attack, he managed to escape and helped people running away from the skyscrapers. When Max returns to live in his apartment, he makes frequent visits to Billy's apartment, but Billy is often on his

errands. Max comes to the following conclusion: "I now understand that this is his role—the rescuer" (*The Fool of New York City* 251).

At the same time, Max's realization of creative values is primarily focused on art. He even moves to Paris to develop his art and manages to get his paintings exhibited. This leads to successful sales of his paintings and a thriving career in the USA, eventually making him semi-rich. His paintings are mostly depictions of September 11 as ways of expressing his personal trauma. While Françoise accuses him of painting "the darkness at the heart of the American dream," he rather intends to "paint a protest against the forces of annihilation, against hatred, irrationality, violence" (*The Fool of New York City* 186). After his transformation in the wake of his amnesia and friendship with Billy, his 9/11 paintings alter in meaning. As he notes:

> On one level they are the same. On another, I see them with new eyes—see my own experience with greater understanding. A trauma can keep you stalled at the age it happened to you. You can bury the memory and think it's dealt with, done and gone. It is never gone, but it must be transformed into something that gives us life. To overcome death, you must create life. But we have to choose to undertake this hard labor, if we would grow older and wiser, and—as Billy said, as Granddad Robbie said—become who we are. Part of me, until now, has remained eleven years old. Now I can begin the long process of growing up. (*The Fool of New York City* 254)

Max's new insights and grieving his loss enable him to overcome his trauma by transforming it into something that creates life. As his paintings represent his way of dealing with the trauma, the new ones convey a more optimistic outlook than the older ones. Deciding to keep his life simple, he buys a rural property in Vermont that once belonged to his grandparents, cleans and renovates it. There he continues practicing art. Katie, the girl he likes, observing him painting, summarizes the meaning of life that Max finds in art. Namely, she notices that his love for the tree he is painting is evident in the painting itself, adding: "People look at things and never really see them (. . .). No flower, no sky, no tree is entirely like another. Each marvel in the world has its own place and character, its own beauty. And you respect it as something unique and glorious" (*The Fool of New York City* 254). Katie's observation reveals that Max considers art to be his true vocation, which then represents the meaning of his life.

Sophia House

Pawel realizes creative values through art, literature, and good deeds. He develops an interest in art in his childhood, and it becomes his haven: "Whenever he drew birds or clouds, he felt happy. It felt like flying. It was a kind of language, though he knew very little of its vocabulary" (*Sophia House* 48). However, when he decides to pursue a career of a painter in

Paris, he fails. In Paris, he shifts his focus from the meaning art brings him to how others perceive his paintings, trying to adapt to their expectations, which takes the meaning away from his art. Namely, galleries refuse to exhibit his paintings because they consider impressionism, his style, a thing of the past. As a result, "Pawel's confidence in contemporary art had been faltering for some time. His confidence in his own skills was hanging by a thread" (*Sophia House* 61). Vulnerable due to poverty and homelessness, Pawel becomes a protégé of the novelist Achille Goudron, who leads him further away from finding meaning in art by suggesting that Pawel should completely abandon any connection to the past in his art and "destroy old values—false notions of good and evil" (*Sophia House* 78), which implies that Pawel should abandon the value system of Christianity. Unable to find any meaning in this new kind of art, Pawel is moved by Rouault's painting of Christ in agony. As a Christian painter, Rouault offers him different advice than Goudron: he suggests that he should paint what he loves, directing him to meaning. However, Goudron assures "Pawel that the new humanism was superior to Rouault's so-called Christian humanism, dominated as it was by a cruel tyrant god who could never be placated" (*Sophia House* 94). Therefore, under his influence, Pawel starts painting the motifs of human degradation, but Rouault warns him that he should never forget human dignity in such paintings, again emphasizing Christian values. When Goudron attempts to sexually seduce him, Pawel is so angry at Goudron and disappointed by their friendship that he feels loathing for his own paintings and does not care what happens to them: "They were, after all, Goudron's creation" (*Sophia House* 78). This testifies to the premise that Pawel's art in Paris held no meaning for him. In contrast, another painting emerges as meaningful to him—a painting of the Last Judgment, in which he recognizes his own suffering: in it, "he saw the drama of his inner life laid bare. Yes, it was a hopeless world, but the despair was relieved mysteriously by the magic of art. To find a painted incarnation of his darkness was to step outside of it for a moment, and in a sense, to transcend it" (*Sophia House* 102–03). He is thankful to its painter for unlocking a grief in him. As it turns out, the painter is the man he meets in front of the painting. He thanks Pawel for weeping over his painting, which he painted during a period of darkness. In this way, O'Brien shows that art can be meaningful both for the artist and for the audience. "The most grand and difficult work of art to produce, however, is the beauty of a good life: a life directed wholly and exclusively by the grand artisan himself, the Holy Spirit. Such a life is called saintly" (Weisel 122). Upon his return to Warsaw, Pawel gradually approaches such life by conforming his life to the image of Christ. In Warsaw, Pawel does not paint anymore but devotes himself to books and the bookshop his uncle bequeathed to him. His mission is to enrich people's lives by truth, and he even sells books to Germans, for

he believes that "truth can change even the most hardened heart" (*Sophia House* 161). Since people are misinformed about what the Nazis are actually doing, Pawel also helps to spread the truth about this by agreeing to make copies of a leaflet, which was brought to him by his brother, with the information that a million of Jews was killed.

Pawel's good deeds are also a realization of creative values. He is such a generous person that he gives money and food to people in need, not caring that he will not have enough left for himself. An especially notable example is his treatment of Mrs. Lewicki, who wants to sell her books to him because her husband is sick. Pawel does not have money, so he gives her several things and a few coins, the only money he has. He is amazed by one of the books the woman brought—an analysis of icon paintings by Andrei Rublëv. Recognizing the value of the book's contents, Pawel later brings her money after he earns some. Unknowingly, Mrs. Lewicki helped Pawel to find the meaning of life through this book. Additionally, Pawel's act also had a significant impact on Mrs. Lewicki's life. He later finds out that, when he visited her to give her more money, she was wretched, praying for a miracle, despairing over the power of evil in the world. With Pawel's money, she was able to buy medicine for her sick husband, who has miraculously recovered. Greatly inspired by Rublëv's paintings, Pawel writes a spiritual play about the iconographer's life, which has a major role in his discovery of the meaning of life, since by writing it, "the crack in the solid wall of his prison widened, and continued to widen until it became an open window" (*Sophia House* 177). The play is so significant to him that he claims it is saving his life (*Sophia House* 255), and he considers it his legacy. Pondering his play, Pawel brings a beautiful reflection on the meaningfulness of art:

> I read and reread my play as it materializes before my eyes and am amazed that all of this should come from me. It seems that a work of art is also exousia—a mysterious revelation of being. Is it, then, a form of love? If so, where does it come from?
>
> And who is it for? It does not matter if no one sees, no one hears. The artist's only concern is to bring it into existence. He must speak without listeners. He must do so without thought of reward. This is the path that lies before me. If I were to turn from it, I would surely die. I cling to this with a ferocity that is shocking. (*Sophia House* 259)

Pawel eventually asks Dr. Haftmann, a Nazi major, to have a copy of his play made and to make critical commentary to it. Haftmann agrees to do it but then keeps putting off returning the play to Pawel. Years later, Haftmann admits on his deathbed that he stole Pawel's play, published it under his name, and has lived on its reputation. However, he has arranged it to be republished under Pawel's name with a full explanation. He regrets that he "took the soul of another man

and called it [his] own" (*Sophia House* 486), which he truly did, since the play epitomized the meaning of Pawel's life.

Pawel's major good deed represents hiding and taking care of the fugitive David Schäfer in his attic. He shares with David the scarce food he manages to obtain. For instance, when David first enters his home, Pawel lets him eat a whole meal in spite of his own severe hunger. However, Pawel does not consider his deed something extraordinary—instead, he believes that anyone would do it. Yet, David is incredibly thankful to him and recognizes his deed as great. He tells him: "You are a tree of life for me, Pan Tarnowski. The Torah is the tree of life. Thus, the Torah lives in you!" (*Sophia House* 140). This good deed also represents the realization of experiential and attitudinal values as well as the ultimate meaning of Pawel's life, so it will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapters.

4.3.5.3. Experiential Values

The second way of discovering the meaning of life, according to logotherapy and existential analysis, are experiential values. They include "experiencing something – such as goodness, truth, and beauty – experiencing nature and culture or, last but not least, experiencing another human being in his very uniqueness – by loving him" (Frankl, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 102). Their significance lies in their capacity that enables us to recognize "the primordial beauty of life" and gives us spiritual strength to live meaningfully in other areas of life (Längle 41). Frankl believes that "love is the ultimate and highest goal to which man can strive," and it is the means by which man is saved (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 45).

According to Frankl, to love means to experience another human being as unique and singular. The one who is loved by someone becomes "indispensable and irreplaceable" without making any effort to cause this (*The Doctor and the Soul* 131). Consequently, since love is undeserved, it represents grace (*The Doctor and the Soul* 131). Besides, love is enchanting: in one's surrender to another person, the lover feels enriched in the interior of his being (*The Doctor and the Soul* 131–32)—"for him the whole cosmos broadens and deepens in worth, glows in the radiance of those values which only the lover sees" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 132). The third factor Frankl recognizes is that love may result in "the miracle of love"—a child, which is a new person, again unique and singular in its existence (*The Doctor and the Soul* 132).

Furthermore, Frankl claims that love is not merely an emotional state but "an intentional act. What it intends is the essence of the other person. This essence is ultimately independent of existence; *essentia* is not contingent upon *existentia*, and in so far as it has this freedom, it is

superior to *existentia*" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 135). Due to this, we say that love is stronger than death—the beloved one may not be alive anymore, but the love for the deceased still lives, since "his essence cannot be touched by death" (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 135). In other words, the unique essence of the beloved person is eternal, thus it cannot die (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 135).

According to logotherapy and existential analysis, only by loving can a person be aware of another person's essence. By loving a person, one can not only see the beloved one's characteristics but can also recognize the beloved's potentials and enable him or her to realize them (Frankl, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 102–103). Namely, "[l]ove helps the beloved to become as the lover sees him. For the loved one wants to be worthier of the lover, a worthier recipient of such love, by growing to be more like the lover's image, and so he becomes more and more the image of 'what God conceived and wanted him to be'" (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 146).

Kreeft states that love "transcends all other forces and their laws," since it is "the fundamental spiritual force in the universe" (*Three Philosophies of Life* 107). Love plays a significant role in Christianity since the foundation of Christianity lies in the commandments of love, which summarize what God asks of his children: to love God and their brothers and sisters.[24] Those who obey these commandments and believe can be called Christians, and they will be judged by their love, which is reminiscent of Frankl's view that man is saved by love. To love as a Christian does not mean to love only those we like or those who can offer something in return, but to love those who need our love. What is more, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also calls for love toward enemies: "But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike" (Matt. 5.44–45). Therefore, to love as a Christian means to love the way God loves, and, as Ratzinger points out, God does not love his children because they are especially good or virtuous, or because they deserve to be loved, or because he needs them, but God loves his children because *he* is good, he loves them although they cannot offer anything to him, although they do not deserve to be loved, like the prodigal son (*O smislu kršćanskog života* 48–49), which is comparable to Frankl's claim that love is undeserved. Love cannot be earned; thus it is a gift.

[24] "But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said, '*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul*, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: *You must love your neighbour as yourself*. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.'" (Matt. 22.34-40)

Those who strive to love in this manner, like God loves, will enter God's kingdom at the last judgment, and the Son of God will say to them: "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me" (Matt. 25.34–36). This implies that love for God and neighbor are inseparable. The center of the Pentateuch in the Old Testament emphasizes: "You must love your neighbour as yourself. I am Yahweh" (Lev. 19.18). Namely, if we love God, we should love our neighbor, because "in the neighbor is Jesus, who comes and asks us to host him" (Ratzinger, *Ljubav koja spašava* 127). Besides, love for one's neighbors should always include love for God, since we should not only help others materially but also bring God unto them; "[o]therwise, we forget what is important, that is, what is really and only 'necessary' (Luke 10.42)" (Ratzinger, *Ljubav koja spašava* 127).

Moreover, Ratzinger connects knowing God with love: "Only love knows love. Therefore, the knowledge of God's reality begins with the initiative of God's love for us and is realized if we accept the offer of that love. This is how we enter the miraculous circle of knowledge and love. Love enables us to see, and seeing to love" (*Ljubav koja spašava* 13). Similarly, Kreeft claims that the meaning of life is to know God, and that the best way to know him is to love him. For the same reason why love is the best way to know a human person, it is the best way to know God—namely, to love is to know someone most deeply (*Mali vodič za svakoga: Smisao života* 12, 21). Kreeft also notes that "Heaven is love, for Heaven is essentially the presence of God, and God is essentially love" (*Three Philosophies of Life* 9). In contrast, since God is love, Hell is the absence of God, and, as the elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* states, Hell is "[t]he suffering of being no longer able to love" (Dostoevsky 274).

Similarly to Frankl, Christianity does not see love as an emotion but as a decision. As Kreeft explains, love "is freely giving oneself to another person. Love is a choice, and not an emotion. It comes from you, and not to you. You do it with your heart, your center, and not only with your emotions. Because of this, 'in the evening of life, we will be judged on love' (saint John of the Cross)" (*Mali vodič za svakoga: Smisao života* 23). He adds that if you love God, you will love your neighbor even when you do not feel love toward him: "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Matt. 25.40). To illustrate, even when we do not feel self-love or self-respect, we still love ourselves and seek for happiness, and the second commandment of love says that we should love others as much as we love ourselves (*Mali vodič za svakoga: Smisao života* 26). Although

love has no cause, it has effects, and the effects of love are service and action (*Mali vodič za svakoga: Smisao života* 27). "Serving in Christian love can also reveal the true meaning of life to today's God-seekers" (Paloš 81).[25] As such, love also represents work. According to Kreeft, love and work are one, "for if love is to live, it must be a work. As Kierkegaard points out, love in Christianity is not a feeling, as it is for Romanticism; rather, 'love is the works of love.' That is why Christ can command love. Only a fool tries to command a feeling" (*Three Philosophies of Life* 111). Apart from work, love requires sacrifice, which can involve, for example, the sacrifice of one's selfishness, time, or wishes. Furthermore, suffering is inevitable in love:

> Love naturally suffers for the very obvious reason that it opens you up, exposes your tenderest, most vulnerable part, the quivering flesh of the heart, at the mercy of the beloved and of time and fate. If the beloved is human and not divine, you will always be betrayed. We always betray each other's love, in some way. That is what Original Sin means. (. . .) If you love, you will suffer. The only way to protect yourself against suffering is to protect yourself against love—and that is the greatest suffering of all, loneliness.
>
> But in the very act of suffering, love can transform suffering, redeem it, and conquer it. (. . .) Thus in Song of Songs the bride refers to her suffering for love and the burn marks this suffering has made in her flesh as marks of beauty, not of ugliness (. . .).
>
> [O]nly after the wilderness, after suffering, is love perfected. Not only does love transform and perfect suffering; suffering also transforms and perfects love. The two things that seem to be enemies turn out to be mutually reinforcing allies. For only in the silence of the wilderness do we hear God's still, small voice whispering to the heart of our heart. (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 113–14)

In addition, Kreeft reveals that the person who loves does not perceive the beloved one as one of many, but that this one human being represents to him the center of the world. The beloved one does not stand on the edge but at the very center of his thoughts, at the core of his own unique essence (*Three Philosophies of Life* 124). Human beings long to be loved by someone, and to love means to confirm: "It is good that you exist; how wonderful that you are!" (Pieper, *An Anthology* 30). It does not mean that the one who loves thinks it is good that you are *like that* (so smart, hardworking, or dexterous), but "how wonderful it is that you exist" (Pieper, *Tri spisa* 215). On the other hand, loving someone does not mean not seeing their flaws.

[25] Paloš refers here to the speech by Benedict XVI "Discorso di sua Santità Benedetto XVI alla 'Fondazione Sacra Famiglia di Nazareth' e all'Associazione laicale 'Comunità Domenico Tardini.'"

According to Ratzinger, the one who loves accepts the beloved one as he or she is, including the weaknesses. However, "real love . . . is connected with the truth and is focused on the truth of this person [the beloved one], which may be undeveloped, hidden, or blemished" (Ratzinger, *O vjeri, nadi i ljubavi* 104–05). By creating a person, God affirmed that it is good that this person exists and is worthy of love, and this God's love of creation is repeated by human love (Pieper, *Tri spisa* 215). It appears that it is not enough for human beings just to exist and to have been created by God—instead, they need this process of creation to be continued and perfected by "the creative power of human love," they need to be loved by a human being (Pieper, *An Anthology* 30). When they are loved, they will normally not take advantage of the indestructible love of the person who loves them, but they will strive to become worthy of that love (Ratzinger, *O smislu kršćanskog života* 42). Therefore, by loving someone, according to Pieper, we give them to themselves and allow them to exist (*Tri spisa* 219). This concept is similar to Frankl's belief that by loving someone, we allow him or her to realize all potentials in order to become the person God intended.

Pieper believes that all the reasons for joy are connected to receiving or owning what one loves, even if it included hope for something in the future or remembering the past (*Tri spisa* 260). Comparably, Frankl also notes that love cannot be nullified by death, which suggests that love toward someone who passed away can still bring joy to the one who loves. Apart from the joy of getting something or someone we love, according to Pieper, we also feel the joy of love itself, i.e., the joy we feel when we love. The reason for it is, as indicated by Pieper, because we love to love, and we receive what we love by loving it (*Tri spisa* 261). We want to be able to say that it is wonderful the person we love exists, and we are grateful to have received what we long for by nature and what we love, we are grateful that "we can wholeheartedly call something 'good'" (Pieper, *Tri spisa* 261).

4.3.5.4. Experiential Values in Michael O'Brien's Novels

The Lighthouse

The greatest challenge in Ethan's life are experiential values, especially when it comes to loving. According to Nelson, Ethan feels "a whispering desire for companionship" that he tends to ignore until he experiences other people's love and affection. Something more fundamental and natural than his need for solitude awakens in him when he is seen and known by others, most frequently by strangers, but not always, so that his dual need for both the presence and absence of other people becomes more and more troubling for him (Nelson).

After a troubled childhood with an unstable mother, Ethan has secluded himself on a solitary islet, far away from people. While he does his duty to mankind (rescuing people), he is quite happy to live as the sole resident of the island and to have minimal contact with people, because he distrusts them. The isolated life on the island and experiencing the beauty of nature help to heal his wounds:

> The boy had fallen in love with the place, had felt an injury in his soul gradually healing under the effects of distance and time and by the incessant rhythm of the surf, by the thrill of violent storms, and by the vast serenity of tranquil weather. On calm days he had bathed in the cold waves, had observed the comings and goings of wildlife, laughing at the seals' antics and wondering over his own laughter, so long silenced by life with human beings on the mainland. (*The Lighthouse* 10–11)

O'Brien further elaborates on the influence of life on the island on Ethan's mind and soul:

> And though at times he suffered from bad memories, they no longer tormented him, as if the tides protected him from all that had gone before. For the most part, he felt peace and the steady decline of fears save those of the natural kind: of falling into the sea, of freezing to death in winter, of tripping on a rock and fracturing his leg far from the radio, of the beacon breaking down. He also ceased to fear the inner turbulence that had been the habit of his childhood and youth, his loneliness, and his mistrust of human beings—though a quiet undertow of the mistrust remained. Against all odds, he had found a task in the world—and a home. (*The Lighthouse* 13)

Apart from finding his place in the world on the island and thus a meaning of his life, Ethan enjoys numerous new pleasures that the life on the island offers to him, such as the "thrill of standing at the cliff face on the high end of the island" (*The Lighthouse* 12), the taste of the first cod he caught, of boiled seabird eggs, and of wild rose hips, the smell of bonfires, the scent of salt from the ocean, listening to the seagull cries, and the "beating pulse of the surf" (*The Lighthouse* 12), all of which are realizations of experiential values. Ethan's closeness to nature and his humble lifestyle reflect O'Brien's love of nature and his own experiences of living in secluded areas such as the Arctic. As nature is for O'Brien "a medium of experiencing God" (Cavallin, *On the Edge of Infinity* 45), Ethan also experiences the presence of God or, as he calls it, *listeningness*, in nature. However, "[m]an is an animal created for love and togetherness. In love, our soul is willingly more in the beloved being than in our own body. So, in a certain way, loving means dying to yourself in order to live in a friend" (Hadjadj 51). As the plot develops, Ethan gradually realizes this verity through his encounters with others.

The core of Ethan's problems with interpersonal relations lies in his parents, and he considers isolation to be the cure for his brokenness. Namely, his father was unknown, and his mother often left him alone, drank, screamed, slapped him, later apologized, and then recidivated. Ethan withdrew "into silence, for he had learned while very young that promises were unreliable and that speech provoked incomprehension, misinterpretation, and at times, punishment" (*The Lighthouse* 31). After some time, she left him. However, Ethan nevertheless loves his mother: "And in this definitive absence, after grief, after anger—*Well, at least she didn't kill me*—he had realized that despite all her faults he loved her, or pitied her, for pity is a form of love" (*The Lighthouse* 32). He tried to find her and wonders where she is and what happened to her. His lack of resentment and an attempt to understand her behavior are a testament to his empathy and love. He loves his mother in a Christian way, like God loves his children: not because she is good and deserves it, but because he is good. He realizes that his mother was also somehow broken, which disabled her to want and love him properly:

> In the end it came down to the truth that she had not been capable of bearing the weight of a child through life, of raising him. He was not wanted. Knew he was not wanted very early on. Though something in him understood that she had *wanted* to want him.
>
> *She gave me life. She did her best.* (*The Lighthouse* 150)

Ethan's gratitude to his mother for giving him life and his endeavor to grasp her conduct seem to enable him to forgive her, which is implied through the conciliatory manner in which he utters the last two sentences. Moreover, the absence of his father also left a void in him: "Remembering the fatherless feeling, the longing to be picked up and tossed in the air and caught with a laugh, and carried on a shoulder ride as his father-protector strode fearless through the world" (*The Lighthouse* 151). The wounds that he carries because of his parents' rejection begin to be cured in the solitude of Ethan's island, as there is nobody there to hurt him. However, through the events depicted in the novel, Ethan is forced to realize his interior isolation, due to which he misses on the highest objective of one's life and the path to salvation—love.

Kreeft claims that the "only way to protect yourself against suffering is to protect yourself against love—and that is the greatest suffering of all, loneliness" (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 113). Kreeft's observation is the perfect description of Ethan's conduct: he avoids people, so that they do not hurt him like his parents did, but in this way, he cannot love or receive love, so he suffers in his loneliness. As the story progresses, the encounters with various people shake Ethan in various ways, and he begins to realize his loneliness and a longing for companionship, which prepares his heart for receiving his own son. A person who

appears throughout the novel and in a way represents a substitute for Ethan's mother is Elsie, the landlady of a bed-and-breakfast. Elsie is a motherly sort of person, who "had a kindly eye that had seen a lot of life's happy moments and its sorrows" (*The Lighthouse* 44). By worrying about Ethan, being kind to him, and loving him, Elsie accepts him and confirms that it is good he exists. Due to that, her love plays a part in transforming his suffering and loneliness. Ethan responds to her kindness and care in various ways: he visits her, carves a fishing boat for her in memory of her husband, carves a model boat for her church, all of which is evidence that his heart starts to change.

Furthermore, on his annual vacation, Ethan meets a man tending sheep, and for once decides "to engage in actual conversation with a stranger" (*The Lighthouse* 47). By this small act of taking a small step in someone's direction, Ethan gives himself a chance to connect with another human being, which will turn out to be rewarding for him. The man, whose name is Roger, is very cordial toward Ethan and invites him to lunch in his family's home. Ethan is warmly welcomed there by Roger's wife and five children, who are all "vital personalities," and exhibit "the family radiance and keen intelligence" (*The Lighthouse* 48). The home has a happy and peaceful family atmosphere. They are all interested in who Ethan is and what his job is like, and the children take him up a hill to show him the view. Although he evidences nothing more than simple humanity and kindness, Ethan is deeply moved. After the visit, "he stopped by the side of the road, sat down on the grass, and put his face in his hands. Unable to explain to himself why he was so overcome with emotion, he dried his eyes, got up, and continued on his way" (*The Lighthouse* 50–51). Ethan's emotions probably result from a combination of several factors. Firstly, the sight of the happy family might have evoked memories of his own childhood, which was marked by absence of love, care, happiness, and peace and filled with fear. Secondly, although Ethan is content with his isolation and believes that he is relatively happy, the warmth, cordiality, and acceptance that he, a stranger, received from Roger's family probably made him aware of the loneliness he was not aware of. Thirdly, the harmonious family, its warm hospitality, and the interest of its members in Ethan's life evoked in him a yearning for belonging, love, and family that his isolation suppressed.

Ethan's isolation is seldom broken as visitors to the island are very rare. However, there are several visits in a very brief period of time, which further soften Ethan's interior isolation and open him up to the possibility of human connection. For example, when he helps the two boys who got stuck with their boat, he reflects on the fact that he has never had a brother or a close friend, but he is glad that the boys do. Witnessing the brotherhood of the boys makes him question his solitary life, while it simultaneously awakens his desire for the closeness the boys

share. One of the most significant visitors is Catherine MacInnis, with whom Ethan falls in love at first sight. He is confused and simultaneously wants her to leave, "allowing his unruly emotions to subside" (*The Lighthouse* 72), and to stay. As they start a conversation, she tells him that she has a family that loves her, but that because of too much safety in her life, she has decided to set into the unknown and adds: "let God take me where he wants, so I can meet people he wants me to meet" (*The Lighthouse* 73). This is for Ethan a foreign concept, but, as it will turn out, although he mostly stays on his island, God leads his life and puts people on his path that he needs to meet. Catherine then tells him that no man is an island, and he is aware that she is right: "He nodded solemnly. Knew it was true. Knew also that he did not want it to be true. That he earnestly wished himself to be an island—and pretty much was one" (*The Lighthouse* 74). With this realization, Ethan experiences inner growth on the emotional level: he feels a need to protect her from the world, from everything, and to take care of her. The change of his heart is evident when she looks him in the eyes, and he does not look down as he usually does. Furthermore, Ethan, who loved his isolation so much, does not want Catherine to go away, and when she does, he hopes that she will return, but she never does. Several times throughout the novel, he wishes she returned, and wants to write to her about "his deepest thoughts and his feelings for her" (*The Lighthouse* 121). When Ethan dies, Catherine cries and plays a concerto for him like she never did before. Although they meet only once, Ethan sees in Catherine a unique person that he could love. This focus on another person changes his perspective, and, apart from being another confirmation of his realization that people are social beings, it prepares his heart for being able to love.

Ethan's desire to have a family, to love and to be loved is not denoted only by being a guest to Roger's family but in two more ways: by observing the families of puffins and by carving a family. Throughout the novel, Ethan watches puffins have chicks on several occasions. The specificity of puffins is that they are monogamous, they lay only one egg per season, and both the male and the female incubate the egg and feed the chick, which is why they symbolize family in *The Lighthouse*. On one occasion, Ethan wonders if the puffin chicks realize how much effort their parents put into guarding the egg and feeding the chick. Since Ethan's parents have not put much effort into being his parents, the puffin families are juxtaposed to Ethan's family, which did not want and love him. At the same time, these birds represent an ideal of family to Ethan, who enjoys watching them nest. When Ross arrives to the island, he reveals that he is also interested in puffins. Although Ethan realizes much later that Ross is his son, this bird that lives in its family stands as a sign of recognition between their

two souls, which have never met their fathers. Often watching puffins nesting, deep in his soul, Ethan longs to have a family, and then his son appears, sharing the same love toward puffins.

However, before he meets Ross, in his solitude, Ethan carves a woman and thinks about her as his wife. He knows that it makes him a little demented, and he is worried about his sanity, but it illustrates his desire to have a wife and a family, even though he deceives himself into thinking that he is doing well on his own: "She did indeed become a presence. Though she was not a living one, it was as if an inner imagining had escaped from his mind, or erupted from his heart's deepest longing, to take its solid place in the visible world" (*The Lighthouse* 41). After that, he carves a baby and two older children, and then a father with a boy on his shoulders covering the father's eyes. However, instead of playful, their faces do not smile—the father looks sad and the boy frightened. After Ethan meets his son and connects with him, his heart opens up to other people and love. Afterward he carves another father with a child on his shoulders, but this time, the child's hands are on the father's forehead, their eyes are wide open, and they are grinning. Ethan becomes aware of what the carvings of a family represented to him and writes a letter to Ross in his notebook:

> How can you accept my shame and sorrow for leaving you alone? I did not know of your existence. Now, all these years later, I would reach back across the years and try to be for you what I then could not be—if life would allow it, but it does not. I was alone then. I was a boy far younger than you are now, confused and uncertain of survival. It was hard labors that steadied me, anchored me—simple tasks, learning things, and seeing wonders that showed me more than I could understand. I sought skills and I made things, a bird, a woman, a family of people who did not leave me. I made from wood and color the creatures that might have been but were not.
>
> I thought they were enough for me. They hid from my eyes the agony of loss, the absence of a greater making—the creation of a new human being, a person who at first was not there in the world, and then who was there.
>
> Of a child.
>
> Of you. (*The Lighthouse* 179–80)

Although Ethan thought that he was happy alone on his island, he could not admit to himself that he longed for love, closeness, people, and family. As a contrast to his real family, the carved family represents for Ethan an embodiment of people who cannot leave him, but the most interesting carvings are those of a father with a child. On the one hand, the fear of the child and

the sadness of the father in the first one indicate the traumatic experiences from Ethan's childhood, as well as his fear of potential love, which may result in potential abandonment and pain. The father's covered eyes represent Ethan's closed heart and his inwardness. On the other hand, the second carving depicts the change of Ethan's heart after meeting his son and becoming close to him. The eyes wide open and the grins symbolize Ethan's change of heart, openness for other people and for love, and his realization that man is created for community with each other.

The person who completely shakes Ethan's world and opens his heart for love is Ross, who later turns out to be his son. As soon as he arrives on the island, Ethan wonders when he will leave. Ross is extremely friendly, talkative, inquisitive, curious, enterprising, and willing to help. He is interested in Ethan's life—he makes him talk about himself as soon as they first meet. Shortly after that, he offers Ethan to help launch his boat, and he also wants to try out the experience of living on the island with a lighthouse. Outmaneuvered by Ross, Ethan agrees. Ross is indeed helpful, but he is also thankful to Ethan for letting him help. He declares: "This is one of the most marvelous days I've ever experienced. I'll remember it all my life" (*The Lighthouse* 100). After Ross' departure, Ethan's thoughts are mixed:

> The return to solitude was a relief in a way. It was back to normal routine, normal silences, and the opportunity to stand by the edge of the island without fear of interruption, gazing out to sea, listening to the listeningness, sensing the awakeness of things. Even so, he felt a new kind of absence, and he now realized that the visitor had been of benefit to him in more than the boat's launching. This first experience of companionship, he understood by hindsight, had not been in the words exchanged but in the presence. (*The Lighthouse* 112)

Not realizing it until Ross was gone, the experience of human connection made a difference in Ethan's heart. The absence he feels is the realization that what he thought was solitude was in fact loneliness. He understands that it is not necessary to talk with someone to connect but learns to appreciate the value of presence. During Ross' second visit, upon learning that Ross has never met his father, Ethan recalls how much it meant to him when a few men praised him during his childhood. Lacking a better way to express his affection for Ross, he somewhat awkwardly offers him praise, which Ross receives with great pleasure. Ross observes that Ethan does not like people and tells him that he understands if Ethan wants him to leave, to which Ethan replies that he does not. He later ponders this conversation and realizes "that it was the most unguarded thing he had said in his life" (*The Lighthouse* 153), and that he should have said something more measured:

> He liked the boy. He was congenial and, if the truth be told, a great help. It was more a case of not knowing how to deal with him: the habit of frequent verbal communication, the wit that invited counterwit, the starkness of his observations, those probing questions. In other circumstances and with other people, these qualities would be acceptable or admirable, or at least not invasive. But they had amassed into something that was confounding the order of Ethan's world, giving him the sense that one whole wall of his life had tumbled down and left him exposed.
>
> Exposed to what? To a need for other people that he had never seen in himself before? A need for relief from loneliness? A need to unfold his own personality by reflection, by dialogue with a living human being not made of wood, and in this way come to new dimensions of his humanity? He did not know. He was not sure he cared to know. It would be easier if the boy went away and never came again.
>
> Yes, easier. But would it be better? (*The Lighthouse* 154)

This contemplation is a major turning point in Ethan's life, since his relationship with Ross exposes to him some new movements in his heart. It seems to him that one of the walls that he built in order to protect himself from suffering, but consequently also from love, collapsed and left him vulnerable, which now opens up his heart for love, but also for the sufferings love might entail. He finally realizes that he is created for community with other people, and that through it, he will be able to reveal his true identity to himself. Since his experience of human beings was often betrayal and unreliability, Ethan is puzzled by Ross' goodness and generosity, which is what triggered the questions and changes in Ethan's soul. Only after the boy leaves does he realize that he is his son. Open for other human beings, at the end of the novel, he sacrifices his life for other people. Like Jesus, who sacrificed his life for people out of love, "[w]e too are called to give our lives for our brothers and sisters, and thus to realize in the fullness of truth the meaning and destiny of our existence" (John Paul II, "Evangelium vitae" §51). In this way, Ethan finds the meaning of his life. At the end of the novel, the readers find out that Ross named his son Ethan, because he wanted him to be steadfast like Ethan McQuarry. Even though he did not know that Ethan was his father, his naming of his son after Ethan testifies to Ross' love for him.

Near the end of Ethan's life, a meaningful event signifies the change that happened in his relationship to others: namely, before Christmas, for the first time in his life, he gets personal mail: drawings from the large family he met on his vacation, a card from Ross, who lets him know that he got engaged and sends him photos, and a card from Elsie, who invites him to Christmas dinner. Although this may seem insignificant for many people, for Ethan, this is a

sign that he is not an island anymore, that he has opened his heart and let other people in. His personal mail is a symbol of his finding a meaning in his life through love.

The Island of the World

The topic of experiential values was already partly covered in the chapter on creative values since Josip's love sometimes manifests in good deeds. For him, love is a decision and often a sacrifice. In the prologue, Josip writes about love:

> [W]hen identity has sealed its form, we seek union with the other islands, within the island of the world.
>
> . . .
>
> In this place where we first appeared, we did not doubt that love is the path of ascent. We did not think of it, as we did not think of the air we breathed. In time our flesh received instruction as we grew, and our hearts and our souls. We came to know that love is the soul of the world, though its body bleeds, and we must learn to bleed with it. Love is also the seed and milk and the fruit of the world, though we can partake of it in greed or reverence. (*The Island of the World* 10–11)

As a child, Josip grows up in a loving family. Deeply religious and hardworking, his parents have a loving marriage and are devoted to raising their son well. Josip also loves and admires his parents. He, namely, "sees his father's true strength, his greatness" (*The Island of the World* 39). Once when he watches his mother drying clothing, "[h]is great love for her wells up with force, and tears spring to his eyes" (*The Island of the World* 50). He suddenly realizes that she is remarkably kind and devout, and that she serves their family expecting nothing in return. Their family friend is a friar, Fra Anto. He is a joyful and kind-hearted person, well-liked by the village children, who perceive him like a father. Josip finds himself fortunate to belong to a family with a friend like Fra Anto. The village inhabitants are in general depicted as honest, devout, and kind. They share a strong bond, which O'Brien illustrates in touching scenes of them singing, eating, and praying together. It is said in the novel that Rajska Polja is the best of all places, and that the villagers are blessed to live there. When Josip ends up in Sarajevo after the slaughter of his village, he "thinks of Mamica from time to time—that she still exists cannot be questioned. He knows she has died but feels she has not" (*The Island of the World* 143). Josip's feeling coincides with Frankl's theory, which claims that love is eternal and that not even death can destroy it.

As a ten-year-old-boy, Josip falls in love with a new girl in the village—Josipa. During one of their encounters, they experience a metaphysical connection. Namely, upon looking at each other, a "current flows between them, without beginning or end, no initiator, no recipient,

for both of them have given and received at the same moment" (*The Island of the World* 73). This current, stronger than anything in the world, makes time and thought disappear. O'Brien describes it as "a flowing current of deep waters—waters burning with a light that is gentle and inextinguishable" (*The Island of the World* 73). Josip will experience this current again in the future (in the church and in the hospital), but never with the same intensity. Since he is only ten years old, he is not interested in the physical aspects of love. Instead, "[h]is love for Josipa has become the light within his soul" (*The Island of the World* 78). They speak "with the eyes of the swallows" (*The Island of the World* 78), just like Josip will later communicate with the patients in the hospital. The Partisans kill her, but even as an adult, he remembers her as the purest love of his soul.

As a young man, he sees a beautiful woman named Ariadne and immediately falls in love with her. For Frankl, love is enchantment, since "it casts a spell upon the world, envelops the world in added worth" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 131). Enchanted by Ariadne, Josip starts to believe in miracles and weighs the idea of paradise. He proclaims to the stars that if he were to die at that moment, it would all have been worth it, for he has witnessed her existence (*The Island of the World* 258). It turns out that she shares his feelings, and they start a relationship. While Ariadne wonders about God, whom she recognizes in their love, Josip rejects this idea. To him, "[t]heir love is everything," it is "the world," [i]t is his religion" (*The Island of the World* 296). Angry at God, he does not want to admit that love toward God and another person are inseparable, but rejects both God and religion, and places Ariadne in the position of God. Contemplating the possibility of untold numbers of his descendants, each of them unique and unrepeatable, fills him with profound astonishment. Frankl similarly describes the miracle of love: "For through love the incomprehensible is accomplished – there enters . . . into life a new person, itself complete with the mystery of the uniqueness and singularity of its existence: a child!" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 132). Yet, Josip questions if it would be cruel to conceive a child in such a dangerous country, fearing that Ariadne and he will end up like a married couple from Rajska Polja whose baby was killed by the Partisans as soon as it was born, and the couple was killed as well. Ariadne convinces him that, despite suffering for his family, he is strong enough to take the risk, which will bring about the triumph of life over death. He marries her civilly, and their lives are filled with joy. By giving her his most precious possession, the carving of a swallow, given to him by the Lastavica, Josip symbolically gives himself to her. Since he got married to the most wonderful woman in the world, Josip considers the possibility of God's existence, but still struggles with faith, while Ariadne tries to convince him to return to Christ. During her pregnancy, their happiness is abruptly ended by Josip's arrest and

imprisonment. After he escapes Goli Otok, he finds out from Ariadne's communist uncle Goran that both she and the baby passed away, and she hears that Josip died in prison. Desperate, he wants to die. Josip's love for Ariadne never wanes. Not even when he, many years later, finds out that her uncle lied and that she lives in New York in holy matrimony with another man and has children with him. When it turns out that her marriage is valid, acting out of the highest good, Josip decides not to contact her. In other words, his love for her is so great and pure that he does not want to bring her pain or destroy her happiness by getting in touch with her, no matter how difficult it is for him, taking into account his lifelong longing for her. Just as Josip's love for Ariadne gave him the meaning of life in marriage and when he thought she was dead, so it too continues to give him a meaning of life after he learns that she is alive: he accepts the sacrifice of permanent separation from Ariadne for a greater good. When he returns to Croatia and stands in front of his and Ariadne's apartment, his thoughts are a reflection of his eternal love and thankfulness for Ariadne:

> There is peace in this reunion, peace and sadness and gratitude. A year of joys was given to him, a year of hopes, and though it was taken away, he now thanks God that it was given, for not everything was destroyed. He prays for Ariadne, casts his mind across the ocean to the city of New York, where she is living, unaware of his existence, and he is grateful for her new life as well, if he would truly live, he must live with an exposed heart, with both blessing and loss. (*The Island of the World* 708)

This passage points out Josip's love, gratitude, and acceptance of life as it is. It reflects his realization that the true meaning of life can be found by living authentically amidst both blessings and loss. He is aware that he does not need to dismiss the sadness for being there without Ariadne, because sadness is part of love. As Frankl explains, "[e]ven when our experiences in love turn out unhappily, we are not only enriched, but also given a deeper sense of life; such experiences are the chief things which foster inner growth and maturity" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 147). When Ariadne dies, Josip attends her funeral and prays for her soul. While in her home, he notices the things he gave her: the wooden swallow and a stone, which suggest that she did not forget him. Indeed, after he meets Marija, his and Ariadne's daughter, he finds out that he was the greatest love of Ariadne's life, that she never forgot him, and kept the memory of him alive for both Marija and herself. At Christmas, Josip "visits Ariadne's grave, praying for her soul, missing her. He listens to his sorrow grow gentle and then come to rest, *for love is stronger than death*" (*The Island of the World* 767, italics mine), which again reminds of Frankl's theory. Namely, Ariadne's essence cannot be destroyed by death, since it is timeless and imperishable (see Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 135).

Strangers and Sojourners

Love is a key factor in Anne's quest for meaning, so it often occupies her thoughts. Contemplating the male and female principle in existence, she concludes that "[o]n every level the unifying principle would seem to be love," and then wonders, "But what is love?" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 100). Convinced that it is "only a system of exerting power," with the only options either control or submission, she believes that "to love is to be defeated" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 102). She also sees another alternative but finds it practically impossible:

> Let us suppose that a man and woman, understanding their limitations and their greatness, were to choose to give life to each other by giving away their very selves. Then both would be defeated, and both would win. In the process, both in the end would become a new kind of being, something they could not understand in the beginning and would never choose if they could foresee the struggle involved. If they were to persist, however, both would eventually become free, because neither would be dominated by the will to power. Only by the will to love. (*Strangers and Sojourners* 103)

Repudiating the Nietzschean will to power, Anne recognizes freedom in the Christian will to love (although she does not recognize it as such) but is aware of the suffering involved. Unlike her initial definition of love, "the impossible alternative" accurately describes what love truly is. Despite doubting the possibility of such love, she will experience this kind of love with a man who appears to be an unlikely candidate for both true love and an intellectual like Anne. Yet, achieving such love will be a lifetime process for both of them.

Stiofain O'Dulaine, known in the New World as Stephen Delaney, whose previously described illness destroys all the potential romance between them, is not an intellectual like Anne but a trapper-homesteader. He is Irish and Catholic, while Anne is English and agnostic. Their relationship is further complicated by the typical Irish animosity toward the English, intensified by Stephen's personal history: his father was, namely, killed by English soldiers, but, as it turns out much later in the novel, Stephen killed one of them in revenge. This sin burdens his conscience, which also affects his relationship and later marriage with Anne. Realizing that marrying Stephen would be convenient, Anne observes that her heart "has learned that a tidy universe without love is cold. Here is where I must be beaten upon the threshing floor. Hidden, crushed, and transformed beneath the stones. I suspect that I shall be broken; I suspect that I shall finally live" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 140). Her predictions will prove true.

At their wedding, both of them are having doubts. While Stephen wonders if Anne would marry him if she knew about his past, Anne is terrified as she questions who both of them actually are, but the Holy Spirit in the form of wind whispers that he is with them. In the beginning they are happy, and it seems that they heal each other's wounds. Stephen "could not quite believe in her love, though he grew almost contented on it, his soul fed by her tending" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 155). Similarly, Anne writes to her sister:

> This man who has begun to make me whole but does so with gentleness, with silence. He is helping me to remove my fingers from the weapons of defence we learned so well. He does not even realise. Yet, I wonder if I shall prove as helpful to him? The person you know is ceasing to exist; who I am to become has not yet been revealed, though I am certain now it is peace and not disaster that is intended. (*Strangers and Sojourners* 155–56)

Yet, their later marriage life does not seem so joyful. Maillet notices that "O'Brien makes very little attempt in the novel to make [their] marriage . . . seem romantic or providential. (. . .) [I]n many ways this seems a marriage of convenience; or, if that is too harsh, than at best this marriage seems a means to avoid the loneliness and material discomfort of the frontier" (69). Anne is, nevertheless, lonely: "*I love and am well loved but remain incomplete*" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 167). In spite of their good life together and three children, the conflict of their different worldviews, especially regarding spiritual and religious issues, cannot be ignored. While Anne accuses Stephen's Catholic faith of superstition, she, sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously, seeks God: not the cold, distant God of her childhood, but a compassionate and approachable Catholic God—actually, Stephen's God. Their dissatisfaction grows with time, yet they preserve their marriage. Even though Stephen prefers to retire to solitude than to be with his wife, he wonders why Anne is unhappy and cannot accept him as he is. He even declares: "I think it's too late for the woman and me. It was a mistake, and there's only endurance now" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 219). On the other hand, Anne fantasizes about "an emotionally intimate, though physically platonic, friendship" (Maillet 74) with a romantic and intellectual artist Peter (her projection of a soldier Peter, with whom she had fallen in love before she even met Stephen), who is the complete opposite to her husband. Yet, coming back to reality, to her husband and children, she realizes how foolish she has been, so she returns to her fantasy to reject Peter and to tell him that "[r]eal love is a long apprenticeship" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 251). "You give your life away. And you don't play at taking it back. In the end it's given back to you in a better form than you could have imagined" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 252). Despite the dissatisfaction with her marriage, Anne

nevertheless understands that effort, sacrifice, and complete commitment to another person are necessary in true love, which then fulfills both spouses with meaning. What is more, sacrifice and suffering are inevitable in love, but love transforms them, as O'Brien shows at the end of the novel. Through the Delaneys' marriage, O'Brien demonstrates that love is not merely a romantic emotion but an intentional act and a conscious decision, as both Frankl and Christianity claim. This understanding of love helps them remain married despite their problems. Burdened with unhappiness, Anne consults with Reverend Gunnalls about her marriage:

> "I did love my husband once. And still do. There's some gift he's been given to bring me, which we haven't yet learned to open."
>
> . . .
>
> "Each of us longs to be known," he said, at last finding his voice, "to be recognized and loved in the core of his being. You felt it from your husband, and your truest, deepest self went searching for more."
>
> "I was a fool. Can you build a life on a look, when so many other things separate you?"
>
> "You weren't a fool. You built your life on what is the most fundamental need of the heart . . . to find a permanent home in the heart of another. The other things, well, maybe you should delight in the differences. How rich those differences make your family."
>
> "Rich?"
>
> "Yes, rich in gifts. And while we're on the subject, Anne, may I ask what gift it is that you were given to take to him? Have you learned to unwrap it yet?" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 312)

Encouraged by this conversation, Anne understands that both she and Stephen should enrich each other with their love. She remembers that she once knew that true love is oneness, but she has forgotten it somewhere along the way. Anne's sister Emily is also the voice of reason complementing the words of Reverend Gunnalls. When Anne wonders why she is not healed when she has a husband who loves her, Emily tells her: "the healing begins when you abandon your demands for love and choose instead to give love, no matter what it cost" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 334), but warns her that she first needs to forgive her husband for failing to love her as she wanted. Namely, by truly and unconditionally loving Stephen, expecting nothing in return, Anne can experience the much-desired healing. Additionally, since loving helps the beloved to become as the lover sees him, through Anne's genuine love, Stephen can become

the best version of himself, the person God wants him to be. In spite of their ups and downs, through which O'Brien so realistically portrays marriage, they remain faithful to each other in their love—not as an emotion but an intentional act. As an old man, Reverend Gunnalls, who has been in love with Anne for years, recognizes and admires this: "You have been humbled, broken. But you have become strong in a way that the world cannot understand. I have remained intact because of your love for your husband and your faithfulness to him" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 535). At the very end of her life, Anne finally finds faith. Through her love for God, her love for her husband intensifies, since love for God and other people are inseparable. Anne and Stephen declare their love for one another on her deathbed.

> She desired this moment to flow on without end. She hungered for his eyes, needed him to hold her with them, to look into her the way he did with children and animals. She would have begged for it, too, if silence, the third partner of their long marriage, had not raised its voice.
>
> *Loss, loss, all that waste*, thought the woman. *Oh, the times I did not love you.*
>
> "I love you", he repeated foolishly.
>
> He reached out his hand. She reached out hers from across a chasm. But as they touched and his grip was firm upon hers, she saw that the chasm was only a crack, and that it had always been so. As she watched, it closed and disappeared altogether. (*Strangers and Sojourners* 544)

These moments represent the climax of Anne's marriage with Stephen. After decades, their emotional conflict is finally resolved, and Anne regrets all the times she has failed to love Stephen as she loves him now, experiencing him in his uniqueness, recognizing his indispensability. By loving and accepting him, she becomes aware of his essence and confirms that it is good he exists. She finally realizes that she has always exaggerated the distance between them, which was merely a crack, so small that it disappears under the power of their love. In this way, they are both finally completely healed and united in love, thus finding a meaning of their lives. As Kreeft points out, "Love, you see, can do *anything*. Love alone can fill Ecclesiastes' emptiness—and yours. Love alone can satisfy Job's quest—and yours" (*Three Philosophies of Life* 140).

A Cry of Stone

While Rose offers Christian love to virtually every person she meets, she has a deeper, more personal connection with a select few: her grandmother, Binemin, Miss Gorrel, the nuns at the residential school, Hugo and Esther, Jimmy, and, of course, God. Rose's love for God and her love for neighbors are inseparable, so that, through loving God, Rose loves her

neighbors. In this chapter, Rose's love for her grandmother, Binemin, Miss Gorrel, and Jimmy will be analyzed.

Since Rose's mother abandoned Rose as an infant and never returned, her grandmother Oldmary raises her. Despite her great poverty, Oldmary does her best to provide Rose with everything she needs, especially placing an emphasis on spiritual upbringing and the immense love she gives her granddaughter. Rose returns her love, which makes both of their lives meaningful. She believes that she was "given a very great gift in Grandma, who was like a saint" (*A Cry of Stone* 140). Rose considers her grandmother her safe haven and the foundation of her world: "Grandma was like a rock that could not be moved. She made a solid place in the great movements of the seasons always wheeling around their home, which was the center of the world" (*A Cry of Stone* 7–8). That is why, as a child, Rose cannot accept the fact that her grandmother will once die, claiming that she wants to die with her. When her grandmother dies several years later, Rose dreams that she talks to her and again wants to come to her, for she misses her deeply. The love between Rose and her grandmother seems to have given Rose strength to live meaningfully in other areas of life even after Oldmary's death.

As previously mentioned, God sends Binemin Edzo as the answer to Rose's prayer for a brother. Their first encounter happens when a man brings Binemin to the church, not knowing what to do with him. Binemin looks either insane or possessed, snarling and cursing, but Rose is kind to him. During the Mass, God speaks to Rose, asking a sacrifice of her for the boy: "She glanced down at the dirty, wild, mad boy lying in the shadow under the bench. She loved him, and, as she loved him, the sweet fire-song swelled in her heart, and she knew that the hurt would be a small thing compared to the love she would have for him, and the life that would come back into him" (*A Cry of Stone* 30). Binemin is traumatized due to severe abuse by his parents, who eventually abandoned him and left him naked, starved, and tied to a tree. He is sent to a hospital and upon his return, he behaves more normally, but he never talks or smiles. Rose gradually makes progress in their friendship and, through kindness and little sacrifices, heals Binemin's wounds. At recesses, Binemin gazes into the forest, and occasionally his eyes flare, he growls and grabs a stick or a rock. Unlike other children, Rose is not afraid of him, because she loves him, so she stands not far from him in silence. When she notices "the bile-fire" erupting out of his eyes, she tries to stop it with her love: "She told her love to go inside and pour light into him, to warm him up. Deep, deep inside, below the place where words are made, below the locked doors which made him silent, it seemed that he felt what she sent to him. Whenever she stood beside him he would not pick up a stick or a stone, though he never looked at her" (*A Cry of Stone* 32). O'Brien demonstrates through this the healing power of love on a

spiritual level. Even though Rose does not know Binemin, she decides to love him, realizing his potentials and enabling him to realize them. Rose's persistent, yet unobtrusive love touches Binemin's heart, so he starts communicating with her, although without talking. Through drawing, he shows Rose that his parents burnt him with sticks. On an occasion when he is greatly tormented by darkness, Rose again tries to send her love to him, but unsuccessfully, so she decides to love him by being present and promises him that she will never go away, which, she notices, "was no small thing" (*A Cry of Stone* 35). He begins to follow her around, but the narrator explains that "[i]t was not exactly that he chased her, because in fact it was she who was taming him and holding him to the world, keeping him from plunging into the underworld, tethering him by a thread" (*A Cry of Stone* 36). One of her great victories is making him smile, and he becomes depended on his ability to make her laugh. Another important event in their friendship is when Binemin finds "a nearly perfect orb of white quartz" (*A Cry of Stone* 38), which Rose puts in the center of carefully arranged white and pink stones, building a picture of a corona of roses. She explains to him that his stone "is a loon-star. It is a speckle that fell from the *tchibekana*, the necklace, the river of souls. There is only one on earth. It is ours" (*A Cry of Stone* 39). Inspired by this, Rose starts to call him Tchibi, "from the *tchibekana*, the river of souls, which our people call the loon's necklace. He is like a star to me, because he is like the loon. He does not speak, and he likes to be alone. But his song is sweet" (*A Cry of Stone* 89). The garden they make with the stones represents a symbol of their friendship, which becomes so close that it heals Binemin to the extent that he starts to speak, his first words being Rose's name. The narrator explains how Rose's love for Binemin and her sacrifice offered up to Christ heal Binemin, enabling him to offer his love, which will grow until it merges with the sea of God's infinite love:

> She had a little brother whom she loved, though he was no longer little. And she had loved him well, offering the hurting to Jesus who joined it to his own hurting and poured it like a cascade into Tchibi's hurting so that he no longer hurt so much. And now he could speak. Soon he would speak many words. Soon he would hurt only a little, and in time there would be no more hurt. Then he too would love, and the rivulets would spill into creeks and creeks into rivers and rivers into lakes that spilled into great rivers, and across the wide world all moving waters, all pure water, water would pour into the sea which was Love. Yes. (*A Cry of Stone* 110)

Rose's service in Christian love does not only heal and rescue Binemin but also represents a meaning of Rose's life. Rose never asks for anything in return but loves Binemin because he needs her love. After a long time of receiving love from Rose, Binemin returns love to her in a

symbolic act of giving himself to her: he gives her a carved stone, green like his eyes, shaped like a partridge, which is what his name, Binemin, means. Later, in the residential school, when Binemin is tortured by dark thoughts that he is worthless, he remembers Rose and the thoughts disappear. Rose's love and goodness have such an impact on Binemin that only a memory of her face is sufficient to dispel darkness and instill a sense of worth in him. Rose's love has always confirmed to him that it is good he exists, thus counteracting his feelings of unwantedness and worthlessness caused by his parent's brutal acts. However, Binemin's and Rose's paths diverge as the evil medicine man Kinoje and his wife decide to adopt Binemin, so he spends time with Kinoje and his followers, stops answering Rose's letters, and no longer attends Mass. Rose misses Binemin, often prays and makes sacrifices for him. She hears about him only years later, when she discovers that he is also an artist and a shaman of great power who leads a troubled life. The motifs of his paintings appall her since their source is the evil of shamanism: "[t]he over-brimming tension in them, the playing with fire and spirit-lines, the dancing with demons disguised in the shapes of animal and bird-spirits, pushing always toward the dangerous edge" (*A Cry of Stone* 554). Hearing his voice in her heart telling her that he is dying, Rose rushes to find him. It turns out that he received life-threatening burns when he got drunk, and he or his drunk friends accidentally burned his house. Anguished by the sight of him burned as a result of his lifestyle, Rose thinks: "Over no part of him, it seemed, had her prayers and offerings exercised an influence. Perhaps a little at the beginning, but if his art and his accident indicated anything, it was that her endless sacrifice had been futile" (*A Cry of Stone* 556). She nevertheless starts to pray again for him, and, just before his death, a promise comes to Rose that he will be purified and saved, which implies that her love, prayers, and sacrifices were nevertheless not in vain. She promises to pray for his soul until they meet on the Last Day. "In her heart she carried him still, and her love for him continued and grew. So the heart's loss was also, strangely, the heart's gain" (*A Cry of Stone* 565). Rose's love for Binemin does not disappear after his death because love is stronger than death, and Binemin's unique essence does not disappear after his death but is eternal.

Another person that Rose loves is her teacher, Miss Gorrel, an atheist who does not believe in love, claiming that it is merely "[t]he transfer of energy. One mode of energy consumes another, as fuel, and itself is consumed by another" (*A Cry of Stone* 93). Pretentious and vain about her achievements, she does not seem likable, but Rose becomes close to her. Rose is especially thankful for Miss Gorrel's gift of drawing supplies, which encourage her artistic expression and inspire her to draw Miss Gorrel. On that occasion, Rose demonstrates that she sees the darkness of her teacher's soul devoid of God by drawing a black stone instead

of her heart. Looking at the picture, Miss Gorrel feels a combination of fear, exultation, and shudder: "'And thus with the pure eye of childhood I am summarized,' the woman sobbed. 'A narrow, twisted creature, clutching the flawed black stone of my heart, seeing neither the arms of an enfolding love nor the jaws of a malice which would devour me in the absence of a shepherd's staff. Is this me? Is this, then, how you see me?'" (*A Cry of Stone* 78–79). Yet, Rose explains that she painted her because she loves her. "Rose Wâbos was the very first to see her as she was and, having seen, continued to love" (*A Cry of Stone* 80). Even though Rose sees Miss Gorrel as she truly is, she decides to love her, thus acknowledging her teacher's potential and her own willingness to help her realize it through love. When several men from the reserve scare Miss Gorrel, she escapes, never to return. Resenting Miss Gorrel's abandonment, Rose is so sad and angry that, when she paints her again, she stabs and tears the picture. "She cried in sickness and shame, because for an instant she had hated Euphrasia, she had wanted to kill Euphrasia—Euphrasia whom she loved" (*A Cry of Stone* 134). The emotional pain caused by Euphrasia's abandonment has made drawing too painful for Rose, so she refuses to draw again. Since forgiveness is a fundamental aspect of Christian love, the priest advises Rose to forgive Euphrasia, explaining that she was unaware of the pain she would cause. This advice aligns with Jesus' words: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23.34). Rose decides to follow his instruction, which frees her. When Rose meets Mrs. Morgan many years later, she does not realize that Euphasia hides under that name. Euphrasia discloses her identity in a letter, informing Rose that she made sure Rose does not hunger upon discovering that she lives with Hugo and Esther. She writes: "You love, Rose. Why is it that you love, when you have received so little from life and have been given instead so many difficulties that would have crushed lesser persons, such as me?" (*A Cry of Stone* 623). This paradox is one of the central topics of the novel. Rose, namely, unites her sufferings to Christ's suffering, thus transforming them into love. Her love is not dependent on external factors or other people's love, but she draws it from the source of her faith—God's love—and gives it unconditionally to all in need of love, including Euphrasia. Euphrasia is ashamed to have run from Rose and pleads with Rose not to abandon her, as she abandoned Rose. Unfortunately, they lose contact and never meet again. Sending the black pearl to Rose to get rid of, Euphasia conveys that she finally allows Rose's art and love to change her, giving the impression that she wants to be worthier of Rose's love. O'Brien seems to imply that she empties her heart of darkness so that divine light can enter, which is seen as a direct influence of Rose and her love.

Lastly, as an answer to Rose's prayers for a child of her own, God sends her Jimmy, an orphan in the institution for the handicapped. When they look at each other, a mysterious, transcendent current flows between their souls, and Rose is in awe of the beauty of his soul.

> Her heart began to drum with a sound that reverberated in ascending waves, booming across voids, through constellations, past the outermost stars on the edge of the expanding crystal sphere. His small heart beat in time with hers. Then they were one beating heart as they flew together through the *tchibekana* into the waiting hands that rushed down to greet them, the hands enfolding all ranks of creatures, containing them, holding them, drawing them upward. (*A Cry of Stone* 797)

The unity of their souls in love is symbolized by their synchronized heartbeats. Through it, Rose is connected not only to Jimmy but to the whole universe and God. In this way, O'Brien conveys that love is the force that connects all creation to each other and unites them to God in a mysterious way. The boy, despite otherwise unable to speak, tells Rose that he loves her, confirming their deep spiritual connection with this miracle. The overflowing divine love they share is neither greedy nor possessive but spiritually enriches both Rose and Jimmy, fulfilling their lives with meaning.

The Fool of New York City

As far as love is concerned, O'Brien demonstrates what true, enriching love is in comparison to false types of love. Firstly, when Francisco/Max is concerned that he is a social parasite, Billy disagrees, claiming that he is his friend. Billy accepts Francisco as he is, offering him a sense of belonging and companionship, which in turn results in Francisco's realization of his hidden potentials. Francisco is immensely grateful for Billy's friendship, particularly for his understanding and compassion. The following conversation best illustrates the essence of their friendship:

> " . . . I can see now that you worked hard to keep me alive, and it must have taken a lot out of you."
>
> "Nope, Max, not much. And you gave a lot in return."
>
> "You're good."
>
> Billy smiles.
>
> "No," he says. "I just remember what it was like when it happened to me."
>
> "When you lost your memory, you mean?"
>
> "When I lost everything."
>
> "You've been a true friend, Billy." (*The Fool of New York City* 225)

As can be noted, Billy does not see their friendship as one-way giving but as a mutual relationship. Apart from that, having experienced much suffering in his life, Billy sympathizes with Max and offers support. Their friendship thus gives meaning both to him and to Francisco. When Francisco/Max gets his life together, Billy visits him one day to tell him that he loves him and that he should keep fighting, whereupon he disappears, because Max is now able to take care of himself on his own. Billy nevertheless leaves the stuffed crested merganser in front of Max's door for Christmas as a symbol of their friendship and as a sign that he thinks about Max.

Secondly, Max's maternal grandfather is juxtaposed to his maternal grandmother as well as to his paternal grandparents. Ben Franklin, his mother's father, is an alcoholic who frequently smokes cannabis. Psychologically unstable, especially after his daughter's death, he vents his anger and grief on Max, the sole survivor of his daughter's family, by yelling at him: "You killed them, you little parasite! (. . .) Go back to your nice safe life, you little accident!" (*The Fool of New York City* 165), which traumatizes Max additionally, making him wonder years later how he caused his family's death. In contrast, Ben's wife, grandmother Dorothy, has always been good to Max. When Max visits her grave, he remembers "her countless acts of kindness to [him] and [his] brother, her inexplicable patience, her goodness that had so often lacked focus or direction" (*The Fool of New York City* 165). Grandparents Robbie and Helen, who were raising Max after the death of his parents, are very caring and loving, and Max loves them very much, although he is afraid of losing them someday. Granddad Robbie strives to nurture Max's intellectual and spiritual growth by engaging him into "thoughtful discussions about life and destiny, fate and providence, vocation and suffering, human struggle and religious faith, and so forth. He never lectured. Rather, he probed and pondered and evoked [Max's] own thoughts on various matters" (*The Fool of New York City* 169). Even though Max initially does not understand Granddad Robbie's wisdom about life difficulties and love, he later experiences it. Namely, Robbie writes: "For the best of men, it [adversity] is a yearning forward to a better self. In most, if not all, there reign the soundless alarums of fear. By love do we cast out fear. By love do we become who we are" (*The Fool of New York City* 170). Specifically, Billy's love helps Max cast out fear, so that he eventually overcomes his trauma, becomes who he truly is, and finds the meaning of life.

Thirdly, O'Brien also contrasts Françoise, Max's girlfriend from Paris, to Katie, who becomes his girlfriend at the end of the novel. Max is enchanted by Françoise's beauty, which prevents him from seeing that she is not the right person for him. She does not understand him, his trauma, and his art, and constantly questions his love. For instance:

"Do you love your tragedy?" she asked. "Do you love it more than you love me?"

Speechless, with an ache in my throat, I threw up my trembling hands.

"I love you," I pleaded. "I love you with my whole heart."

"I know you love me," she said, her face crumpling, tears springing to her eyes. "But you cannot yet say, with complete honesty, that it is your whole heart."

"It is the only heart I have." (*The Fool of New York City* 193)

Moreover, as already discussed, Françoise mocks Max for not wanting to sleep with her because he respects her. He explains: "I want you to know—I want you to know deep in your soul—that I love you totally for who you *are*. I would rather die than use you" (*The Fool of New York City* 200), but his answer does not satisfy her. When Max returns to the USA because of a chance to become an established artist, they exchange letters, but Françoise is angry because he does not own a cell-phone or laptop and blackmails him again with love: "If you love me, you will buy yourself a laptop and cease torturing me with these endless delays" (*The Fool of New York City* 204). However, the reason why he does not want to communicate through technology is precisely because he truly loves her: "I love you so much that I cannot bear to metamorphose the words of our union into cold font on a screen. How much better it is to hold your hand-written letters close to my heart, imagining it's you I embrace" (*The Fool of New York City* 204). He begs her to join him in the USA, but she constantly finds new reasons to delay and even does not attend the opening of his exhibition. Her insensitivity culminates in her decision to come precisely on the anniversary of 9/11, yet she does not want Max to meet her at the airport, but at Ground Zero, the place of his family members' deaths, which he could never bear to visit. She, namely, believes that he will complete his grieving if he comes to this place, but he does not want to go there. He wonders about the true reasons for such a request (if she is manipulating or testing him) but decides to meet her there in order not to be unfair to her and to prove his love. As he approaches the site, he experiences trauma hallucinations and a panic attack. Unable to reach Ground Zero, he phones Françoise, but she does not answer. When he later manages to reach her father, the man says that Max hurt his daughter terribly and that he should leave her alone. Françoise terminates all communication and just sends Max a greeting card with a message: "*I am not the one you need. I must cut the string*" (*The Fool of New York City* 215), which hurts him so much that he starts drinking heavily and considers suicide, which culminates in his amnesia. Even though Max sincerely loves Françoise, her love toward him seems rather manipulating, which breaks his heart. However, it does not mean that this experience is not meaningful for Max. Namely, Frankl claims that "[e]ven when our

experiences in love turn out unhappily, we are not only enriched, but also given a deeper sense of life; such experiences are the chief things which foster inner growth and maturity" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 147). It is indeed Max's breakdown that eventually triggers his growth, of course, with Billy's help. It is worth pointing out that Max later visits the site of the tragedy with Billy, who does not force him to go, but rather suggests it. His aim is not to end Max's grief but to remember. Because of Billy, Max is no longer so much afraid of visiting the site of the World Trade Center and feels changed afterwards. In other words, Billy's love transforms Max's ache and fear, which Françoise's love could not do, because it was not true.

When Max drives to Vermont by the end of the story, he meets a girl named Katie. Her worldview is strikingly similar to Billy's and also Max's after his transformation. She also believes that "[p]eople forget what life is about" (*The Fool of New York City* 263), and she finds meaning in simple things: baking pies, weaving, splitting kindling. "The smell of wood smoke on a winter's eve. Stars you can see at night" (*The Fool of New York City* 263). Katie helps Max with the renovation of his grandparents' property, and he reveals: "I liked her for her generosity, her perkiness, and her resolve, which was never intense, just focused" (*The Fool of New York City* 267). After meeting her, he notices that he dreams good dreams. Unlike Françoise's parents, whom he did not like, Max really likes Katie's parents, since they are uncomplicated but kind, insightful, and considerate. He goes to church with Katie and her family on Christmas Eve: "*Don't be a stranger here*, her eyes seemed to say. *Don't feel left out. We're with you*" (*The Fool of New York City* 277). Even in this early stage of their friendship/relationship, Katie and her family provide Max with a sense of belonging and acceptance; they make him feel at home. For Christmas, Max gives Katie a painting of the mountaintop where they first held hands. When Katie has nothing to give him in return, Max tells her that she is the gift. In other words, Katie's uniqueness and intrinsic value bring meaning to Max's life, so material presents are not necessary.

Sophia House

Pawel's search for meaning is closely connected to the search for love. The realization of meaning in this area is especially challenging for him due to two traumatic events from his childhood. Firstly, Pawel was left scarred for life when his great-uncle Nicholas, a relative who was supposed to love him, sexually abused him at the age of six. Secondly, Pawel's father was absent from his life on account of military imprisonment during World War I, which made him distant from Pawel. When his father returned from prison the day after Pawel had suffered sexual abuse, Pawel was so traumatized that he could not bear to kiss him, so he ran away and screamed in pain. The trauma that great-uncle Nicholas inflicted on Pawel's soul, which the

child seemed to associate with his father's arrival, is reflected in Pawel's relationship with his father, which remains distant forever: "Pawel would not let himself be touched by Papa, would not look at him except secretly" (*Sophia House* 46). He does not even talk to his father, and his father is hurt by Pawel's rejection. In addition, these traumatic events affect Pawel's relationships with other people.

While in Paris, faced with poverty and homelessness, Pawel is taken in by the novelist Achille Goudron, who provides him with everything he needs. Pawel is genuinely thankful for Goudron's generosity and observes the following:

> [T]he relationship grew steadily into one of unexpressed love. Pawel thought he had found the guidance of a true father, one who would unlock the greatness within him. He believed that in return he was giving to Goudron the companionship of a son—a blessing the man sorely missed because he was divorced from his wife, who lived with their children in South America. Little by little, Pawel's confidence grew. He trusted Goudron's judgement absolutely. (*Sophia House* 77)

However, the novelist's kindness turns out to be a cunning manipulation, which Pawel realizes only when Goudron takes him to a gay club and kisses him. "He saw in an instant Goudron's whole strategy during the previous year. He had built up Pawel's immense respect and love for him, his dependence upon him, only to reveal it all in the end as a calculated sexual seduction" (*Sophia House* 100). After this incident, Pawel decides to return home. Scarred even more by Goudron's betrayal of trust, Pawel decides: "Never again will I permit another person to see inside me or to touch me" (*Sophia House* 101), repelling both male and female friendships in order to avoid exposing his heart to pain.

While he was living in Goudron's château, Pawel wondered why he felt so alone and wished to find a woman beautiful in form, heart, and mind to love. However, too afraid to approach women, Pawel turned his longings to men, but never indulged in homosexual behavior, since his inclinations horrified him. These longings could also be attributed to the trauma he had experienced as a child, which had distorted his view on love and relationships. Pawel even thought that he did not love anything. O'Brien speaks through the voice of Georges Rouault, the painter of Christ in agony, who wrote to Pawel: "The man who does not love does not yet know himself. Inside every heart is an image of love—however buried it may be. He must seek it, and find for himself his own language, the words that will unlock the hidden icon" (*Sophia House* 92). In other words, Pawel should not seek human love, but God's love hidden in his own heart, in which he will find the meaning of his life. Later, Father Andrei supports Rouault's claim by telling Pawel that God is love, and that He will not abandon him. He adds:

"God has saved us, but he will not force salvation to us. Love never forces. Love thrives only in freedom. We must choose to accept what he offers" (*Sophia House* 117). However, Pawel struggles with these ideas. The priest tells him about the moment of his own realization of God's love. He reveals that he understood how despised and hated he was when, as a child, he was beaten by his classmates and left bleeding on the steps of a cathedral. In that moment, Jesus spoke to his heart: "He told me that no human love would ever fill the hunger within me. Though every genuine love is from God, it is an incarnation, a reflection. In this world it will always be imperfect. His love is perfection. It contains everything. For the first time in my life I *saw* this love not as a theological abstraction. It was real" (*Sophia House* 119). He tells Pawel that the same voice told him that Pawel is His beloved son, but Pawel does not believe him. Namely, receiving no love from people, it is difficult for Pawel to believe that God loves him. In time, he nevertheless gradually becomes aware of God's love and starts to open his heart.

Since Pawel longs for love, the object of his idealized affection, realized only through distant admiration, becomes a young woman he saw only once in the salon of the music faculty, before the Nazis began arresting people. He calls her Kahlia. Although he does not know where she is now, he writes letters to her. He claims: "Never have I heard a musician play with such sensitivity. I knew then that we were to become one soul. Had the world been different we would have been introduced and befriended each other and never permitted a parting" (*Sophia House* 21–22). However, it turns out that she has been captured by the Nazis. He nevertheless continues writing letters to her. In one of them, he reveals an insightful realization about true love, which is strongly reminiscent of Christian and Frankl's view on love: "When I was first struck by the sight of you I understood, in a way that I had not until then, that love yearns toward completion in the being of another. I do not mean simply the meeting of the flesh, but more urgently, the union of soul and soul. In all cases, love can exist only as a gift freely given" (*Sophia House* 336). Even though Pawel and Kahlia never begin a relationship, the meaning of Pawel's life is realized through his love for her, since the meaning does not depend upon whether love is returned or not.

Due to Pawel's wounds, hiding David represents an overwhelming temptation for him. He feels attracted to David and desperately wrestles with his inappropriate desires but successfully manages to fight them every time. As their friendship deepens, Pawel is afraid that he loves David, although he has promised to himself to guard his heart. He eventually decides to deal with his confusing emotions in the following way: "I feed my guest, I respect his dignity, and I guard his autonomy as well as his life. This is the form my damaged love is permitted to take" (*Sophia House* 255). David returns his love, respecting Pawel and claiming that he is his

friend. David is perhaps the first human being whom Pawel allows to approach him, most likely because he does not have much choice, since they are forced to share their living space. This seems to be God's plan for Pawel in order to enable him to experience the love of another human being, making him eventually grateful for David's companionship. God gradually changes Pawel's heart with his love. Since Pawel is afraid of many things, a priest tells him that he should "[r]emember that perfect love casts out fear" (*Sophia House* 398), but Pawel wonders how to find perfect love in such times. The priest answers:

> "There never has been a perfect time for love. We choose it at every turn. Again and again we choose. That is how love grows strong."
>
> "But for love to grow strong it takes a lifetime of choosing. It is too late for me."
>
> "Begin now. At every moment the world begins again."
>
> "I am too bent. I do not know how to love."
>
> "Perhaps our Lord is teaching you a deep and difficult lesson (. . .). You must learn to have confidence in him." (*Sophia House* 398–99)

The priest here expresses the Christian teaching that love is not a feeling—it is a choice we make every day. After the conversation with the priest, Pawel notes that "[m]ature love sees the beloved as he is and loves him for the reality of his being" (*Sophia House* 402), again echoing Frankl and Christianity. Through his theorizing, he reflects on his relationship to David, in which he tries to respect David's dignity and to love him:

> To seek to possess another is to become possessed. To use another human being as an object, even within the privacy of one's own thoughts, is to degrade the being of that person. It is to dehumanize oneself as well as the other. So far I have not fallen in this regard. Daily I struggle against it. But resistance is not enough. There must be a vision of how to love in a positive way. How to strengthen him to face the trials of an evil age. (*Sophia House* 402)

Comparing his love for David to a tree, Pawel claims that the root of his love is good (as the root of any love is), but its trunk and branches are bent. He grieves over his "disordered desire" (*Sophia House* 402–03) and hurts under the suffering caused by it. However, he declares: "with my very life I cling to the promise that in paradise everything that is genuine love will find fulfillment. Every sacrifice will find a reward far surpassing earthly consolations. There, love will be in full flower, a joy and splendor beyond measure. This is my only hope" (*Sophia House* 403). Pawel here describes his hope for the realization of the ultimate meaning in heaven, where love will be perfect and abundant, and of which we are able to experience only a foretaste in our earthly lives. Pawel is convinced there is little love in the world, but David opposes him,

claiming that Pawel demonstrates his love every day by taking care of him and saving him from death, which represents a realization of the meaning of Pawel's life. Pawel eventually asks David to be his spiritual father, and David agrees to be his spiritual son. This touching moment is proof that Pawel's love is perfect and pure, like the love between a father and a son, rather than a disordered inclination. One of the central ideas of O'Brien's work is recognizable in this scene: "the urgency of our rediscovery of spiritual fatherhood in the modern era. It is this lost sense of spiritual fatherhood, and even spiritual manhood that is the cause of so much disaster, both in the world, our society, and in the Church connections itself" (*Arriving Where We Started* 178). That Pawel's suggestion of fatherhood was not just empty words is demonstrated in what happens immediately after this promise, as Count Smokrev enters the bookshop and sees David. Namely, Pawel protects David from Count Smokrev's immoral offer and takes his place when the soldiers come for David. Like a real father, he protects his spiritual son by sacrificing his life. Following Jesus' example, "[w]e too are called to give our lives for our brothers and sisters, and thus to realize in the fullness of truth the meaning and destiny of our existence" (John Paul II, "Evangelium vitae" §51). Through his sacrificial love, literally giving his life for David, Pawel realizes the meaning of his life in the midst of the darkness of the World War II.

4.3.5.5. Attitudinal Values

Suffering is an inevitable part of every human life, and has been present in all times and cultures. In the apostolic letter "Salvifici doloris," John Paul II distinguishes between physical and moral suffering, explaining that physical suffering means when "the body is hurting," while moral suffering represents "pain of the soul" (§5). He further clarifies: "In fact, it is a question of pain of a spiritual nature, and not only of the 'psychological' dimension of pain which accompanies both moral and physical suffering" ("Salvifici doloris" §5). Ivančić defines suffering as the pressure of evil and pain that is long-lasting, hopeless, and profoundly burdensome (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 246–47). It is therefore not surprising that, living in the period of materialism and consumption, of satisfaction and pleasure, of hedonism and egoism, contemporary man does not accept suffering as an integral part of life and does not know how to deal with it. Searching only for the satisfaction of one's needs and pleasure, one does not see the meaning of suffering in the context of the meaning of life. Thus, contemporary man finds suffering pointless and tries to avoid it at any cost. This leads to, in Frankl's term, existential frustration, which is manifested in depression, aggression, and addiction. Kreeft reports that today, more than ever before, people are suffering psychologically and spiritually (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 11). Although a mystery, suffering is crucial in matters of meaning. It

inevitably prompts people to wonder about the meaning both of life and suffering, as these questions are frequently intertwined. Faced with suffering, people question the meaning of their lives, why suffering exists and what its purpose is, whether it has certain positive effects or it destroys man, how to deal with it, whether God exists or not, whether he is good or evil, omnipotent or powerless, and whether he cares about us or not, since he allows suffering. In brief, suffering raises existential, psychological, philosophical, social, spiritual, and religious questions, and thereby occupies an important place both in Frankl's theory and in Christian theology.

4.3.5.6. Attitudinal Values in Logotherapy and Existential Analysis

Frankl believes that experiential and creative values are not the only ways to find a meaning in life. Instead, meaning can be discovered even in a hopeless situation that we cannot change (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 103)—in unavoidable suffering. However, it is often hard to accept suffering and to take the right attitude toward it, because people usually have difficulty recognizing meaning in suffering. Therefore, logotherapy tries to help patients to find meaning in their suffering. Namely, Frankl concludes that, "[i]f life has meaning, then suffering must also have meaning. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even in the form of fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete" (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 68). Therefore, no situation in life can be truly meaningless (including suffering), since the right attitude may transform even the seemingly negative aspects of life (particularly "the tragic triad"—suffering, guilt, and death) into a strength (Frankl, *Patnja zbog besmislena života* 26), so that meaning can be found even when faced with suffering, guilt, or death. In other words, existence never stops being meaningful. However, Frankl warns that meaning cannot be found in any suffering but only in unavoidable suffering. Namely, in a situation in which one cannot do anything to shape destiny (that is, when one is confronted with unavoidable suffering), one should face it with the right attitude, while the acceptance of unnecessary suffering cannot result in strength but represents masochism, for example, having operable cancer not operated on or not using analgesics (Frankl, *Patnja zbog besmislena života* 76–78, *Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 114–15). The very manner one suffers hides a possible meaning (Frankl, *Patnja zbog besmislena života* 75), which implies that one's attitude toward suffering matters in the context of meaning. It follows that the "ability to suffer is . . . the ability to realize attitudinal values" (Tweedie 142). In Frankl's opinion, everything can be taken from a person except for the freedom to choose one's attitude regardless of the circumstances (Frankl, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 67). He explains it in more detail:

> The way in which a person accepts fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which one carries one's cross, gives a huge opportunity – even under the most difficult circumstances – to give a deeper meaning to one's life. A person may remain brave, dignified, and unselfish. Or, in the relentless fight for self-preservation, one may forget one's human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here lies the chance for man either to use or to miss the opportunities of attaining the moral values that a difficult situation provides. And this decides whether one is worthy of one's suffering or not. (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 68)

Logotherapy and existential analysis start from the assumption that achieving satisfaction or avoiding suffering are not fundamental human goals; instead, the pursuit of meaning is the aim of human life (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 104). For that reason, man is ready to suffer, but only if the suffering is meaningful (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 104), for example, if it represents sacrifice. Suffering as sacrifice for the well-being of a beloved one "is pregnant with meaning" (Tweedie 145), and when suffering becomes meaningful, like in sacrifice, it stops being suffering in a way (Frankl, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 104). For Frankl, suffering provides an opportunity to fulfill the deepest meaning (*Patnja zbog besmislena života* 75), because greater strength of spirit and of man's capacity for self-transcendence is necessary for suffering than for the realization of other values. According to Frankl, *homo faber*, the working man, judges life only in the categories of success and failure, and *homo patiens*, the suffering man, has other categories—those of fulfillment and despair. While despair can accompany both success and failure, *homo patiens* can find fulfillment even in failure, because with the right attitude one can grow, mature, and find meaning even in suffering (Frankl, *Patnja zbog besmislena života* 76–77, Tweedie 142–43). In other words, *"[l]ack of success does not signify lack of meaning*" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 110). However, today's materialistic society that regards success as the highest value finds this absurd, which makes it difficult for contemporary man to accept suffering. In brief, the meaning that accepting suffering provides does not depend on external factors and success but on the inner strength and the attitude when faced with unavoidable suffering. This offers a potential for growth and finding the deepest meaning of life.

Frankl believes that one should stay optimistic even when faced with "the tragic triad:" (1) pain, (2) guilt, and (3) death by transforming them into something positive or constructive (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 125–26). He calls it "tragic optimism," which denotes optimism in tragedy, and which is embodied in human potential that enables: "(1) that suffering is transformed into human achievement; (2) that the feeling of guilt creates an opportunity for

an individual to change for the better, and (3) that an incentive for responsible action can be drawn from the transience of life" (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 125–26). Firstly, in a situation of unavoidable suffering, one is invited to unlock the uniquely human potential in its fullest—to transform suffering into achievement, to mature and grow beyond oneself, to change oneself, by which one fulfills the meaning of suffering (Frankl, *Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 103, *Patnja zbog besmislena života* 28, *The Doctor and the Soul* 113, Tweedie 143–44). Secondly, if a person struggles with guilt, there is no use to hate oneself because of it (Lukas, *Što nas u životu pokreće* 33). Repentance can be helpful in this situation, since it frees the culprit of guilt, leading to a moral rebirth and correcting the past (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 112–13). In this way, the culprit can overcome guilt and develop into a loveworthy person (see Lukas, *Što nas u životu pokreće* 33)—one should change oneself and contribute to the society in which one lives. Thirdly, logotherapy and existential analysis also see the transitoriness of life as meaningful. If people were immortal, they could postpone everything without consequences, and temporality and singularity of life indicate one's responsibility toward life (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 75). Therefore, the adage of logotherapy and existential analysis would be: "live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now" (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 75). The passing of time does not make life aimless but provides it with direction, it indicates the presence of opportunity rather than its passing (Tweedie 131). To "die is to become fulfilled and not something to be feared. (. . .) To die is to leave the transitoriness of time, and to become eternalized; paradoxically, death brings immortality" (Tweedie 136). Thus, the person who sees "life" as an opportunity to give one's offering and "death" as the moment to submit that offering can transform the suffering caused by the transience of life into joy for the indestructibility of existence (Lukas, *Što nas u životu pokreće* 109). All in all, when confronted with tragic destiny, if a person succeeds in fostering a positive, heroic attitude, he or she will not only experience strong comfort and be proud of the dignified enduring of suffering, but will also be able to radiate comfort to others in a special way (Lukas, *I tvoja patnja ima smisla: Logoterapijska pomoć u krizi* 17). Precisely love, which was introduced as an experiential value, is the factor that supports attitudinal values. Love helps one to find meaning in the difficult moments of suffering, and not only in the beautiful times of life. It follows that, unlike other values, attitudinal values are not only useful for the suffering man but also for others, because they testify to the ability of man to do something good, positive, or generous; i.e. the suffering person will pass one's testimony to the witnesses, who will be able to use it in their lives, so that they too can suffer meaningfully (Lukas, *I tvoja patnja ima smisla* 196). It should be emphasized

that, according to Frankl, "[s]uffering can only be understood in reference to something beyond the suffering man"—Transcendence (Tweedie 145–46). In his writings, he also recognizes that Christianity has elevated attitudinal values to the center of consciousness: "the Christian existence, taken in the perspective of the cross, of the Crucified One, becomes ultimately and essentially a freely chosen imitation of Christ, a 'passion'" (*The Doctor and the Soul* 71).

4.3.5.7. Suffering in Christianity

Catholic theologians supplement Frankl's stance on suffering. Namely, man asks God why suffering and evil exist, which frequently results in frustrations and conflicts in the relationship with God but also, in extreme cases, in the denial of God's existence, since evil and suffering apparently cloud God's existence, particularly in the situations of undeserved suffering or faults without appropriate punishment (John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §9). Therefore, in order to help to understand the mystery of suffering, this subject is often tackled in depth by theological texts: Catholic theology endeavors to make sense of suffering, i.e. its meaning and mystery, from the perspective of a person's relationship with God, one's faith in God, and love for one's neighbor (Radionov 518). Suffering invites man to enter the realm of transcendence, to which suffering belongs, and by delving into the area of the meaning of life and world, man encounters Love (Radionov 518). It is significant to notice that in Christianity, the symbolic figure for courage is not a hero or a conqueror but a martyr (Pieper, *An Anthology* 68).

4.3.5.7.1. Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Christians believe that God is omnipotent, so that he can save people from suffering, but he does not do it, because he has reasons for allowing them to suffer. More specifically, God is good in not saving people from all suffering, because his infinite wisdom enables him to see what sufferings are necessary for their ultimate fulfillment, wisdom, and happiness, but he is also aware that people would be spiritually spoiled if he saved them from every hardship (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 72–73). According to Kreeft, although people cannot know the meaning of every event, they can still be aware of the meaningfulness of every event (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 142). By loving God [and by being aware of God's love toward humans], people can recognize that everything is grace: Job's and Jesus' abandonment, suffering, the cross, the grave, and even the delay of grace—everything is grace (Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 142), and everything thus has meaning, even suffering.

As in Frankl's theory, we will not deal here with human-caused suffering, which Christianity does not consider a gift or grace, such as wars, murders, or unhealthy lifestyles that

surely lead to disease, like the abuse of alcohol or drugs. Instead, we will focus on suffering that represents grace and is therefore crucial in finding the meaning of life. In this context, one must not overlook the fact that "[s]uffering is not the essence of Hell, because suffering can be hopeful" (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 9). On the one hand, suffering can be punishment for a committed sin (Adam and Eve are an example of this). It serves then as an opportunity for conversion: in this process, one is called to repent, to overcome evil and "strengthen goodness both in man himself and in his relationships with others and especially with God" (John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §12). On the other hand, not all suffering is punishment, as it is exemplified in the story of Job, which depicts the sufferings of an innocent person (see Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 51, John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §11). God lets Job suffer in order to tempt him, to prove his righteousness (Radionov 518), to toughen and perfect his faith (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 80). "Job never lost his faith and his hope (which is faith directed at the future), and his suffering proved to be purifying, purgative, educational: it gave him eyes to see God. That is why we are all on earth" (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 9): we prepare for eternal life. It can also be a way of dying to oneself and discovering the meaning of life. Namely, by suffering, one is becoming oneself, and although the majority of us do not lose everything we have in one day like Job, "we must learn to lose everything but God, for all of us will die, and you cannot take anything with you but God" (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 85). Kreeft concludes that Job discovers who he is by discovering God (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 87), which is an invitation to follow Job's lead. Furthermore, through suffering, God can invite one to pray or to act (Radionov 519). Suffering can also teach us humility, to remind us that we are not God (Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 115). Another spiritual good that can arise from suffering is togetherness, which is achieved when people suffer together, and God allows suffering in this case if togetherness is more beneficial for them than the absence of suffering (Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 70–71). But the best fruit of suffering, according to Kreeft, is forgiveness, since we learn to be forgiving when we suffer. He explains that we can either suffer in our earthly life or in hell, and the only alternative to forgiveness is hell (Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 141). In other words, we should let suffering teach us to forgive in this life, so that we do not spend eternity in hell.

When things are going well, it seems easy for people to be faithful to God, but when they are confronted with suffering, they are tempted to turn away from God, although suffering is just the right place to "learn to overcome terror with courage, and mistrust with confidence" (O'Brien, *The Apocalypse: Warning, Hope and Consolation* 5). Only when one cannot solve a situation with one's own strength and loses all hope, one often arrives "at a mysterious place of

the heart, where the source-springs of life are to be found" (O'Brien, *The Apocalypse: Warning, Hope and Consolation* 5), where one finds God and his help. However, it depends on us whether we will accept suffering and God's help and profit from it or not. Our attitude toward suffering is what determines whether we will change or not, whether it will lead us to life or death (O'Brien, "Interview on *Sophia House*," Radionov 519).

As discussed above, God does not free us from suffering but allows it, and he is with us in all sufferings, because suffering is a blessing for a Christian, it is a way of salvation. Namely, as Augustine claims, "[s]ince God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil" (qtd. in Aquinas 16). In other words, suffering should not be understood as punishment (at least not always), but as God's gift, as a chance for something good, as a challenge for change. Kreeft explains that the paradox of suffering is that death to self-will (the essence of suffering) can transform into perfect joy if we endure it freely for God's love (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 146). Similarly, according to O'Brien, God knows that our exposure to the dangers of life is good if we do not flee from them: "He knows that we are stronger than we think we are. He knows that we are strongest of all when he lives in us and we live in him" (*Remembrance of the Future* 141). When we realize this, then evil, discouragement, pessimism, and shallow optimism have no effect on us anymore, and their place is taken by Christian hope (O'Brien, *Remembrance of the Future* 141–42). O'Brien also confirms that "[s]ometimes, the heart, in order to grow, must suffer. In fact, it is always like this. The heart expands through suffering. We think we are dying. And in fact, we are being born" ("In Search of the Father" 123).

When discussing physical death as a form of suffering, Christianity takes the view similar to logotherapy and existential analysis. Firstly, "the meaning of life and death are reflected in each other," i.e., only the death of a person whose life was filled with meaning can be considered meaningful death (Vučković 51). Secondly, life is not lost in death only if it has been given in sacrifice (Hadjadj 32), following the example of Christ. Thirdly, in the last moments of life, the mediocrity of your life can be transformed by your final choice into a "bright sacrifice if you allow your anxiety to blossom, recognize your misery, and call upon God's mercy in the night" (Hadjadj 292). Finally,

> in weakness at the end, weakness before death, [Christianity] does not see the breakdown and failure of human power, but the deepest life experience of facing suffering and death, behind which is not the threat of nothingness, but the meaningfulness of the relationship with God. In other words, behind the weakness,

> Christianity reveals the other side of the coin: trust. Weakness does not end anxiety, but it pierces it with confidence.
>
> The fundamental feeling in Christianity in relation to death is not the knowledge of immortality, but the trust that behind the wall of anxiety is not nothingness, but the Father. (Vučković 50)

4.3.5.7.2. Christ Overcame Suffering and Gave It Meaning

According to John Paul II, "[i]n the vocabulary of the Old Testament, suffering and evil are identified with each other," because "that vocabulary did not have a specific word to indicate 'suffering,'" while in the New Testament, "suffering is no longer directly identifiable with (objective) evil, but expresses a situation in which man experiences evil and in doing so becomes the subject of suffering" (John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §7). Therefore, the New Testament places suffering into a new perspective: it does not identify suffering with sin and damnation anymore, but interconnects human suffering with Christ's redemptive suffering on the Cross. Kreeft claims that

> Jesus did three things to solve the problem of suffering. First, he came. He suffered with us. He wept. Second, in becoming man he transformed the meaning of our suffering: it is now part of his work of redemption. Our death pangs become birth pangs for heaven, not only for ourselves but also for those we love. Third, he died and rose. Dying, he paid the price for sin and opened heaven to us; rising, he transformed death from a hole into a door, from an end into a beginning. (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 135–36)

These three elements will now be analyzed in more detail.

In the first place, due to his infinite love for man, God gave his only-begotten Son to suffer and die and thereby save the world (John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §14). Therefore, through the Cross on which Christ died, God tells us that love is "the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering" (John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §13). By letting his Son suffer (Phil. 2.6–11), God lets people know that he is on their side when they suffer, and that sufferers are in fact God's favorites (Ivančić, *Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 247). They can encounter Jesus in suffering, because he took human suffering upon himself, so that there is no hopeless or desperate suffering but suffering comparable to passing through a tunnel with a light at the end (Ivančić, *Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 247). According to Ratzinger, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ points out that God is especially close in suffering and grief, which touches God's heart in a special way. Thus, God wants to tell people that they should not be afraid, because he is close in their troubles, and he will comfort them (*O vjeri, nadi i ljubavi*

67). Furthermore, on the Cross, Jesus demonstrated his power in weakness and his greatness in humiliation (John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §22). By this, he conquered suffering and turned it into victory.

In the second place, Christ solved the problem of suffering by suffering and the problem of death by dying, thereby transforming the meaning of both suffering and death (Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 125). Goodier claims that Christ drew all suffering to himself and nailed it to his Cross, which made suffering significant in a new way—it "made it the greatest delight on earth" (133–34). Although Christ did not take away the sufferings of human life with his crucifixion and resurrection, he nevertheless "illuminates every suffering with a new light, the light of salvation, the gospel, the good news" (Radionov 520). United with Christ's suffering, every human suffering is redeemed (Radionov 520). Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but he also changed the meaning of death, thereby changing the meaning of "all the little deaths, all the sufferings that anticipate death and make up parts of it" (Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 132). Kreeft believes that God is with us when we are suffering under the burden of life, that he is taking our blows: "Every tear we shed becomes his tear. He may not yet wipe them away, but he makes them his" (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 133). That is why the psalmist says to God: "collect my tears in your wineskin" (Ps. 56.9).

> If he does not heal all our broken bones and loves and lives now, he comes into them and is broken, like bread, and we are nourished. And he shows us that we can henceforth use our very brokenness as nourishment for those we love. Since we are his body, we too are bread that is broken for others. Our very failures help heal other lives; our very tears help wipe away tears; our being hated helps those we love. (Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 133)

Third of all, Jesus redeemed us from our sins, freed us from evil and death, and brought salvation to us, so that we can have eternal life in Heaven. God used Satan's power to defeat him; i.e., God saved the world by dying (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 130). As John Paul II explains, "[s]alvation means liberation from evil, and for this reason it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering. According to the words spoken to Nicodemus, God gives his Son to 'the world' to free man from evil, which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering" ("Salvifici doloris" §14). God's love for man and the world is manifested in the liberation through the suffering of his son, and this love is salvific—through it, God protects man against "definitive suffering"—damnation (John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §14). In the sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ's suffering and sacrifice for the salvation of the world are made present. Kreeft states that the "Eucharist is the solution to the problem of

suffering. For it is the taking up of suffering into sacrifice. Human punitive suffering, the mark of mortality and sin, becomes one with divine redemptive suffering, the mark of eternal life and grace" (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 172–73).

4.3.5.7.3. Christian Response to Suffering

Christians are invited to follow Jesus in everything, including suffering, and through suffering, they transcend themselves and die to themselves. According to John Paul II, sharing in Christ's suffering is equivalent to suffering for God's Kingdom. By sharing in Christ's suffering, one becomes worthy of God's Kingdom and in a way repays "the infinite price of the Passion and death of Christ, which became the price of our Redemption" ("Salvifici doloris" §21). Furthermore, John Paul II notes that the Apostle Paul elaborates on the topic of the "birth of power in weakness" or the "spiritual tempering of man" who is sharing in Christ's sufferings: "we can boast about our sufferings. These sufferings bring patience, as we know, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us" (Rom. 5.3–5). John Paul II explains that suffering calls to exercise the virtue of perseverance in enduring hardship. Perseverance offers hope, which ensures us that suffering will not defeat us, and that it will not deprive us of our "dignity linked to awareness of the meaning of life," which originates from God's love ("Salvifici doloris" §23). By sharing in God's love, we find ourselves again in suffering by rediscovering our souls, which we believed we had lost due to suffering ("Salvifici doloris" §23).

According to John Paul II, in the Church, as the Body of Christ, Christ wants to be united with every person, "and in a special way he is united with those who suffer" ("Salvifici doloris" §24). In a way, Christ has "opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering:" by sharing in Christ's suffering, man "*in his own way completes* the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world" ("Salvifici doloris" §24). When faced with suffering, one asks Christ what the meaning of one's suffering is, and Christ answers from the Cross, from his own suffering. By sharing in Christ's suffering, man gradually hears the answer, which is at the same time a call to follow Christ, to participate in the salvation of the world ("Salvifici doloris" §26). Kreeft explains that all human suffering can become part of Christ's work of salvation under the condition that we believe, because to believe is "to receive what God has already done" (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 134). Like John Paul II, Kreeft claims that, for a Christian, suffering is Christ's invitation to follow him, and he explains this idea in more detail:

> Christ goes to the cross, and we are invited to follow to the same cross. Not because it is the cross, but because it is his. Suffering is blessed not because it is suffering but because it is his. Suffering is not the context that explains the cross; the cross is the context that explains suffering. The cross gives this new meaning to suffering; it is now not only between God and me but also between Father and Son. The first *between* is taken up into the Trinitarian exchanges of the second. Christ allows us to participate in his cross because that is his means of allowing us to participate in the exchanges of the Trinity, to share in the very inner life of God. (*Making Sense out of Suffering* 135)

By taking up his cross, one spiritually unites oneself to Christ's cross and discovers the salvific meaning of suffering, so that one can find peace and spiritual joy in one's suffering, overcoming the sense of the uselessness of suffering (John Paul II, "Salvifici doloris" §26–27). Namely, "human sufferings, united to the redemptive suffering of Christ, *constitute a special support for the powers of good,* and open the way to the victory of these salvific powers" ("Salvifici doloris" §27). Suffering is both supernatural and human by nature: "It is *supernatural* because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply *human,* because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission" ("Salvifici doloris" §31). Radionov claims that love is "the most complete Christian answer to the question of the meaning of suffering" (521). If one endures suffering out of love, by following Christ's example and uniting one's sufferings with the sufferings that Christ endured out of love for humanity, suffering becomes meaningful: it becomes victory as man participates in Christ's redemption of the world.

Michael O'Brien's novels regularly explore the topic of suffering of ordinary people. It is important to notice that O'Brien's view of suffering is Christian and therefore optimistic, since he never loses sight of the resurrection and Divine Providence (see O'Brien, "Writing for the Eschaton"). His fictional characters "represent countless real people who embrace the Cross and live one or more dimensions of it in union with Jesus, thus participating in the salvation of other souls. They are strong, because they are weak with the 'weakness' of Jesus Christ" (O'Brien, "Interview with Avvenire"). These people, as O'Brien claims, "change the balance of the world" ("Interview with Avvenire") and discover the meaning of their lives through suffering.

4.3.5.8. Attitudinal Values in Michael O'Brien's Novels

The Lighthouse

The motif of suffering connected to one's parents is present in *The Lighthouse* in the lives of three men: Esau Hurley, Ethan, and Ross. Their different attitudes toward similar situations are juxtaposed in order to reveal how individuals cope with suffering, which attitudes lead to finding the meaning of life through suffering, and which not. The readers are introduced to the character of Esau Hurley in the moments when Ethan prevents him from committing suicide. Ethan sees grief under Esau's façade of bitterness and cynicism. In order to understand the origin of this situation, it is necessary to look into the past. When Esau was a boy, both his parents died, so he ended up in an orphanage, and it is implied that he was taken advantage of there. As a young man, he was handsome and the smartest of all, but throughout his life, he drank a lot, fought at bars, and led a disordered life. Telling Ethan his life story, Esau says that he was not a bad guy in the beginning, but little by little, he started doing small wrongs and then bigger. He explains: "You're sinking and your head is full o' darkness, but you keep saying to yourself, 'This is right; this is good.' But you know deep inside yourself that wrong isn't right and right isn't wrong, so you make yourself blinder, do more evil because evil was done to you and life owes you" (*The Lighthouse* 85). Ethan realizes that Esau is similar to the children he knew when he was a child: "The mean ones, the bullies who were hurting themselves as much as they hurt others" (*The Lighthouse* 86). Esau's answer to suffering is not transcending it and finding a meaning in it. Instead, he spirals down into self-destruction and repays evil with evil, hurting himself even more and inevitably hurting those around him as well. Namely, he says he hates good people for being good, while thinking that he is righteous, "saving the world from people who give other people pain" (*The Lighthouse* 86). He admits that he was the one responsible for burning the church down, because he believes that God does not live there anymore, and that there are rotten people like him. Instead of transforming his pain into something positive and constructive or instead of repenting for his wrongdoings and changing himself, in his arrogance, Esau thinks that he is the righteous one and does even more evil. However, he confesses his sins before death, and a priest holds his hand when he dies. In this way, O'Brien shows that even the last moments of one's life are a chance to convert and that God is merciful to everyone, even to the man responsible for the arson of the church, only if he repents and seeks God's mercy. In this way, although he did not live meaningfully, he finds a meaning before death. Just as a sad movie with a happy ending is considered positive, Esau's sad life, with confession and conversion, can be considered meaningful.

Esau's parents were not responsible for their deaths and did not abandon him willingly, unlike Ethan's parents, who most probably had a choice (at least his mother did, as we do not find out why his father was absent from the beginning). Suffering that emanates from one's

family is probably the most difficult to deal with: “But this source of our deepest loves is also the source of our deepest hurts. (. . .) [Y]ou know how those closest to you hurt you the most, whether deliberately or not. And if you are not part of a family, you know the even deeper hurt of loneliness” (Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* 10). Ethan experiences both. He reacts to suffering because of his parents’ abandonment and his mother’s treatment of him in a different way than Esau. Firstly, he decides to be upright, which is the right attitude toward suffering: “Throughout his life, Ethan had experienced much betrayal, a frequent exposure to the unreliability of human nature. For this reason, he had resolved to be true to his word, to resist at all costs any failing in integrity. He understood that it was partly reactionary, partly a means of avoiding the mistakes of the past and the chaos of the world” (*The Lighthouse* 155). Secondly, he isolates himself from the world, which, as discussed above, changes throughout the novel, so that he finally finds a meaning in this way as well. Knowing how it hurts not having a father, he is sad when he discovers that his son had no father for three years, before Ross’ mother married another man. However, he decides it is best not to tell Ross that he is his father. He accepts this situation, so it does not destroy him. In the end, when he sacrifices his life to save the people in the storm, he again finds a meaning of his life because, according to Hadjadj, only if life has been offered in sacrifice, it is not lost in death (32).

Ross has never known his birth father, but he has a great stepfather, and his whole family helped his mother raise him. He was angry at his father during his teenage years, but now he just wonders who he was and pities him. He explains how he managed to overcome his feelings as a teenager: “Whenever I drifted into thinking about my origins, the old feelings rising up, analyzing myself to death, feeling abandoned, I just started praying for that guy. When I prayed for him, the mood went away, the sun started shining again. Of course, it takes practice. My dad taught me this” (*The Lighthouse* 160). Having a stepfather who helped him deal with his suffering enabled Ross to take the right attitude to it. Unlike Esau and Ethan, Ross was not alone dealing with suffering—apart from his stepfather and family, he also knew that God is close to him in suffering, that he was suffering with him, which provided comfort. Since suffering is sometimes an invitation to pray (Radionov 519) and to forgive, Ross recognizes this with the help of his stepfather and finds a meaning of life through attitudinal values. In this process, he transforms his suffering into an achievement, matures, and grows beyond himself, becoming a kind and generous man. His attitude toward suffering also serves as a role model to others, such as Ethan, who “pondered the truth that this boy, this stranger, had also suffered loss and had risen above it, like a dolphin leaping, a soul riding the waves” (*The Lighthouse* 161).

The Island of the World

As Josip's suffering is mostly spiritual, it has been largely covered in the chapter on spirituality, freedom, responsibility, and conscience; in this chapter, this issue will be approached with the focus on Josip's reaction to suffering. Namely,

> [s]uffering puts us to a test. The most severe suffering tests everything within us. Then we choose. We choose either to turn inward to the darkness of despair, or we look up to the great wounded hands that reach down to embrace us. Mankind very much needs the living Jesus who longs for us to come to him, to open our hearts to him. He is love itself. But love never forces itself upon another. He invites. (O'Brien, "Interview with Katolički Tjednik, Sarajevo")

Initially, Josip retreats into hopelessness, but later in life decides to answer Christ's invitation, opening his heart to him. Through acceptance of suffering and its unification with Christ's suffering, he connects himself to God, learns humility, develops compassion, and frees himself from hatred, which ultimately leads to his growth. Additionally, in this manner, he also becomes an example for others.

As a child, seeing the massacred village, Josip starts running away. His running away represents not only a physical way to escape the horrors he saw but also a psychological way of suppressing what happened. The conviction that he does not exist also helps him cope with the shock. The monstrous evil and consequential suffering he experienced as a child were so overwhelming that even a mature person would struggle to cope with it. It was therefore impossible for him as a child to find a constructive way to overcome it. Later in life, when faced with new sufferings, Josip will constantly struggle to find meaning in them. When Josip's aunt takes him in, he remembers what happened, but he cannot bear to think about it. He is tortured by frequent dreams of the blood and fire, which serve as a symbol of the destruction of his village and thus his whole world. Hatred starts to flame in his heart, which will have a gradually destructive effect on his soul and psyche. The psychological turmoil during his time in Sarajevo, after the initial shock had subsided, is illustrated in the following passage:

> There are hours each day, whole passages of days, in fact, when all energy melts from him and he is merely a sack containing a ball of sorrow that must not be closely examined. He often feels like crying, but he is learning not to give in to the feeling. It can stay inside, he tells himself. All inside, pushing farther and farther inward, into a cellar from which it cannot escape. There are harder moments, when colors fade, when sound goes too, and he can only put his head between his knees and stare at the floor.

> There are times when he still curls into a ball on his mattress, with a knife turning and turning in the center of his chest. (*The Island of the World* 147)

Not having enough strength or wisdom to face his suffering, he suppresses it and runs away from it. No matter how deeply buried these feelings are, they must inevitably resurface. His uncle Jure, a Partisan, returns from the war and views Josip's presence with disfavor. Being on the verge of tears and seeing he cannot leave his aunt's house as he has nowhere to go, Josip realizes that Jure is the Partisan who hit him, ordered him to run, and then told him to be silent, because he is dead. Josip's ordeal continues as Jure threatens to kill him if he tells his aunt about this. In the meantime, Josip is admitted to the hospital, where the Lastavica explains to him that his suffering will bring much good to other people, and that he should not be afraid, but Josip does not understand. After returning from the hospital, he realizes that his uncle is responsible for the massacre of his village. Filled with a desire for vengeance, he wants to kill him but ultimately refrains from it, choosing instead to flee. After a few days of absence, he is taken back to the apartment, only to discover his uncle has shot himself. Josip is unsure if Jure killed himself, or if Eva killed him. What is important to him is that he is dead. His earlier trauma is now further intensified by his uncle's murder, both due to the shocking scene and due to his feeling of responsibility for it, resulting from his wish to kill him. "Each night he dreams of blood. He is either running from it, wading in it, choking on it, or drowning in it. And when he is not, he is licking it from his hands—is it his blood or other people's blood? He does not know. Blood strengthens him and makes him want more. He wakes from such dreams gagging and horrified by himself" (*The Island of the World* 193). He starts washing his hands compulsively, trying to wash the blood off them. His dreams of blood and fire are connected to Rajska Polja, while the dreams of drowning in blood are connected to Sarajevo. "Memories and hallucinations blend, mutate, cavort: an ever-changing panorama of descent into darkness, above which a red star sucks and swells ever larger" (*The Island of the World* 194). He thinks about blood all the time and sees it everywhere. One day, he starts running to escape from the blood, but he feels it following him. He enters a river, tears all the clothes from himself, and plunges under:

> He will wash it all away, the blood on his hands, the blood in his mouth, the blood that is falling and falling like ceaseless rain upon the mountains all around. He will wash it all away in the river, for the river has not yet turned to blood.
>
> Knowing that no large hands will pull him up and carry him to shore, he understands that he has come to the end. He will sink into the pit as so many others have sunk into it. Yet he will go down naked and free and cleansed at last. All murder and

> theft and falsehood will be washed out of him, all fear and shame. (*The Island of the World* 197–98)

He wishes to drown but does not succeed. “Slowly, slowly he is cleansed. Slowly, slowly, he realizes that he has learned to swim” (*The Island of the World* 198). The imagery of blood represents here both Josip’s sins (e.g. the wish to kill) and the sins committed against him, all of which cause his unbearable suffering. He therefore enters the river, a symbol of baptism, where he symbolically wants to wash away his sins, fear, and shame. Thinking that he has to die, he tries to drown, but God prevents that from happening and cleanses him, giving him the second baptism and a rebirth. Learning to swim signifies newfound wisdom and strength to cope with suffering.

As a young man, Josip further struggles with sorrow, which is triggered by things that remind him of his past. “In such moments, the blow of a hatchet splits his rib cage, and agony pours from the severed arteries. Whenever this occurs, he is able to bring it under control by changing his thoughts, and then he is slowly able to change his emotions. It passes. Such incidents are becoming less frequent as years go be. Life goes on. It must” (*The Island of the World* 211). The strategy he still uses is suppression, so he buries his suffering deep inside his soul. When he meets Ariadne, he is still tortured by his demons. Although he is afraid that he will lose her if they marry, she convinces him that she will always be in his heart, and that he is strong enough to start a new family with her. After they marry, Josip’s father-in-law asks him to consider leaving Yugoslavia because of the communist regime, but he answers that both he and Ariadne are willing to sacrifice, adding: “And because we are together in it, the darkness becomes light” (*The Island of the World* 320).

Indeed, a great suffering and sacrifice ensue. Josip is taken into custody for questioning about *Dobri Dupin*, where he is beaten constantly and threatened that his wife and unborn child would be hurt. He does not reveal anything and is sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor on Goli Otok. Upon arrival on the island, the guards torment him for fun, beating him with truncheons more than the other prisoners. His body is a mass of open wounds, yet they bathe him in seawater. The prisoners are treated worse than animals, humiliated, and the “atmosphere is one of constant fear and subservience, obedience and exhaustion” (*The Island of the World* 360). However, Josip does not despair and sees meaning even in this situation, because he is sustained by the love for his wife and unborn child, and he believes he can escape. Until he does, he decides to rebel against the inhumane conditions: he develops a culture by having dialogues, through which he also finds meaning even in the infamous working camp. When cruel guards brutally murder two boys that Josip was close to, his hatred grows, and he wants

to kill them. At this point, Josip does not understand that "[h]atred is an energy that gives and takes. It drains the soul, even as it seems to invigorate" (*The Island of the World* 395). Tata tries to reason with him, warning him that his vengeance will eventually destroy him, yet Josip does not want to listen, but plans and imagines killing the guards. He almost kills Zmija, one of the guards, but his friends stop him.

After he manages to escape the island, Josip threatens Ariadne's uncle Goran to tell him where she is. As Goran is a powerful Communist, he represents for Josip the embodiment of everything that has destroyed his homeland and his life, the embodiment of evil. Josip wants to kill him, but after hearing that both Ariadne and the baby are dead, he is completely devastated and cannot do anything, not even kill him. Not knowing that Goran is lying, Josip feels profound emptiness. As already discussed, two attempts of his self-destruction follow. Firstly, remembering the three men he wanted to kill and struggling with the hatred that consumes him, he strikes his breast with a rock until he faints. Secondly, he tries to commit suicide when the devil tells him that they are the same. While in a psychiatric hospital, he slowly recovers. He believes the reason is the treatment by his psychologist Slavica, but she disagrees and explains: "It is you who chose to live. Only you can choose to live or die, and no one else can make this choice for you" (*The Island of the World* 496). Since he chooses to live, he still sees a meaning in life, despite his sufferings. What is more, he even tries to help other patients, as already discussed.

Every time Josip has encountered great evil and pain, he has fled or walked away. When he gets a new job in Rome, he decides to walk there. As he is for the first time not walking away from something but walking toward something, it becomes a pilgrimage for him, although he is not aware of it. Namely, his walking will result in a spiritual transformation of his life, which will completely change his outlook on the meaning of life and suffering. By doing this, he becomes

> again the walker of the world, and he understands the necessity of this walking. No longer is it a fleeing-from, it is a going-to. It is the counterpoint of flight; it is the search for completion, the arc between departure and arrival. It is *nostos*. The home of his past is behind, the home of his future is ahead in the unknown territory he must cross. He knows that he will live in the fabled city for a time, yet as he walks through the flat farmland and orchard country of northern Italy he dreams of another home. It is ahead and undefined, yet it is already taking shape within him. It has no form or detail and may be far away or near—he does not know. This sense cannot be dismissed, for it tells

him that a momentous turning point is walking toward him, even as he walks toward it. (*The Island of the World* 519)

As explained earlier, Josip confesses when he arrives to Rome, and the friar advises him to love his enemies and to forgive them. From this moment, Josip's perspective on life and suffering changes: he places God in the first place and accepts his cross. By taking the right attitude toward suffering, he transforms it into an achievement and grows beyond himself, finding meaning even in suffering. The first step is to enter a church, which he succeeds with God's help. His first suffering after the conversion occurs when Mrs. Conway falsely accuses him, yet he forgives her, and she is, of course, taken aback. In this way, he does not intensify his hatred, which would destroy him, but sets a good example of forgiveness.

Even though Josip accepts Christ's way of suffering and loving his enemies, it does not mean he does not struggle with it. His confessor remarks that all his sufferings are a gift. Josip contemplates it:

> A gift that I lost Ariadne and the baby, my family, my people? A gift that I lost my learning and my vision of the cosmos? I know the truth of this, theologically. Still, how hard it is to accept in one's heart and soul.
>
> Would I like to have the gift rescinded? Of course! Yet, in the strangest level of my self I know that it is a gift nonetheless. How else do we know God's rescue unless we have been drowning? Can healing be demonstrated without injury, or love be proven without trial? Still, there is an ache within me that cries out: what of those who were not protected, who are left unhealed, who do not know love?
>
> The reply is articulated by—and can *only* be articulated by—God dying with us on our cross. (*The Island of the World* 588)

The story follows Josip's exile in the USA, where he lives without any family or friends, which represents suffering for him, but he accepts it and changes himself. He dedicates his life to helping others (e.g. Caleb or Jason and his family), loving those who hate him (e.g. the Serbian lady), doing acts of mercy (e.g. baptizing the dead infant and burying him), or sacrificing himself (e.g. living on bread and water and selling his possessions in order to help Croatia in the war).

Reflecting on his successes and failures in loving and forgiving his enemies, on Good Friday, Josip prays to Jesus: "Teach me to die like you" (*The Island of the World* 678); shortly after comes one of the greatest trials of his life, when he is truly called to die to himself. He, namely, finds out that Ariadne is alive and married to another man. His whole world collapses, and, "held in the grip of darkness" (*The Island of the World* 682), he wants to die. The person

who gives meaning to these otherwise meaningless moments for Josip is Caleb. To Josip's statement that he is a mistake and must die, Caleb begs Josip not to kill himself and not to leave him. Realizing that Caleb loves him and that his life is meaningful to Caleb, Josip decides to live. He chooses to die to himself and to offer his suffering to Jesus' suffering for a greater good: "Josip prays and fasts and offers his second loss of Ariadne for the saving of the victims [of the Homeland War]—perhaps some will escape. He clings to the Cross and lets himself be nailed in his own way and understands that this union saves him from the dangers of vengeance and apathy" (*The Island of the World* 687). After discovering that Ariadne's second marriage is valid, he decides to sacrifice again and not contact her for the greater good. "He will bear this absence, this silence, this permanent separation. He will take it entirely upon himself, and no one needs to know. Yes, he will offer it to the crucified Christ. He will offer it for Ariadne and her family, and he will unite it to the Lord's sufferings so that lives will be saved over there [in Croatia] in the war" (*The Island of the World* 695).

After the Homeland War, Josip visits Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite many beautiful memories, both countries are in his mind connected to a trauma or suffering. Returning there enables Josip to confront his sufferings, to forgive, find peace, and heal, which results in his rebirth. When in Split, he is faced with a temptation that will test his Christian ethics and the ability to cope with inevitable suffering. He overhears a conversation between the two cruel guards from Goli Otok that he wanted to kill. They laugh about the past, believing that their acts were necessary. They were not punished, and they live comfortably. The following day, he finds them in a café, approaches their table, drops a limestone[26] slab onto the table with a boom, points a pistol at their heads, pretends to shoot them by whispering "Bang!" and says: "I am from Goli Otok (. . .). This is for what you did to Krunoslav Bošnjaković. (. . .) This is for what you did to Dalibor Kovač" (*The Island of the World* 718). Then he places wooden crucifixes before them and adds: "Unless you repent of your crimes, the winepress[27] of God shall extract from you full payment. Know that judgment is soon to be upon you in the court of heaven" (*The Island of the World* 718). Josip's dramatic act is heavy on symbolism. The limestone slab stands for the guards' crimes committed against the innocent people imprisoned on Goli Otok, while Josip's enactment of gunshots symbolizes his fantasy of revenge that he rejects due to his spiritual transformation. The crucifixes indicate the motive for Josip's mercy, since he has learned to suffer as Jesus suffered and to forgive as Jesus

[26] The prisoners on Goli Otok worked in a limestone quarry.
[27] One of the cruelest punishments in the working camp on Goli Otok was called the winepress, and Krunoslav Bošnjaković was killed using that method.

forgave. Additionally, together with Josip's warning, they also represent a call to repentance and a sign of God's mercy and forgiveness. Josip's act suggests that it is not up to him to take revenge; instead, he invites the guards to repent, warning them of God's judgment. If Josip killed the guards as he intended to, he would not be any different than them. However, in this way, he transcends himself and makes his small contribution to changing the world.

While in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he remembers his transcendental experience in the Neretva River, when he wanted to wash his sins away and to drown:

> Those waters gave him his second baptism—a death and a rebirth—the first of the many he was to experience. He had met Christ in it, a bound and trussed and murdered Christ floating by.[28] Christ had called to him there, asking him to enter the water in a way that he had never done before (. . .).
>
> Then Christ had pulled him under. Had it been a pulling or an invitation? In a sense, it was both, the dialogue between providence and fate, between the call to good and the vulnerability to evil. And so, he had gone down, deeper still into the unseen currents, where he had begun to learn that knowledge itself cannot save. Christ, he had learned, always drew his followers into deep waters, even, at certain points, to the brink of literal drowning, for in this immersion was the beginning of wisdom. It pulled the soul from the merely horizontal perspective into the vertical, the cosmic one, which is so much higher than it is broad. (*The Island of the World* 721)

His second baptism enabled Josip to recognize Christ's presence in suffering and the transformative power of suffering, leading him to wisdom. Josip realized that through the deepest pain one can become closer to God and gain a better understanding of the meaning of suffering and life. Furthermore, his thoughts before returning to his birthplace reveal his motivation for the return:

> It is no longer necessary to avoid the *apokalypsis* of memory at all costs, for this practice of avoidance, which he has pursued for most of his life, can now be left behind. The only certainty is that it will contain pain. Yet this pain is life. If drowning contains the promise of rebirth, then pain contains the promise of joy. He hopes for this. Yes, the journey is not so much about knowledge as it is about hope. Here, at the latter end of his years, he may begin again. (*The Island of the World* 721–22)

When he arrives to where his village used to be, he feels at first unusually calm, but pain, sorrow, and joy are also present. He considers this experience a prayer enveloped by God's

[28] He saw murdered priests floating in the river.

presence. He cries and remembers. Previously unable to delve into his memory of the village massacre, he can now examine it. Realizing that the Partisans raped Josipa before killing her, he chokes and vomits, screams and cries, after which he feels calm. He mourns the loss of Josipa, the loss of the purest gift, and the descendants who could have been born from their love. In this way, his final rebirth occurs, and he becomes completely free of the burdens of his past, pain, and fear. Accepting all his inevitable sufferings in freedom gives his life the deepest meaning, so he grows beyond himself. Sharing in Christ's suffering perfects his faith, through which Josip is protected against eternal suffering—damnation.

Strangers and Sojourners

Strangers and Sojourners primarily focuses on Anne's spiritual angst while she tries to unravel the meaning of life. She is troubled by metaphysical questions: is there God, what is he like, why does he allow suffering, what is the meaning of life and death, what are love and truth. The inability to answer these questions leads Anne to the feelings of loneliness and not belonging, although she is surrounded by her family. Her feeling that she is in exile rather than at home does not refer to her missing England, as she initially thinks, but to her detachment from God. Even though she does not realize it at first, her search for meaning is actually a search for God, for the ultimate meaning.

Anne is terrified of getting married to Stephen but knows that, through love, she will be broken in order to be finally able to live. The Holy Spirit confirms this at their wedding, whispering in the form of wind: "*You shall be tried also by fire and created anew*, said the wind. (. . .) *I am with you*, said the wind. *I am hidden in your weakness, flowering in the heart of winter*" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 144). Married life, however, does not meet Anne's expectations, since it does not fulfill her as she has expected. Aware that her life is good, she is puzzled about "the wound in her breast, which she . . . diagnosed as chronic separation" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 167), yet she does not know from what she is separated. She does not realize that no human being, not even her husband, can fill her emptiness as God can. Her loneliness is actually a longing for God, echoing St. Augustine's thought that "our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*The Confessions* 1.1.1). Anne dies to herself in her family but feels lonely and incomplete despite it: "It was true that the glass of her self had been cracked by her husband's love, by birth, and by dying to much of what she held sacred: art, ideas, the lively sport of conversation. The liquid of her being had begun to pour out into the lives of others: the man, her children, and a chosen neighbor. But the vessel of her mind had not been fully compensated" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 167). Sometimes she feels that behind her loneliness and despair a longing for God is hidden: "My life is a temporary encampment on the edge of

an abyss. I beg for oxygen, for light, for strength. Yet of whom do I ask it? Certainly not that God whose coldness could make me tremble with fright as a child" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 189–90). Indeed, the image of the cold God she was presented with in her childhood cannot fill her emptiness. She continues to contemplate: "We are starved for the unknown God. A few, like Stephen, will consume him in a sacrament. Others, like myself, are driven out into the waste places in search of his presence" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 190). Faced with spiritual suffering, Anne does not passively accept it, but embarks on a quest for God. The profound despair during this quest is best illustrated when she goes outside at night, sees the grandeur of Canoe Mountain under a full moon, and breaks down in tears. She feels afraid and alone: "Perhaps this desire for true home is a quest for the promised land. At the height of my weeping I cried out, 'I want to go home!'" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 192). Through this anguish, a revelation emerges: "Perhaps there are places within us, places of true home, that do not yet exist and are carved from the stone of our hearts only by suffering" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 193). Amidst her pain, Anne longs for a true home, symbolizing her yearning for togetherness with God, whose love would bring her peace and comfort. Her realization that suffering will bring her closer to God indicates the transformative potential of suffering in the search for meaning and reflects some of her earlier thoughts and God's words at her wedding.

Anne regularly goes to Catholic Mass with Stephen: "I go to look and wait . . . and to find my . . . soul" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 199). She prays: "*Deliver me from the shadow in my mind*, she asked the benign Presence—asking in the same breath if it was real, if it had ever been there" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 201). Anne wants Stephen to help her in her spiritual journey, as if to convince her that God exists. He also expresses doubts about Anne's cold God, "too much an English judge" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 203) and tells her about his God: "My God is a peasant, dragging his cross through the streets of Dunquin and Swiftcreek. He's got splinters and dirt on his fingers. He laughs and weeps. (. . .) A warm God. A father (. . .). A bleeding God" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 203). Obviously forgetting her realizations about suffering, she accuses the Irish of the obsession with suffering and death. Afflicted with darkness and fear, she begs Stephen to hold her, and he prays for her, but her longing for home, a safe haven persists, indicating her sense of displacement and alienation: "I belong neither to the heights of heaven nor to the dust of the earth (. . .). Your Irish martyrs could never love me, Stephen, and I doubt if your God does either. I cannot abide the blood. Or the manure for which you have so much respect" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 205). Her repulsion toward blood and excrement, and her need for cleanliness symbolize her desire to avoid suffering. However, Stephen's words suggest that suffering is essential for gaining wisdom in order to find faith and

meaning, as manure is necessary for plant growth. He explains that God should be searched in the ordinary aspects of life, even in suffering: "Your God wasn't lowered on a golden chain, woman. He chose to be birthed in a stable. It wasn't any Christmas crèche either. He was born beside smells that weren't too polite. And he walked through a little bit of a tough hill town. Shepherd folk with sheep grease on their hands" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 205–06). Yet, Anne's despair deepens to such an extent that she begs God to kill her.

It seems that a conversation with Father Andrei alleviates her suffering and directs Anne to the truth she has been searching for. She sees in him an unusual trait: his power comes from the lack of power. When he looks into her soul, she begins to weep, which makes peace replace the hurt and terror in her soul. He tells her:

> "We are all deaf. The way of emptiness teaches us to hear."
>
> . . .
>
> "The world is full of hatred because it refuses to be poor. It wants to conquer fear with power. But you will conquer in another way, the unknown way. First, perhaps, you will forget. You will not see. You will not understand. Later you may see, and then you will know that the false self must die in order for the true self to be born."
>
> . . .
>
> "When you turn again, you will know the emptiness is your friend." (*Strangers and Sojourners* 300)

Reverend Gunnalls confirms to her that people are often deaf. Anne does not see suffering "as a desirable path to God" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 306), but he defines it as "God's quiet shout" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 307). Furthermore, Anne desires peace, but Gunnalls assures her that "a life without trials may be truly more hopeless than one that's constantly struggling with despair. One is dead, Anne, and the other is being born through blood and tears and agony" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 307). Gunnalls' exposition is strongly reminiscent of Frankl's and Christian theory, which claim that suffering is an opportunity to grow, mature, convert, and to find meaning.

Beyond Anne's usual suffering, a new cause of suffering emerges: the local women spread malicious gossip, accusing her of questionable morals and an affair with Reverend Gunnalls, claiming that she is carrying his child. This gossip prevents her from getting the job of a kindergarten teacher. Upset with their lies, she falls on her belly and gives birth to a stillborn baby. In her pain, Anne comes to the realization of certain truths. She finds that the women who gossip are similar to her, since they too are trying to deny their nothingness and emptiness. Admitting her own fault, she identifies her desire for superiority as the reason she has become

"nothing" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 341). In her nothingness, she recognizes faith, not yet in God, but in the unexplainable beauty of all creation. Furthermore, she understands that her fear of grief has intensified her suffering. Realizing that fear can result either in courage or hatred, she understands that her true enemy are not the women who gossip but hatred within herself. Therefore, she decides to seek courage, through which she hopes to find a deeper faith in existence. Pieper's definition of courage perfectly describes the essence of Anne's courage: "To be courageous means: to oppose injustice in the face of overwhelming external power and to accept willingly any resulting disadvantage, be it only public ridicule or social isolation" (*An Anthology* 68). Anne resolves to fight the enemy within, taking "the step-by-step journey into the dark territory of faith; she will choose to celebrate a presence of which her own life is a sign" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 343). Seeing her victimhood as a great gift, she notices that she is now free: she can exit her enclosure and enter "the darkness of absolute trust" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 343), which seems to be a spark of faith in God's providence. She is determined to use truth as her weapon—a truth purified by fighting her own destructive impulses—in order to create light, and she does this by buying the local newspaper company.

Amidst suffering, Anne embraces her identity. She finally learns to appreciate manure and to accept exile, suffering, and her participation in the battle for light. She eventually realizes "that it is not so much a question of finding the right place, the right time, the ideal marriage. Neither life nor happiness hinges upon such things. It is wholly within. It is response to what is given. It is choice" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 407). In other words, she realizes that the meaning of life cannot be found in external factors but in the person itself. It is within her power to choose the attitude in any circumstance, which reflects Frankl's theory. In her endurance of suffering, Anne becomes an inspiration for others. She, namely, meets a handicapped writer named Fran on a ship. Fran later publishes an essay in which she reveals that she wanted to commit suicide, but she met Anne. She writes: "But she got sufferin' in the eyes like only you an' me and the cripples know. 'There's somebody you can admire', I says to myself. 'Dis lady, she got guts. She got *resistance*" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 523). Fran gives up her intention, because Anne made her realize that she is not alone in her suffering. At the end of her life, Anne finds faith and offers God her nothingness and emptiness, realizing that the inexplicable presence of beauty in the world is a confirmation of God's existence. On a final note, Anne's life is perfectly described by Ivančić's observation of faith: "Faith is . . . a fundamental spiritual activity. The stronger a person believes, the safer, calmer, happier he is. If he cannot believe, he is afraid, he is incapable of living, then his life has no meaning. He cannot go anywhere, because he does not have fundamental trust" (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 188–89).

A Cry of Stone

The story of Rose's life embodies almost everything that Christian theory has to say on suffering: God allows her suffering to provide an opportunity for conversion (in this case for others), to invite to prayer and action, to perfect faith, to teach humility, to forgive, to purify, and to participate in the salvation of the world. *A Cry of Stone* explores the notion of dying to oneself and portrays Rose's suffering as a sign of God's favor, offering her comfort and closeness in her trials. Rose's life is marked by suffering from day one. Namely, her mother leaves her as soon as she is born. A significant part of her suffering represents sacrifice. The first time she encounters this word is during the Mass at which Binemin Edzo is brought: God presents him as her brother and asks a sacrifice of her. Unfamiliar with this word, she asks her grandmother what it means.

> "A sacrifice", Oldmary whispered, "is when you take a heavy load on your back, like a hurt or non-fairness. You give it to God and he puts it on the Cross of Jesus, the Big Sacrifice, and the Mass which is also the Big Sacrifice. Then you have a part in it."
>
> "What kind of part?" Rose whispered.
>
> "Part of mending."
>
> "Like sewing?"
>
> "Yes. Sewing the ripped hide. Sewing the cut flesh. Stopping the blood that is pouring out too fast."
>
> "That is sacrifice?"
>
> "That is sacrifice."
>
> "Does it hurt?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Oh." (*A Cry of Stone* 29–30)

Thinking about whether to accept God's offer or not, Rose realizes that her pain would be insignificant in comparison to her love for Binemin and the life that would return to him, so she accepts. Not only Christianity but also Frankl believes that sacrifice is meaningful if it is offered up to God (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 81), and from this point, Rose offers up all her sacrifices to God, uniting them with Christ's suffering. Her sacrifice takes form of the pain in her back, and she offers it to Jesus to use it in the best possible way. Maillet provides an explanation of this concept:

> Sharing in the sacrifice of Christ or, as it's often popularly called, "offering it up," is strongly associated with Catholicism but often denigrated as sadistic self-flagellation, or seen by Protestants as one more evidence of "works-based" theology by

> which Catholics are vainly trying to earn their way to heaven. As with any doctrine it could be abused, but in its sanctified form, as in the life of Rose, it might instead be seen as a response to Christ's call: "take up your cross" and come, "follow Me." (Matthew 4:24) One might see it as human participation in the divine response to the problem of evil: as Christ comes to suffer for us, finally on the Cross, so we suffer with Him so that the effect of the Cross in our world is concretely seen. (175)

Rose notices that Jesus pours her sufferings into Binemin, who makes progress with each of her sacrifices. Yet, she does not offer her ache only for Binemin but also for Euphrasia, Oldmary, and others who need it. New sufferings ensue, like Euphrasia's abandonment, Oldmary's death, or Binemin's adoption by Kinoje and his consequential distancing from the Church, but Rose persists in prayer and offering sacrifices. Discovering certain things about her grandfather after Oldmary's death, Rose is worried that he sinned a lot and that he might be far from purified for heaven, so she takes also his soul "onto her back, and the weight of him was great" (*A Cry of Stone* 237).

However, Rose does not always understand why God gives suffering if he is love. Pondering, she reaches the following conclusion: "She reminded herself that the love-fire always returned, and that in the hidden-way, the blessing-way, he was asking her to be part of his work. If he was allowing her to be smaller and poorer and to bear more suffering, he would use it for a good purpose, take it into the Big Sacrifice, and from there he would pour more healing into others" (*A Cry of Stone* 139–140). Rose learns about martyrs, realizing that, like her, many people sacrifice for the good of others. She often feels God's consolation in her suffering, but not always. For example, when the Mother General refuses to accept her into the order, she is sad but accepts the rejection as God's will, even though she fails to understand it. Feeling God's absence, she does not know what to do, but this does not deter her from praying. Even after deciding to study art, Rose still does not feel God's presence, but she offers this too, even though it is "a great burden" for her (*A Cry of Stone* 284). Another heartbreak strikes her when the nuns from the residential school, whom she considers her only family, have to return to France. Rose believes that she is too small for everything God gives her, and her way frightens her. She does not understand why God takes everything from her, but sister Mère Jean tells her that her strength is in her smallness and adds: "If he takes all from you, it is because he will in his time give all back to you, and it shall be greater than what has been taken" (*A Cry of Stone* 287). Additionally, when Rose finally returns to what used to be her home, she realizes that it is not home anymore, for her grandmother died, the cabin is burned down, and the center stone from her and Binemin's garden is gone. Burdened with all this ache, Rose "cried long and

hard, and it seemed to her that the storm in her soul, and a rising fear, were worse than she had ever felt" (*A Cry of Stone* 299–300). As rain begins to pour, and Rose has nowhere to seek shelter, it enhances the impression of her being completely alone in the world and abandoned by everyone, without a home. Yet, Rose is cleansed and consoled by the rain.

The next suffering arises from Rose's immense goodness and naivety. Having no friends at the art school, Rose is happy that a girl Deirdre wants to spend time with her, although she is shallow and aimless. The readers are aware that Deirdre is taking advantage of her by borrowing money, which she never returns, but Rose is not conscious of it. When Deirdre wants to borrow some money again, and Rose politely and tactfully asks her to return the debt, Deirdre gets angry, claiming that she has already returned it. Being short with money, Rose nevertheless decides to help Deirdre. However, Deirdre exploits Rose's kindness and naivety through a carefully designed diversion, stealing all her money, so that Rose cannot pay rent, tuition, or food. When Rose realizes what Deirdre has done, she demonstrates having a heart of a true saint:

> She urged herself not to hate Deirdre, to pray for her, to offer the back pain for her, because she was a lost-girl, a darkness-inside-girl, who could not love. Deirdre was poorer than Rose, poorer even than the homeless people, because she was an empty shell; she had sought to cram it full of the pleasures money could buy in order not to feel her emptiness. She had food and shelter and clothing and health and intelligence and a talent for design and a future of her own. Yet she had stolen. (*A Cry of Stone* 346)

Rose chooses not to focus on her own miserable state and uncertain future but to answer Deirdre's wrongdoings with Christian love. Recognizing Deirdre's moral and spiritual poverty, Rose expresses forgiveness and compassion through prayer and offering her pain for Deirdre's redemption. She is determined not to be harsh with Deirdre but to tell her she forgives her and ask her to return the money. Additionally, she decides not to tell anyone about the theft in order not to shame Deirdre. However, Deirdre seems to have vanished into thin air. After several days of searching for her in the cold city streets, Rose falls ill. She ends up in a hospital and gets evicted, ultimately finding refuge in a homeless shelter. This is followed by more suffering, overwhelming her heart to the point of despair, as she exclaims: "I would be better off dead than alive" (*A Cry of Stone* 391), but God does not grant her wish. Soon afterwards, she starts living in the home of a Holocaust survivor, Esther, who accepts suffering as an integral part of life: "To suffer is to live. To live is to suffer" (*A Cry of Stone* 462). Yet, after Esther's death, desolation overwhelms Rose, which leaves her with no strength to deal with suffering anymore, feeling that she is no artist and that her life is over.

Although Rose otherwise accepts suffering, she occasionally wonders about it. For instance, the sight of a boy with an extremely deformed face raises in her the question of why so much suffering exists and why it most cruelly affects the innocent. "Perhaps it was the clarity of the boy's eyes flashing with courage, perhaps it was Rose's own recent loss, but it came to her that within man's suffering there might be a mysterious nobility—a glimmer of who he might become" (*A Cry of Stone* 545). Burdened with already almost unbearable suffering, Rose nevertheless begs God that she lessens the boy's pain, and God agrees. Similarly, during her visit to the institution for the handicapped, Rose wonders at the holiness of the residents' lives, concluding: "They lived daily in their crucified flesh, and within their deprivation were the marks of crucified hearts. But they were free to love in their pain" (*A Cry of Stone* 788). In her humble way of looking at the world, Rose does not realize how similar she is to these people: like them, she has suffered for most of her life due to the pain caused by her severely deformed spine but has always been free to love and to offer her pain for the good of others, uniting her sacrifice with Christ's suffering. Very rarely does Rose envy someone more fortunate than her or gives in to sadness over her suffering, but when she does, she actively tries to refocus on the gratitude for her blessings and remind herself of the purpose of her sacrifices, because, as she realizes, she sometimes forgets it. For example, envying the twin sisters with dwarfism for their beautiful lives including a family and home, Rose wonders why God gave her "the broken dwelling, the broken family, and the broken heart" (*A Cry of Stone* 806), but then remembers all the blessings for which she is grateful:

> The face of Oldmary came to her as if in reply. Then Tchibi, and Fr. Andrei, Mère Jean, Hugo and Esther, and even, in her way Euphrasia. God had not abandoned her, and in all places he had warmed her with the radiant heat of his presence in the sacraments. There had been times when he had spoken to her with words, words heard in the heart of the soul. There had been consolations. There had been charitable strangers aplenty, greater in number than those who had hurt her. (*A Cry of Stone* 806)

Upon finding out that she has incurable cancer that has metastasized from her right lung into her brain, leaving her two to six months of life, Rose is angry at first. She then addresses the silence in her heart:

> "I accept. Do what you want with me."
>
> For a time she floated in the pool of abandonment, letting go of her fear, letting go of her self, or letting go of the fierce grip on life that she thought was her self.
>
> "Io, at last I am becoming a poor person. This I offer. Yes, this too I offer." (*A Cry of Stone* 817)

After this dying to herself, she doubts and fears, grieves her losses, accepts, and continues this in cycles. Her emotions are mixed: she wants God to heal her, but simultaneously, she is attracted to death, to the release from her pain, to meeting the deceased she loved and foremost the Beating Heart. From this point until the end of her life, she seems again to lose everything and suffer even more; she becomes an even "smaller" person than she was, or, as she says, a "no-thing." She is in constant pain, coughs up blood, and sometimes questions her identity, even experiencing hallucinations. Her drawings have been nibbled by mice. When she tries to enter a cathedral on Christmas Eve, she is not allowed in because it is being locked. She ends up spending the night in an outdoor manger scene. On Christmas Day, a priest hesitates to give her the Eucharist because she is dirty and covered in blood. People misinterpret her paintings in a gallery, where they hang unsigned, because Euphrasia failed to keep her promise to reveal Rose as the author. Due to touching her own paintings in the gallery, Rose is thrown out. Yet, she accepts everything, including her nothingness, and even offers her death for Euphrasia. By accepting her suffering and offering her sacrifices to God, Rose is rewarded: she finds the meaning of her life and helps to build a civilization of love. In other words, by following Christ to the cross, she becomes more Christ-like.

The Fool of New York City

Both Billy and Max are confronted with considerable suffering quite similar in nature, but the two of them react to it differently. Since Billy has learned to accept suffering and to take the right attitude to it, he teaches Max how to do it. Having experienced amnesia, Billy consoles Max that this suffering might be rewarding: "'It is hard for you,' he says. 'I was once like you. A long time ago, I too forgot my own name. The name love gave to me, and breathed into my ears, and called me to supper, and scolded me, and taught me my path in life. And when I lost that name I thought I had lost everything. But it was only a beginning. A losing can be a better kind of finding'" (*The Fool of New York City* 22). As the story unfolds, the readers find out that Billy's fiancé left him because of his height, and it still hurts him. Then he lost his parents in a car accident, in which he was badly hurt and after which he suffered from amnesia. Due to amnesia, he often felt depressed and occasionally woke up in the middle of the night panicking, because he felt he was "completely alone in the world, without a family" (*The Fool of New York City* 235). However, by refocusing the attention from himself and his suffering to other suffering people in the psychiatric institute, i.e. by realizing himself through self-transcendence, he found a meaning: "It seemed that by engaging them I lifted their hearts a little. (. . .) I learned that I had a gift for making people smile" (*The Fool of New York City* 235). After being released from the institute, he started living with limited resources in a condemned building.

Yet, he is grateful for his life and the small things. For example, the fact that he has strong bones because he grew up on a farm where there was no shortage of milk is the reason why he claims: "I've been fortunate from the beginning" (*The Fool of New York City* 52). He even considers his immense height, which frightens people and is often impractical, a special gift. He affirms: "I'm one of the luckiest people in the world" (*The Fool of New York City* 53). When he distributes sandwiches to the needy in the streets of New York, they tend to avoid him and are reluctant to take a sandwich from him because of his height. Max comments this in the following way: "I suppose Billy has experienced enough rejection in his life to be untroubled by people's doubts about his intentions. Cheerily, he presses ever onward" (*The Fool of New York City* 98). In general, Billy is "perpetually cheerful" (*The Fool of New York City* 112) despite the sufferings in his life.

When Max's memory returns, it turns out that amnesia is not the only suffering he and Billy have in common: his parents also died, and his fiancé also left him. His parents' and his brother's death when he was only eleven was devastating for him. He describes how he felt when the towers fell:

> "It's broken," I said, and began to wail.
>
> The towers, the world, my family, my life were broken, and nothing would ever put them back together again. (*The Fool of New York City* 155)

Max's grandparents Robbie and Helen, who became his legal guardians, were loving and caring, but he was so deeply scarred by his loss that he did not make friends in the new school and constantly saw towers falling in his mind. He was aware that his childhood ended. His emotional burden even increased when grandfather Franklin blamed him for the deaths of his family members. He describes his high school period in this way: "In all my activities I preferred to be alone. Though I had friends, I did not speak to them about my loss, nor did I develop any degree of intimacy founded on trust. I did love Robbie and Helen, actually very much, though with an undercurrent of fear that I would lose them too someday" (*The Fool of New York City* 169). When he became an artist, he expressed his trauma through paintings. He realized that Françoise was right when she told him that he loved his tragedy, and yet, he believed he was incapable of changing himself. A new suffering befell him when Françoise conditioned him to meet her at Ground Zero on the anniversary of 9/11. Even though reluctantly, he decided to go in order to prove his love to her but was unable to reach the site due to hallucinations and a panic attack. Françoise terminated all communication, blaming him for having hurt her. Consequently, he began drinking and was constantly listening to Mozart's unfinished *Requiem*, as he says, "in honor of my unfinished life. I should have been finished

off with my family. I killed them, though I was not yet certain how I had done it. I killed them and I survived. It was the survival that provided the incontrovertible evidence" (*The Fool of New York City* 214). He eventually traveled to his deceased grandparents' house in Vermont, having brought a lot of alcohol and a gun. He explains: "I . . . settled in to face my past, whatever it might be. I knew that I must do it this way or I would die. I might choose to die anyway, depending on the truth. My own personal ground zero" (*The Fool of New York City* 217). Max was angry at everybody. He was angry at his parents for having left him alone, at Françoise for having cut arteries in his heart, at the terrorists, and most of all, at granddad Ben Franklin for having claimed that Max had killed his parents. Depressed and constantly drunk, he tried to put the gun in his mouth to see what it would be like. When he pulled it out, he accidentally shot a pan on the wall and then vomited. He shouted: "Nothing makes sense! (. . .) Life, death, accident, murder—nothing!" (*The Fool of New York City* 219). In such a state, he fell through ice in the pond near the house and thought he was dying. Having managed to get out of the pond, he put on his grandfather's clothes and realized that he did not know where he was. Thereupon he asked some strangers for a ride, and they took him to New York, were Billy finds him. Up to this point, Max's wrong attitude toward suffering left his life devoid of meaning and purpose. Billy's friendship changes his outlook on life and suffering, so he is not immensely afraid anymore to visit the site of the World Trade Center. He feels disturbed, yet unable to cry, and when he and Billy leave the site, he feels that he is different. In the wake of this, he changes his life: he sells the expensive things he used to console himself with and donates the earnings to the churches and soup kitchens in which Billy volunteers, commenting: "I feel poorer and more buoyant, and in the process have learned that deprivation can be good for the soul—the nouveau-riche boy returning to his essential form" (*The Fool of New York City* 254). The final stage of his grieving occurs when he visits Ground Zero once again, but this time alone, and weeps and sobs openly. Finally accepting the deaths of his family members, he goes home "suspended in a feeling of peace" (*The Fool of New York City* 254). Realizing that traumatic memories do not disappear when we bury them, he becomes aware that we should decide to transform them "into something that gives us life" in order to mature, in order to "become who we are" (*The Fool of New York City* 254). In this way, he realizes meaning through the right attitude toward suffering. By the end of the novel, he understands that also "Billy was who he was not only because of his nature and upbringing but also by his personal sufferings—rather, by what he had done with them" (*The Fool of New York City* 268).

Sophia House

Pawel has been faced with suffering from his early childhood. The first source of suffering is his father's absence due to imprisonment, which is followed by great-uncle Nicholas's sexual abuse in Zakopane. The latter causes such trauma that Pawel is wounded for life, not even wanting to get close to his father, as explained earlier. Pawel becomes frightened by everything, suffers from nightmares, hides from reality in books, and is always alone. As he grows up, darkness overwhelms him, and he suffers from depression and numbness, still struggling with nightmares. He represses the memory of the abuse, believing that it was just a bad dream, although he questions this in his later years, until he eventually realizes that it really happened. As a result of these two traumas,[29] Pawel struggles with homosexual inclinations, which he finds disturbing.[30] Furthermore, he seems to be unsuccessful in every endeavor: for example, he fails at studying engineering, and he is not accepted into the monastery. He becomes filled with anger at everything and everyone: "anger at the state of the world, anger at his fearfulness and weakness, anger at his cherished-hated solitude. His unhappiness, he was sure, was the fault of his upbringing—the insensitivity of his family. There was even anger at God, though in the beginning this was infrequent" (*Sophia House* 54).

As Maillet observes, "[f]or Pawel, the pain of home leads to a period of wandering and exile" (222). He decides to travel to Paris in order to escape his origins and to pursue a career as a painter, but he is unsuccessful even there, since galleries reject his paintings. While working there as a gardener on the estate of a Russian princess, he meets Father Photosphoros, a Russian Orthodox monk, and asks to apprentice under him in icon painting, but the monk rejects him harshly. Pawel interprets his rejection as a sign that God does not want him, which leads him to despair. As a result, Pawel leaves the princess's service and becomes a homeless beggar. Pressured by overwhelming anguish, he considers drowning in the Seine. However, despite his difficult life circumstances and disappointments, he still sees some meaning in his existence, since he comes to the realization that he nevertheless wants to live. Pawel is afflicted by a new suffering when he, driven by hunger, exhaustion, and what he perceives as a loss of dignity, decides to accept an offer to work as a nude model. Unaware of the cause, which the readers are invited to attribute to his sexual abuse, Pawel has always felt "a morbid terror of nakedness"

[29] Maillet explains that a common psychological theory used to explain homosexual feelings can be applied to Pawel's case—"the theory of the 'absent father,' whose lack of presence in a child's life leaves them longing for male affection and unsure of their own potential to become a physical father" (221).

[30] Maillet emphasizes O'Brien's view on homosexuality as one of the most controversial elements of his writing, but warns that it should not be "criminalized as 'hate' speech," even though some demand it: "For centuries, due to clear statements in scriptural revelation, the common Christian view was that homosexual behaviour was intrinsically disordered, so it cannot be surprising that the Roman Catholic Church still officially holds this position today (222).

(*Sophia House* 68) in front of others. Forced to undress in front of art students, the following thoughts consume him: "He was an object about to be used by other objects. All shape, all form, all color were draining away, leaving only a knot of despair within him. (. . .) He felt as if death itself had taken him. He had never experienced an agony like it" (*Sophia House* 68). Pawel attempts to cope with this suffering by shifting his focus on other things, but eventually decides to end the anguish by leaving, although the master of the academy refuses to pay him for the half-day's work. In other words, he realizes that this suffering is not necessary after all and chooses to stop it, thereby reclaiming his dignity. One of the frequent sources of his suffering is loneliness, and he wonders why he has not found a person to love. His "sense of abandonment and a feeling of being unloved generates a struggle against discouragement and even ultimate despair" (O'Brien, "Interview with Famiglia Cristiana").

Pawel is unable to grasp the meaning of all this suffering, but Rouault's painting of Christ in agony moves him, indicating that, on a subconscious level, he at least acknowledges the existence of meaning in suffering, even if he does not yet understand what it is. Rouault attempts to explain to him the connection between love and suffering. He, namely, suggests that Pawel should find an image of love in his heart by "submitting himself to the forces of life. By suffering" (*Sophia House* 68), viewing suffering as a means of finding meaning. However, Pawel cannot see the transformative nature of suffering, so he declares: "Suffering has not taught me to love (. . .). It has taught me to hate" (*Sophia House* 93), indicating his struggle to find meaning in suffering. Another suffering befalls Pawel when Goudron, whom Pawel has trusted, tries to seduce him. After Pawel pushes him away and escapes, he feels self-hatred and wants to drown, but eventually decides against it. He feels as if he belongs nowhere and wonders what he is, seeing himself as a "mass of contradictions and self-deceptions" (*Sophia House* 101). This is followed by a decision to not allow anyone to approach him, not realizing that in order to love and be loved, it is necessary to open one's heart to others, inevitably risking suffering. This is a risk worth taking for the greater good—love, which in turn makes the potential suffering meaningful.

On the journey home to Warsaw, God sends Pawel a message of hope in the midst of suffering and despair by leading him to a painting of the Last Judgment. In it, Pawel sees his own face reflected in the faces of those depicted, who cannot look up to the light, who have lost the ability to see and believe, and who perceive ruin as the totality of reality. He is familiar with their despair, fear, and loneliness, so he bursts into tears, since "[i]t seemed to him that the artist had captured his experience perfectly. (. . .) He no longer believed in Christ. But in this fantastic scene, leaping with angels and demons wrestling each other over the souls of men, he

saw the drama of his inner life laid bare. Yes, it was a hopeless world, but the despair was relieved mysteriously by the magic of art" (*Sophia House* 102). The painting and its author, who, like Pawel, once experienced a period of darkness, offer Pawel hope. However, Pawel still does not know how to deal with suffering, distrusts people, and cannot forgive those who betrayed him, so he persists in his intention to keep other people at a distance. "He no longer aspired to any kind of human success. He had no desires to paint, to be loved, or to be great. He was content to be a mediocre man" (*Sophia House* 111). Haunted by a sense of futility, he once again considers taking his life, "believing that nothingness was release from the intolerable imprisonment of his self" (*Sophia House* 111). Yet, once again, he lacks the will to execute his plan, implying that he still recognizes at least some meaning in his life.

The turning point of Pawel's life takes place at the shrine in Czestochowa, where he hears Mother Mary tell him: "I too have received blows (. . .). And a sword pierced my heart" (*Sophia House* 113). Through this, he begins to change: feelings resurface in his heart, which causes terrible pain, yet he senses life returning within him. He converts and talks about suffering to his confessor, Father Andrei. The priest points out the importance of forgiveness: "Unforgiveness locks us into unbelief, and unbelief deepens the unforgiveness. It revolves endlessly unless we make a stop. Unless we forgive" (*Sophia House* 116). Forgiveness is an important factor in self-transcendence and consequently self-actualization, since it "frees us to believe in a benevolent God and in the saving power of Christ, and thus to become who we truly are" (O'Brien, "Interview on *Sophia House*"). Father Andrei also emphasizes the Cross as the only means of regaining the original harmony lost in the Fall of Man, remarking that the Cross is the narrow gate and embodies God's infinite love. However, when he reveals God's prophetic words concerning Pawel: "*Here is my little son whom I love greatly. He has been broken. He will do a unique good in this world, but first he will be tested by fire*" (*Sophia House* 119), Pawel refuses to believe it. A probable reason is his inability to accept that suffering is meaningful: that God purifies him through pain and that it is a way to heaven. When the two of them meet again, Father Andrei returns to the topic of Pawel's suffering:

> " . . . You struggle against despair, which is perhaps the greatest temptation of our century. All manner of evil flows from this primeval wound in man, this conviction that he is absolutely alone, this terror that his sufferings are meaningless. Is this not also your fear?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Rest assured, my brother, that it is not so. It all has meaning." (*Sophia House* 122)

Namely, God does not leave us alone but is with us in our suffering. According to Radionov, suffering is indeed meaningful. Namely, by uniting one's suffering with Christ's, a person actively participates in the transformation of the world. "In this way, through suffering, . . . we become a participant in Christ's redemptive suffering, we become a co-redeemer, and we dive into the mystical spiritual depths of the Christian meaning of suffering. Thus, human suffering becomes salvific through the salvific sign of the cross of Christ, attains redemptive value, and acquires meaning" (Radionov 520).

Although Pawel has returned to faith and lives sacramentally, he still has to learn to carry his cross. His experience of suffering enables him to sympathize with others who suffer, especially with the Jewish boy he protects (O'Brien, "Interview with Fronda"), but his merciful act of helping the boy turns out to be the testing by fire that God prophesied. This suffering is especially demanding for him, as he struggles with attraction toward David and with loneliness. He is afraid that he might use David in the same way he was used by great-uncle Nicholas and Goudron, continuing the cycle of abuse. The demons in his mind tell him lies that torture him: "*There is no love for you*, they said. *You are an aberration, destined for destruction*" (*Sophia House* 163). He argues with God, begging him to disclose the purpose of his life, to tell him how to live, to speak to him. Tormented by suffering, he cries out in despair: "Why are there only two choices: this endless solitude, or degradation? I want to die. I want to live. I want to be alone. I want to love" (*Sophia House* 165). He laments his homosexual inclinations toward David: "O God, how can I love with the pure love you demand when this weight is in me, pulling me daily toward disaster? I am becoming drawn to him, I tell you, and I cannot break the hold it has on me" (*Sophia House* 166). Not understanding why God has given him this burden, he declares that he hates his heart and begs God to kill it. Believing that he is a predator, he again considers taking his life, but this time, the thought of hell deters him from it. As O'Brien explains:

> Through the story of Pawel's temptations, I try to show how a person reacts in situations of extreme stress, when all securities have failed, [*sic*] He is plunged into an epic crisis, and called to respond with heroic courage, even though this comes to him only little by little. Pawel experiences extreme weakness, and in this condition he discovers an unexpected grace and moral strength that is given from above. In his battle against what seems to be "small" sin, with no consequences that he can foresee, in fact his choices shift the balance of the world. In the end he resist [*sic*] successfully, and for himself this means new freedom to love and sacrifice. And for the world it means that David Schaffer [*sic*], who later becomes Fr. Elijah in *Il Nemico* [*Father Elijah*], is freed to become

> Christ's servant and to confront the Antichrist fifty years later. ("Interview with Famiglia Cristiana")

Gradually, with the help of prayer and sacraments, Pawel learns to carry his cross, which makes his suffering meaningful. His dialogue with God, followed by a vision, and the writing of the play about Andrei Rublëv seem to be important factors in Pawel's deeper understanding of suffering. These experiences enable Pawel to explain to David that, from the Catholic perspective, the answer to the problem of evil is Jesus: "This man is God himself suffering with us, dying with us, so that he might draw us up to the Most High, confounding all the devices of the enemy" (*Sophia House* 327). When he later feels desire for David again, he initially engages in a discussion with the voice of the devil in his mind. However, Jesus teaches him not to listen to or converse with evil, but to turn to Him and trust Him, which helps Pawel overcome his suffering. Instead of focusing on his homosexual desires, Pawel begins to see himself as a beloved child of God, regaining his sense of dignity. Namely, what O'Brien observes about individuals with homosexual inclinations is true for Pawel: "the happiest are those who do not define themselves according to their sexual inclinations. They know that their personhood derives from something else, from their inherent dignity as human beings" (*Remembrance of the Future* 27). Pawel accepts his struggles and realizes their value, which is demonstrated in his reply to David's claim that he is a burden to Pawel: "There are burdens, even heavy burdens, that ease the weight of a man's life. And there are burdens that, when they are lifted from a man's life, will crush him" (*Sophia House* 352). In other words, Pawel's bearing of inevitable suffering makes him experience life as meaningful. On another occasion, Pawel declares that "[t]he pillars of wisdom are these: humility, powerlessness, poverty, loneliness, sickness, rejection, and abandonment" (*Sophia House* 412). Through his experience of these "pillars," Pawel has indeed found wisdom, discovering the meaning of life in a completely unexpected way—by accepting what he has always thought he should fight against—pain. Learning to accept the inevitable pain, Pawel listens to the advice that Father Andrei gave him and forgives those who wronged him. He offers himself completely to God, becoming purified. In this state, he is able to make the sacrifice God asks of him—to take David's place and sacrifice his life for him, shifting the balance of the world.[31] On the train to a concentration camp, Pawel is hugged by a repulsive old man who thinks that Pawel is his son. Pawel protests at first, but then hugs the man and comforts him. "In his arms was a father, a child, a beloved, disguised in the

[31] The full significance of Pawel's sacrifice is revealed in the sequels to *Sophia House—Father Elijah: An Apocalypse* and *Elijah in Jerusalem*. Namely, David converts to Catholicism and becomes Father Elijah, a Carmelite priest who plays a crucial role in fighting the Antichrist during the end times.

many disguises of man. As he held the creature it ceased to be just that—a creature, an *it*, wretched, unlovely, invasive of his privacy. He no longer felt afraid of him nor disgusted by his lack of beauty. The being he held in his arms was, indeed, beautiful" (*Sophia House* 475). When the man dies in his arms, Pawel says "I forgive everything" (*Sophia House* 475), implying that he forgives his own father, whom he has not forgiven until then. In this act of mercy on the way to death, Pawel shows his capability to be a human even amidst suffering, thereby finding the meaning of life. *Sophia House* is ultimately a story about sacrifice that changes the world's balance, to which testifies also the dedication of the novel: "*For those whose sacrifice is hidden in the heart of God, those whose 'small' choices shift the balance of the world.*"

4.3.6. The Ultimate Meaning

When writing about the ultimate meaning ("*Übersinn*"), Frankl conveys that it "transcends and surpasses man's limited intellectual capacities" (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 108). Namely, apart from will-to-meaning, man also has will-to-ultimate-meaning, and Frankl considers religious faith to be trust in ultimate meaning (*Bog kojega nismo svjesni* 99, *Patnja zbog besmislena života* 90, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 17). Although we cannot know the final purpose of our own life or the "super-meaning" of the universe, we can nevertheless approach it in religion or in revelation (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 48–49). Frankl writes: "We can only believe in super-meaning. But we also have to believe in it. And although only unconsciously, each of us already believes in it anyway" (*Odgovoriti životu: Autobiografija* 61). Frankl thinks that every event must have an ultimate meaning that we cannot know of but have to believe in (*Odgovoriti životu: Autobiografija* 61). In order to explain that life as a whole has a final meaning, he compares it to a movie: a movie consists of thousands of pictures, and, while watching the movie, we should understand each of them, but we cannot understand the meaning of the whole movie until we have seen the last frame. It is the same with life: we cannot know the final meaning of life until the last moment of life, and the final meaning depends on how the person actualized the potential meaning of every situation in one's life (Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 143), even one's last moments. Accordingly, only death gives meaning to life (Frankl, *Odgovoriti životu: Autobiografija* 16). Frankl draws another parallel by which he shows that there is a possibility of the ultimate meaning. He recounts his conversation with a therapy group:

> I asked whether an ape that was being used to develop poliomyelitis serum and therefore punctured again and again would ever be able to grasp the meaning of its suffering.

> Unanimously, the group replied that of course it would not; due to its limited intelligence, it could not understand the human world, i.e., the only world in which its suffering would be understandable. Then I continued with the following question: "And what about man? Do you think that the human world is a terminal point in the evolution of the cosmos? Is it not conceivable that there is another dimension, a world beyond man's world; a world in which the question of an ultimate meaning of human suffering would find an answer?" (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 107–08)

By suggesting another dimension, this analogy implies the existence of the transcendental. Namely, Frankl says that the concept of ultimate meaning is connected to an ultimate being—God, which should not be viewed as "one thing among others but being itself or Being (capitalized by Martin Heidegger)" (*Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* 147), which would mean that God is the foundation of existence and its ultimate goal.

Logotherapy and existential analysis talk about the phenomenological manifestation of the meaning of life, for which Christianity provides an ontic foundation in the person of God. As Kreeft explains: "If there is a meaning to our very lives and our very selves, it must be there by nature, not by art; or, saying the same thing in a different way, it must be objective, not subjective; or, saying the same thing again in a third way, it must be by divine art, not human art, God-made, not man-made. The meaning of life therefore requires a God" (*Making Sense Out of Suffering* 168–69). Many theologians write about what the meaning of life includes. Firstly, interpreting Thomas Aquinas, Feser claims that only God can bring us perfect fulfillment (112), while Kreeft points out that it is necessary to know God and Jesus Christ (*Mali vodič za svakoga: Smisao života* 11–12, *Three Philosophies of Life* 84). Secondly, Kierkegaard suggests that accepting oneself as a task is how one can find meaning in life, but that meaning can be secured only "through a proper relation to God," which is faith (Bernier 159). Similarly, according to Ecclesiastes, there is no meaning of life without a faith in God worth living and dying for, without a faith that entails trust, hope, and love (Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* 27). Thirdly, God wants us to freely love him in the same way he loves us and to unite with Christ (Kreeft, *Mali vodič za svakoga: Smisao života* 9, 35). Ivančić expands this premise and writes: "The meaning of life is to love man and God (*unum*), to be good (*bonum*), to comprehend, speak, and witness the truth (*verum*), and to realize beauty (*pulchrum*). If he does this, a man is spiritually healthy and free from existential anxiety and fear. He is then glorious, indestructible in the memory of people and the memory of God. He exists" (*Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 131–32). In this was, holiness and salvation can be achieved. According to Ratzinger, holiness means to be conformed to Christ. Ratzinger explains

that holiness is not something extraordinary but ordinary and normal for every Christian (*Ljubav koja spašava* 96). It does not mean heroism, and Christian saints are therefore not Supermen; instead, holiness can be achieved in any vocation. It signifies living "an ordinary life with a view directed toward God and shaping it in the spirit of faith" (*Ljubav koja spašava* 96). In other words, it means to be ready to serve the way God wants us to serve (Ratzinger, *O smislu kršćanskog života* 38). St. Ignatius reveals that the meaning of life is to save one's soul and explains the way to achieve it:

> Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.
>
> The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created.
>
> Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him.
>
> Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.
>
> Our one desire and choice should be what is more conductive to the end for which we are created. (12)

Namely, in Kreeft's words: with Christ, "poverty is riches, weakness is power, suffering is joy, to be despised is glory. Without him, riches are poverty, power is impotence, happiness is misery, glory is despised" (*Three Philosophies of Life* 28). In brief, by living holy (and by God's mercy), man's soul is saved for eternity, and eternal life with God in paradise represents the ultimate meaning of life.

4.3.7. The Ultimate Meaning in Michael O'Brien's Novels

The Lighthouse

At the culmination of the events in *The Lighthouse*, it becomes clear that everything in Ethan's life has led to this ending, which gives meaning to his whole life: Ethan's encounters with other people, all his deeds, art, love, and suffering, but, above all, the lesson that became ingrained within him—that no man is an island, that every person needs a relationship with other people, that human beings are created to live in a community (including the suffering that comes with it), which is a preparation and glimpse of the eternal communion in paradise. Although he only had an inkling of God during his life, he sacrifices his life, like Christ, so that others could live.

Realizing that he will die, he thinks that he will die alone, and he looks down into the darkness. However, in the last moments of his life, he decides to look up and reach for light, which is the moment of his conversion. "And then he saw a man coming toward him, walking in the water, telling him not to be afraid. And a woman was beside the man, her face compassionate and wise, her arms reaching to Ethan to enfold him" (*The Lighthouse* 190). After spending his life feeling unwanted, after isolating himself from others, avoiding love due to fear of suffering, Ethan does not die alone after all. His father may have abandoned him before birth, but Jesus himself comes in the moment of his death to tell him not to be afraid. His mother may have left him after a turbulent childhood, where love was scarce, but Mary, the mother of all people, appears in his last moments, reaching her arms to enfold him, her child. This peaceful and reassuring image of God's love conveys to Ethan a message that God eagerly awaits him as his son, and that he welcomes him in the eternal communion in paradise, which represents the ultimate meaning of Ethan's life. According to Nelson, "[o]ur hearts will remain restless until they rest in the presence of the merciful God. To be with God and behold him in all his glory—*that* is the meaning of life. To rest in his presence—*that* is our final solitude." With the ending of the novel, O'Brien delivers a powerful message to his readers: "we should keep our eyes on the true horizon which is Jesus. He is the true horizon and he is coming, regardless of the darkness and the intensity of the storms that we're in and that are approaching" ("Q@A with *The Lighthouse* Author Michael D O'Brien").

The Island of the World

The Island of the World follows Josip's journey of rediscovering the faith of his childhood, which the impact of evil has broken. As a child, when a swallow lands on his fingertips, he asks her: "Who are you?" "Where have you come from?" "Where are you going?" (*The Island of the World* 33). These questions represent transcendental and existential questions to which Josip seeks answers throughout his life. After the trauma Josip experiences as a child, the Lastavica of the Sea gives him a key to understanding life and God: "If there is no window, the light enters through you" (*The Island of the World* 174), which Josip does not understand. As a student who has strayed from the faith, he ponders similar questions: "*But what am I striving for, my beloved?* he asks the sea. *Where am I going? And what am I, really? For I am neither a giant nor a swallow, though my companions tell me I am a giant, and voices from the past tell me I am a swallow*" (*The Island of the World* 202).

Once he recalls a memory from Sarajevo: he is riding a white horse, which takes him into a cloud and higher in the sky, then beneath the waves, and into a field. Josip wants to ride forever, upward, "far from the cities of mankind and the enclosures of the self with their

bleeding walls" (*The Island of the World* 231). Remembering what he is fleeing from, he cries and the horse cries with him, and their tears become one stream. When the horse takes him back to where he found him, Josip protests, and the horse replies: "*You must live in the place that is the station of your labor and your love. Down there in the swaying forests, the dark sleeping fields, the cold barren lands, and the cities of man, where the indestructible, the faithful, the true are needed*" (*The Island of the World* 232). He tells Josip that he must "live in the rank of being that is his own" (*The Island of the World* 232), and Josip sobs uncontrollably. The horse tells him: "*You will ride upon me again, and I will come forth with all the white horses in the armies of heaven. In battle array shall the armies ride, for the One who is Faithful and True is coming upon his white horse, and it is he whom we follow*" (*The Island of the World* 232). Josip asks him who he is, and the horse answers: "*He is coming! He is coming! He is coming!*" (*The Island of the World* 232). This allegory refers to Revelation 19.11, where Jesus is portrayed as the Faithful and True, riding a white horse. Josip's ride on the horse depicts his spiritual journey in which he must overcome the struggles of life until he meets Christ in eternity. Although Josip wants to avoid the trials and sufferings of the earthly life, because they cause too much pain, the horse reminds him of his responsibility to accept God's plan. In other words, the horse assures him that he must accept his vocation ("rank") together with all the difficulties, because God needs him on earth to fight in the army of heaven, since he is indestructible, faithful, and true. However, the horse promises that Josip will be redeemed and united with Christ in eternity, announcing Christ's second coming. On the whole, the horse carries a message of the ultimate meaning of life: enduring troubles and pain on earth in order to be united with the divine in eternity.

During the relationship with Ariadne, Josip still struggles with faith, due to which he is uncertain about marriage and children. As he recalls his conversation with Ariadne about this issue, he realizes that "written in the glory of the cosmos is both a promise of joy and a promise of sorrow. Beyond them and through them is the promise of final victory. He can feel hope now, a sense that even sorrows may become part of the coming victory" (*The Island of the World* 304). His realization is reminiscent of the white horse's message. However, under the burden of suffering, Josip often forgets this, until his conversion, after which it seems that his gaze is always directed to God.

Like *The Odyssey*, *The Island of the World* is a story "about a man who goes on a long journey (. . .). He has a lot of trouble, but he gets home in the end" (*The Island of the World* 734). Josip returns home in the end both literally and spiritually. His literal return home is represented by his moving to Split. As soon as he arrives, he goes to a church. He is welcomed

there by Fra Anto, who does not lie on the stairs anymore but stands in a white robe, light shining through his wounds, and says: "*You are home at last, Josip* (. . .). *Here you will stay*" (*The Island of the World* 774). For the first time, the friar enters the church with him, as well as a barefoot twelve-year-old boy dressed in white. They prostrate themselves before the tabernacle.

Near the end of his life, Josip receives visions after Communion, which offer consolations. In them, he sees Christ in Rajska Polja. At first, Josip is a child and cannot bear to look at Christ, because he "is ashamed of his dirty clothing and his sins, the blood he has swallowed in his life and the blood on his hands" (*The Island of the World* 798). As they walk hand in hand, Christ asks him to look him in the face. "Christ's expression is serious, gentle, and pleased that Josip has trusted in his love, trusted enough to believe that God is taking all his sins into his own hands and heart, and has forgiven him" (*The Island of the World* 799). In the last vision, Josip is not a child anymore but an old man, and Jesus, transforming himself into a child, asks him to run. Since Josip is an old man, it is difficult for him to comply, but with Jesus' help, he runs. As he runs, he is getting younger until he becomes a child again. They arrive at a hilltop, and Jesus shows him a valley:

> A city has filled the valley. It is the celestial city, given from above. Beyond the valley it spreads in all directions, even onto the surface of the sea and inland over the hills and forests, rising higher and higher above all the mountains. The city is gold. The city is light. And it is full of happy people.
>
> *It will come down to earth, Josip, and here you will live with me.* (*The Island of the World* 804)

Through these visions, Jesus shows Josip that he was with him throughout his life, both in the joyous moments and in the sufferings, holding his hand. Although Josip is ashamed of his sins, Jesus is merciful: he loves him and forgives him. Furthermore, Josip's transformation into a child is evocative of Christ's teaching that it is necessary to become like a little child to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 18.3). Jesus shows him the celestial city, where he promises to Josip they will be united. Its description coincides with the holy city, the new Jerusalem, where there will be no more death, crying, or pain but joy (Rev. 21). Finally, in the last moments of Josip's life, a swallow lands on his fingertips, like it did when he was a child.

> *Who are you?*
>
> . . .
>
> *Where have you come from?*

It is not afraid. It would remain as long as he wishes. Yet it is time to go. A flicker of wings, and it soars upward, rising into the dark until it is seen no more.

Where are you going?

There is no need to ask.

It is already spoken. (*The Island of the World* 812–13)

Jesus gave him the answer to where he is going in the vision. In brief, Josip's redemption and salvation of his soul represent his finding the ultimate meaning of life.

Strangers and Sojourners

As established earlier, Anne's suffering represents a search for the ultimate meaning. In her youth, she contemplates many metaphysical questions, which direct her toward the search for the meaning of her own life. For example, she tries to find meaning in the concepts of time and mortality and wonders if human life is designed or accidental. Although she leans toward accidental, she leaves open the possibility that we are part of "something larger than our senses can perceive" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 99). Her reflection on the relationship between the past and the future leads her to question the exact parameters of meaning. Struggling with these questions her whole life and receiving answers through suffering, she seems to find certain wisdom in her later years, approaching faith. Namely, when asked if she was happy, she replies:

> "I was happy. But not with the kind of happiness most people want. It went much, much deeper. I can't describe it. It was a sense that just grew and grew over the years, a current underneath everything, a feeling, a form, a hand that was on my life. A sort of fierce, fatherly love that demanded everything from me but hid itself from me. It had given everything. It wanted total trust in return." (*Strangers and Sojourners* 513)

When she discovers that she is dying, Anne realizes that nothing she considered important before was really important, neither her awards and fame nor her position and powers. Questioning the purpose of her life, she concludes that it was the transformation of her sufferings into something creative but realizes that her cleverness and willpower are not the source of it. "She had discovered that all strengths would fail in the end and a beating heart exposed to eternity must come to understand its frailty. Only then could it begin to know its true dimensions, its simplicity and greatness" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 528). The thought that she might be returned to darkness terrorizes her, but she is determined to win, deciding that she will believe she has at last reached the gate of light. Her dread of dying therefore becomes replaced with awe: "it could be the one journey for which she had been preparing all her life" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 529). Talking to Stephen about death, Anne says that she is glad to be crossing "the last little bridge over the abyss," because she finally has something to offer:

her nothingness and emptiness (*Strangers and Sojourners* 542). She, namely, believes that she can give God "nothing except the gift of trust in what [she] can't yet see face to face" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 542). Reflecting on her thoughts when she was young, she now realizes that if the world were just biology without love, nothing makes sense.

> "(. . .) But there *is* love, you see. Poor, weak, and broken love—a sign of something from a distant land. Whoever made Sarah's heart and Nathaniel's mind and Jan's passion to invent and your . . ."
>
> She had been about to say *eyes* but fell silent.
>
> "Whatever or whoever made these must be very wonderful indeed. If I am to meet him, then I want to stride into the dark holding an image of beauty and the goodness of being right here in the center of me. Do you understand?"
>
> He was silent.
>
> "I am naked before God, Stephen. I have nothing to give him except this . . . faith."
>
> "It's said that he loves best what's little and truly is itself." (*Strangers and Sojourners* 543)

Recognizing God in the beauty and goodness of creation, Anne finds some kind of faith in her agnosticism, which is the only thing that she can bring in front of God. A day before her death, Father Andrei takes her confession. The spiritual fruits of the confession are symbolized by Anne's radiant smile and an extraordinary peace that fills the room. Anne regrets this has not happened long ago, since she feels that the shadows she was afraid of are gone forever, so she is not afraid anymore. The reading that was read at Anne's and Stephen's wedding seems to reflect Anne's life: "A reading from the Book of Hebrews. . . . 'All of these died in faith before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognizing that they were strangers and sojourners upon the earth . . .'" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 144). Despite Anne's inability to fully experience God's presence, she believed that he exists based on the glimpses of him she sometimes caught in life. Even though she did not experience the great joy she had expected in life, but frequently fear and anguish, Anne nevertheless learned to believe that her earthly life is only a journey to eternity, where she would truly rejoice. She realized that her true home, for which she so desperately longed, is not on earth but that the ultimate meaning of life represents the unity with God in heaven.

A Cry of Stone

"Either life has a meaning and retains this meaning whether it is long or short, whether or not it reproduces itself; or life has no meaning, in which case it takes on none, no matter how long it lasts or can go on reproducing itself" (Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* 78). In other words, Frankl believes that a short life or life without children has meaning too, and O'Brien confirms this on the example of Rose Wâbos, who dies childless in her thirties, finding the ultimate meaning of her life. All her life, she trusts in God's love and will, believing that God's allowance of her suffering must be meaningful for the ultimate meaning of her life and the lives of others. Indeed, her prayers and sacrifices help her grandmother and Binemin reach Paradise, and she inspires Mrs. Boyle and Euphrasia to find faith. Her discovery of the remains of a coffin deepens her apprehension about the ultimate meaning of life:

> At that moment Rose saw the brevity of life. She understood, as well, that within her own span of time she could create nothing beyond what was given. Words or embraces, cries or chants, drawings and painting and carved stones, all burst like a clutch of birds from the open fingers, all fell back into the soil. But it was not, in fact, a falling into nothingness, for the speaking of words sent waves throughout the world.
>
> . . .
>
> "We are but dust and ashes", she whispered. (*A Cry of Stone* 311)

Rose here comprehends that, despite the transience of life, every person's acts and words leave a lasting impact on the world and other people's lives. Moreover, in a dream, the Holy Spirit reveals to her what is the meaning of life: "A life is a word. Its meaning and its shape are the answer you seek. It must be lived in order to be spoken" (*A Cry of Stone* 389). Namely, the meaning of life cannot be defined but must be lived in order to be found, so the "word" Rose speaks are her faith, love, suffering, and art.

Rose's trust in God as the ultimate meaning of life is especially present in the most difficult moments of her life, one of them being her homelessness after Deirdre steals her money. In these moments, when she is left with literally no securities—no home, family, friends, education, job, or money, there is nothing else left to her but God, who seeks her complete trust in the darkness which prevents her from sensing his presence and love:

> She felt that he was longing for her to trust him, that he was taking her farther on the darkness-way, where all treasures but him are dropped one by one along the path, the forest grows more dense, the light fails, and the love that walks with you—within you—looks at you and says with his eyes *I am here, do you not trust in our love*? But she was afraid now, more afraid than she had ever been in her life, for in the dark a person cannot see the eyes of love, and there is only silence. (*A Cry of Stone* 366)

Like the Biblical Job, Rose is so righteous and faithful that one can hardly imagine any human being that is equal to her. Yet, she faces temptations to prove her loyalty to God, not for his sake, but for her own and to serve as an example to others. Despite this spiritual desolation marked by fear, which is triggered by God's seeming absence and the lack of consolations, Rose still trusts him and remains faithful. After this period of desolation, Rose becomes cognizant of God's plan for her: "It was the losing-way that taught the trusting-way. (. . .) Now she understood. Now she saw that he [God] had been drawing her more closely to himself with every step. Her health was returning, and the solider words of reality were again God's instrument for speaking to her" (*A Cry of Stone* 442). God provides her with a home, a space to paint, and Hugo and Esther as support.

An important factor in Rose's path toward achieving the ultimate meaning of life are three journeys that God promises her in order to purify her, "*for the good of many souls and for the good of your own soul*" (*A Cry of Stone* 607). The first journey takes her to England, where God's providence leads her to the home of her late grandfather, Kyle Bradon, whom she has never met. The house is owned by her relatives, Ned and Fern Bradon. Fern is aware that something is wrong with her husband's family, that they have no true love for family or people outside their family: "there's a dungeon in your minds—all you Bradons, so harsh and proud. (. . .) Hard, sneering, and unforgiving your folks were, with nothing good to say about anyone who wasn't just like them" (*A Cry of Stone* 646). She senses that something dark is present in the family. "The way you and your family just throw people away. Cut them out, discard them as if they weren't real" (*A Cry of Stone* 647). People hate them, and they wonder why. Fern believes that Rose can help them, and the latter tells them the story of her grandfather. He, namely, served and was decorated in World War I, in which his brother Ned was killed. Repulsed by war and killing, he deserted. Trying to forget everything and begin anew, he moved to Canada. Rose reveals that his parents "were ashamed of him and despised him. They had said hard words to him, they said he should have died with Ned. I think it broke his heart. The medal was not enough, you see—not for him, not for them" (*A Cry of Stone* 651). Fern recognizes in this the Bradons' pride and their tendency to dispose of people. While Rose tries to justify their actions by the suffering of losing a son, Ned disagrees with her: "Perhaps they would rather have had two dead heroes than a live deserter. Yes, it was pride all right. That hard thing in them" (*A Cry of Stone* 651). Then he comes to a realization that is one of the reasons Rose was sent to her relatives: "And in me" (*A Cry of Stone* 651). Rose becomes especially close to Ned's and Fern's son, Kyle, who shows her the cellar of their ancestor's castle, which he has found. Rose prays for the healing of the family's past and for their conversion from

Protestantism to Catholicism. In the light of discovering the castle, she suspects that the family's wounding had origins much earlier than she thought. As she and Kyle learn about the long-forgotten past of their family and its role in the War of Roses, in which the whole family save one son was murdered, they find a letter of their Catholic ancestor to his descendants, who promises to pray for them from heaven: "Yea, though men of violence and deceit shall level us so that no memory of us remain, even so I pray by the Blood of the Lamb that these words will be read by eyes of my lineage, that they might turn to God in time of trial and ever remember who is Master of Times" (*A Cry of Stone* 696). Miraculously, the Bradons warmly accept this poor, hunchbacked Native American who is their kin and do not dispose of her, as they intended when she arrived. Curious about why people are initially repelled by her but later change and come to love her, Rose concludes that it is God's love within her that they truly seek. She decides to leave, so that the Bradons can "*seek him in the place where he desires to give all of himself*" (*A Cry of Stone* 700), implying the Eucharist of the Catholic Church. Rose's observation of Kyle at her departure gives optimism about the healing of the Bradons' wound and their conversion: "She saw . . . the profound generosity of his nature, the confidence and kindness within him that seemed to have sprung full-grown from the millennium-long Bradon wound. Light was in him, and soon a greater light would come to him, and it would spread to the rest of his family and to others, and where it would end none could yet tell" (*A Cry of Stone* 702). In this way, both Rose and her family find the ultimate meaning of their lives. She also visits the nuns in France, where she realizes that God's will for her was not to take religious vows but rather to teach her humility and weakness. Regarding Rose's complaints about artistic failure, Sister Mère Jean declares: "in your failure you may bring about a greater harvest for souls than if your work is praised throughout your nation and beyond. Perhaps the failure is a necessary sacrifice" (*A Cry of Stone* 725). Mère Jean considers it possible that one day the Holy Spirit will speak to someone through Rose's artwork, which is again Rose's way to realize the ultimate meaning and to enable its realization for someone else.

The second journey takes Rose to the twin sisters with dwarfism, who share their immense love with others, foremost with the residents of the institution for the handicapped, whom they consider their children. Apart from meeting Jimmy and becoming his spiritual mother, as previously discussed, Rose comes to the realization that God has sent her to the sisters to tell them about God, and they are eager to listen.

Ottawa is the destination of her third journey and the place of her death. As explained earlier, by the end of her life, Rose has lost everything she had had except for God and considers herself a "no-thing." Therefore, at the Mass, she has nothing to give God but herself. In a vision

or a hallucination, she sees Binemin, now clean, strong, without burn holes, who promises her that she will soon come to the City of Light. When she faints in the street, Jack Tobac takes her to his home. It turns out that he and his wife Mari-Kahenta once saw Rose in Saint Kateri's shrine when they brought there their newborn daughter, Kateri, several years ago. Mari-Kahenta tells Rose that she has often thought about Rose and prayed to Saint Kateri for her. Providentially, she and her husband now take care of Rose, who is dying. Rose gives the little Kateri a stone shaped like a palette she found on a beach and explains to Jack why this stone was meaningful to her. She was, namely, very discouraged when she found it, and finding such a stone was a miracle for her, because she is a painter.

> "Then she understood. If God could patiently create this stone over thousands of years, seeing ahead to the woman who would one day walk on the beach with discouragement in her soul, he could do anything. If he could send her a message like this, he could bring a harvest from barren soil. He could bring dead things to life, and even a life that seemed a failure might become fruitful." (*A Cry of Stone* 845)

This stone serves to Rose as a symbol of God's love, care, and providence as well as the meaning of her life. Rose's recognition of God's ability to plan sending a message of hope millenniums ago enables her to believe that he can transform her life, which she considers insignificant and unsuccessful, into something meaningful and fruitful, thus realizing the ultimate meaning of her life. This message is reinforced by Rose's vision in the last moments of her life: the Mother of God enfolds her and tells her that she has never left her. The beauty and comfort of this image stems from Rose's realization that she has always had a mother by her side, even though her birth mother abandoned her. Although Rose believes she was lost, Mary assures her that she was not and that light is within her, just like her grandmother told her years ago. She adds: "The greater light is coming, and the darkness cannot overcome it" (*A Cry of Stone* 847), echoing Binemin's announcement and suggesting Rose's imminent arrival in the light of heaven as the realization of the ultimate meaning of her life.

The Fool of New York City

The questions Max asks upon waking up in the abandoned building in New York represent the ultimate questions he seeks answers to, whether suffering from amnesia or not: "Are there other hints out there? Will they tell you your name and your purpose? Will they explain why you are here?" (*The Fool of New York City* 10). Seeking for the answers throughout the novel, he accepts Billy's observation that people fail to grasp what is important in life, that they occasionally "get large and small confused" (*The Fool of New York City* 224). Max therefore realizes that he should transform his suffering into something that provides life, lead

a simple life, love, help others, and become who he really is. Except for the occasional hints of transcendence throughout the novel, O'Brien does not raise the issue of faith as the ultimate meaning of life until the very end of the novel. Finding a meaning in all other categories of meaning, Max finally attends a Mass with Katie and her family and observes:

> I was not a believing person, and yet I did not feel out of place. It was as if I had always known this small island of light in the surrounding darkness, these people, the embraces and the sincere greetings, the sounds of children singing, the ringing of bells, and the flickering red lamp behind the altar. As if this, *here*, was the humble center of the universe, and I had reached it at last. No one, not even a person like me, was excluded. Though I did not yet fully know it, I was home. (*The Fool of New York City* 277–78)

Since the ultimate meaning of life cannot be known until the end of life, O'Brien shows just a glimpse of it in Max's life as a sense of belonging to the Catholic Church, implying that Max will continue to live a holy life, so that his soul will be saved for eternity.

Sophia House

Faced with many sufferings, the lack of love, and the loss of faith, Pawel searches for the ultimate meaning of life. He wonders: "Where was the future to be found? What was the meaning of his life? Was there meaning in any human life? If so, what was the truth of life and where would he find it, if it existed?" (*Sophia House* 90). After the initial search for human success, in which he fails, Pawel stops striving for it, thereby slowly opening himself up to the possibility of discovering the ultimate meaning of life. However, he struggles in the process, often questioning whether there is any meaning of life at all:

> Life was short. Life was absurd. Life was carnivorous—no, omnivorous. Although in the past he had occasionally observed the curious twists and turns of fate, had noted that life did at times cast up surprises on the beaches of a permanently stormy sea— . . . still, these were the exceptions that proved the rule. Life was dangerous and always fatal. Yet, he admitted, one must not reject out of hand the possibility that there was some hidden meaning in the surprises. (*Sophia House* 112)

His conversion brings him closer to finding the ultimate meaning of his life, but when Father Andrei tells him that he "is called to an unusual work in the Kingdom of God" (*Sophia House* 115), which is, in fact, the ultimate meaning of his life, Pawel refuses to believe it. Father Andrei explains to him that we cannot save ourselves—instead, we are called to take our cross, follow Jesus, and accept God's offer of salvation, but it is difficult for Pawel to understand this. He pleads with God to tell him what he was made for, but God does not answer until Pawel decides

to talk to God as if he was real. God then reveals to him that he can now receive because he is empty, showing him a vision of Father Elijah in end times. God tells him: "*You are part of it. It is real. And yet it will not come to pass if you turn toward the shadows.* (. . .) *What seems an accident to you is wholly within the plans of God. A great blessing has come to you.* (. . .) *You cannot see the whole. You see only a part. The greater part of the battle is waged in the realms above you*" (*Sophia House* 175). In other words, if Pawel accepts God's will, he will play a significant role in God's plan. Despite not being able to see God's plan in its entirety, he decides to do what he considers the right thing: he does good, respects David, gives him refuge, but also helps others in need. After a while, David has a prophetic dream in line with Pawel's vision. He, namely, dreams that Pawel saved him from the Germans, after which the two of them went to the mountains, where two angels greeted them. One of them then declares about Pawel: "*Because this man has denied himself, he shall go higher. This palace is allotted for him and this one is for you. These two dwelling places are connected and shall have much honor in the heavenly Jerusalem*" (*Sophia House* 335). David's dream foretells that Pawel will indeed save David from the Germans, but also that he will realize the ultimate meaning based on his sacrifice and reach heaven.

Pawel nevertheless wonders about the reason of David's presence in his life: "But if an invisible hand was upon both their lives, surely it had brought them together for a purpose. What purpose? And how could such a purpose be fulfilled?" (*Sophia House* 405). David later develops a theory that provides an answer to Pawel's questions. He imagines the two of them as if each of them had only one eye, and each understood the meaning of the world from his own limited perspective. He believes that God brought them together so that they could gradually gain a new perspective, as if they had two eyes. "They see farther and deeper because of it. And this seeing is love, I believe" (*Sophia House* 414), says David.

After a while, Pawel experiences purification upon offering his heart completely to God. He then sees David's goodness and belovedness in God's eyes but also becomes aware that David represents a word of love spoken to him due to a reason incomprehensible to him. Pawel reveals: "As I lay my desire for human love upon the altar of God, I felt fire touch my heart. It was a burning. Like dying. Yet I knew that in this dying I am being born" (*Sophia House* 454). In other words, Pawel's freedom from the attachment to his own desires enables him to be purified. He experiences death to self, which allows him to realize the ultimate meaning of life through the act of sacrificing his own life to save David's. Pawel thereby freely chooses to accept God's plan for his life, not preferring life over death, which echoes St. Ignatius's philosophy. This is evident in a letter he writes to David on the way to a concentration camp:

"Never have I wanted to live so much as I do now. I go down into darkness in your place. I give you my life. I carry your image within me like an icon. This is my joy. I go down at last to sleep, but my heart is awake" (*Sophia House* 472). Furthermore, Pawel finally forgives his father, which frees him completely. While on the freight train, Pawel looks at other people being taken to a concentration camp and comes to the following realization: "Their lives had been spoken, and so shifted, a little, the balance of the world" (*Sophia House* 472), which is the ultimate meaning of every life. Finally having found peace and purpose, Pawel approaches the end of his life journey: "Falling slowly into the mouth of Wrog,[32] Pawel was unafraid for the first time in his life. He was rising, his eyes shining, his arms lifting to greet the messages the angels were pouring out over the world" (*Sophia House* 476–77). O'Brien here depicts the triumph of good over evil through Pawel's faith and sacrifice: since Jesus conquered death through his resurrection, death no longer has power over Pawel. Instead, it represents a passage to eternal life and the ultimate meaning of life for this righteous man. Moved by Pawel's letter, which he receives many years later, David, now a powerful politician, decides to abandon the pursue of power and to return to faith. This turning point will prove to be a significant factor in his realization of the ultimate meaning of life, as depicted in the sequels to *Sophia House*, in which he becomes Father Elijah, who also shifts the balance of the world. Without Pawel's selfless sacrifice, Father Elijah's mission would not be possible.

4.4. Helpers

Although the term "helper" does not originate from logotherapy and existential analysis, and Christianity does not recognize this term either, both approaches nevertheless talk about providing help when needed. The character of helper, according to Sanja Nikčević, appears in affirmative plays (plays representing plots with positive resolutions of life situations). Helpers assist with advice, favor, or money, but they do not decide instead of the hero (Nikčević 129). Helpers also exist in affirmative novels, and they are important factors in Michael O'Brien's novels, since they help other characters to fulfill the meaning of their lives and are therefore worth analyzing. Frankl believes that in difficult times, someone is always looking after us—be it a friend, a spouse, someone alive or dead, or God—it is someone who expects us not to disappoint him or her (*Čovjekovo traganje za smislom* 81). By helping others, a human being becomes truly human. People are not created to function alone—one needs other people and is needed by them. That is why Frankl insists that not only does an individual existence need the

[32] A dragon, a symbolic representation of evil.

community to acquire meaning, but that the community also depends on the individual existence to be meaningful (*The Doctor and the Soul* 80). However, if someone does not require help, one is invited to help others (Lukas, *Što nas u životu pokreće* 12). Namely, the mere consummation of health, happiness, education, wealth, or success does not grant meaning if they are not shared with others (Lukas, *Što nas u životu pokreće* 10). Only by sharing one's well-being does one find meaning and happiness (Lukas, *Što nas u životu pokreće* 12).

Christianity recognizes two sources of help: God and people. Namely, the Hebrew word for help *ezer* (עֵזֶר) is used both for God and woman from the very beginning of the Bible ("Yahweh God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate'" (Gen. 2.18)). In order to help a person to find one's identity and meaning, God gives love and freedom, helps one to know and develop one's identity, and redeems the person from fears and addictions (Ivančić, *Dijagnoza duše i hagioterapija* 91). However, God does not do it alone—he wants to reach a person through other people, he wants us to serve others and with others in order to give history meaning (Ratzinger, *O smislu kršćanskog života* 39). Therefore, "being a Christian means always and above all to get rid of the egoism of living only for ourselves and to completely focus on coexistence with one another" (Ratzinger, *O smislu kršćanskog života* 39). When Jesus preaches about loving one's neighbor, he does not imply only one's family members or friends but any suffering person who needs help (Kasper 93). In the encounter with the suffering, the sick, the outcasts, or with the dying, Christians are called to encounter, dialogue, and solidarity, thereby finding the meaning of life (John Paul II, "Evangelium vitae" §83). Naming the acts of mercy in the judgment speech (Matt. 25.35–39) (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, ransom the captive, bury the dead, shelter the stranger, comfort the sick, clothe the naked), Jesus promises the kingdom of God to those showing mercy to the abovementioned ones (Kasper 135, 172), which is the realization of meaning for Christians. The Good Samaritan serves Christians as a role model for compassion.[33] According to John Paul II, the Good Samaritan is "*every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others*," but also "*one who brings help in suffering*," who unselfishly gives oneself in love for others ("Salvifici doloris" §28). Modeled on the example of Jesus Christ, Christians are called to give their lives for their brothers and sisters, thereby realizing "in the fullness of truth the meaning and destiny of [their] existence" (John Paul II, "Evangelium vitae" §51). In conclusion, it is important to note that Jesus teaches that "there is no love for God without love for neighbor" (Kasper 173). In Michael O'Brien's words,

[33] See: Bošnjaković, Josip, and Sanda Smoljo-Dobrovoljski. *Bogatstvo suosjećanja*. Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2023.

> Mercy, and mercy alone, penetrates the lies, for mercy is a quality of true love that flows from a sense of compassion, a sense of unity with the sufferer. In a profound sense, the suffering person is my self, my father, mother, brother, sister, friend in need of help. Pity is not enough. Practical and theoretical solutions are not enough. Love alone can restore the damaged image and likeness to the original unity. (*Remembrance of the Future* 14)

4.4.1. Helpers in Michael O'Brien's Novels

The Lighthouse

As discussed earlier, with their kindness, among others, Elsie and Ross help Ethan to realize that people are created for community and to open his heart for love. Elsie offers him delicious homemade food, shares stories with him as if he were a member of her family, and even invites him to her family Christmas dinner. "She had worried about him, and to have someone worry about him was a rare thing—in fact, a wonderful thing" (*The Lighthouse* 115). Elsie's "questions . . . never probed too deeply but showed that she cared about him. It was her way. She was like this with everyone. Not a policy, and certainly not a front—more a radiance from her heart" (*The Lighthouse* 173). When Ethan dies, Elsie weeps and grieves, prays for his soul, and has Masses offered. Although Ethan was a stranger, she received him like family from the beginning and did not expect anything in return for her kindness.

Ross helps Ethan by praying for his biological father, unaware that it was Ethan, by admiring his art, as well as through his presence on the island and his works of kindness, which are crucial for Ethan's growth. Ross' kindness involves numerous acts: when he visits the island for the first time, he helps Ethan launch the boat, buys necessary things that Ethan did not remember that he needs, and helps him negotiate the price of a motor. When he visits Ethan for the second time, he brings a wind generator that he bought for him, and Ethan does not understand why he bought him something so expensive, since they hardly know each other. Ross is a little hurt by Ethan's words and says that it is "a random act of kindness" (*The Lighthouse* 127), but that it is Ethan's kindness to him, because he always dreamed of living in a lighthouse. Of course, he installs the turbine but also insists to reorganize Ethan's shed. Ross is so humble and thankful to Ethan for letting him stay on the island that he always downplays the significance of his own help.

Moreover, Ethan believes that he could have gone astray if there were not several good men in his childhood who pointed him in the right direction. For example, when he was four, a social worker told him sincerely: "Ethan, things are hard for you at home right now. But I can see as plain as day that you're going to grow up solid and true" (*The Lighthouse* 151).

Furthermore, a teacher praised Ethan's stories and poems, and a gym instructor taught him basketball, "encouraging him with every inch of progress, treating his failures lightly" (*The Lighthouse* 151). When he worked in a supermarket as a pack boy, the manager would give him a bonus because he was dependable. Furthermore, the counselor at a boy's club run by a church told him that he would be "a good, strong man" (*The Lighthouse* 151). Ethan believed them and became such a man, "feeding like a starving child on the definition of himself, the shapes that manhood might take. These men stole nothing from him and gave him everything, the affirmation he hungered for. The quantity of such encounters had not amounted to much, but their quality was of immeasurable value" (*The Lighthouse* 152). Through these examples, O'Brien demonstrates that every good deed, even just a kind word, counts. Namely, through their small acts of kindness, the helpers from Ethan's childhood were invaluable in shaping his self-image and sense of worth as well as an important factor for his growth into the person of integrity he has become, thus helping him find the meaning of his life.

The Island of the World

There are many helpers who assist Josip on his life journey. The most important one is God, whose providence leads him, but he often sends humans as helpers. Some of them have already been presented (Eva, the Lastavica of the Sea, Caleb, etc.), but other helpers will be analyzed here in more detail. In the inhumane conditions of Goli Otok, Josip encounters six men with an admirable capacity of humanity. Upon his arrival, after the guards brutally beat him, two prisoners have to plunge him into seawater. Before plunging him, one of them, Krunoslav Bošnjaković (whose death Josip later wanted to avenge), whispers to him "Courage" (*The Island of the World* 353). When Josip later asks him about it, he sincerely apologizes for plunging him in the barrel with seawater. He did not want to do it, but he was forced to. Yet, Josip tells him: "It's all right. I just want to tell you I am grateful for what you said. The word stayed with me as I went down. And maybe that word brought me up again, alive" (*The Island of the World* 371). After Josip's arrival, the men take care of him: they wash his wounds, feed him, encourage him, and help him walk, even though they are exhausted from working in the quarry. Each of the men shares with Josip meager portions of food they get in prison. Josip thus ponders:

> Why do these particular men give him a share of their own meager rations? A piece of bread can mean the difference between life and death, yet they continue to risk doing it for him. Now, as he recovers, they take turns giving him portions of their food, one extra piece of bread a day, one extra dish of wheat soup; and sometimes they

> supplement this with other material: a handful of dusty herbs scavenged from the rocks, a lizard, a seabird's egg, blades of grass.
>
> Why do they do it? . . . Who are these six, really? . . . If he survives, he will remember them. If they do not survive, they will not be forgotten. If no one survives at least they tried to think of each other as human beings.
>
> The six are of differing temperaments, character, and background, yet all have sacrificed themselves for him. (*The Island of the World* 353)

Propo later tells him that they help him because they heard about his courage when the guards beat him, but their real motivation is something deeper:

> "Each has his reasons. But I think we do it to keep from sinking lower than the beasts. Animals do not sacrifice without thought of reward. Only men sacrifice in this manner. So, you help us to remain men."
>
> "As you help me to remain a man."
>
> "It's how we can repel their lies, each for his own reason, each in his way." (*The Island of the World* 369–70)

Propo correctly pinpoints the reason why people help each other, even in dehumanizing situations: because helping is a human characteristic, and in the context of an inhumane labor camp like Goli Otok, it is one of the rare things that enables them to remain human. The men also prevent Josip from killing a guard, and one of them helps him escape. When all of this is taken into consideration, it is clear that Josip would not have survived the camp had it not been for his six friends.

Apart from the prisoners, there are also other good Samaritan-like characters. After Josip swims from Goli Otok to the shore in cold weather, modest peasants Marija and Drago take him into their home and take care of him. They even give him his own bedroom. When armed men search for Josip, Drago does not betray him. He is aware that Josip has escaped from the island, but as far as he is concerned, Josip is a fisherman who fell out of his boat during a storm. Josip wonders why they help him. On the one hand, they are good Christians, believing that "a guest is Christ himself coming into the home" (*The Island of the World* 432). On the other, Drago considers himself a criminal, because once, as a teenager, he found himself in the middle of a riot, and banged one Communist and one Ustasha on the head with a bottle, but he does not know if they survived, and this still bothers him. He thus explains: "I try to make up for my crime by doing what I can to help people, especially people who fall into the sea" (*The Island of the World* 434). When Josip recovers, Drago and his brother take him to Split with a boat. Josip is extremely grateful to them but also worried if their generosity will get them into

trouble. He believes that "[s]uch men are the heart of Croatia" (*The Island of the World* 438). Drago gives Josip some money, clothes, and the boots from his feet. Josip is reluctant to take the boots, but Drago insists, explaining that he would cause suspicion barefoot. Drago tells him: "Repay me when you can (. . .). When we are old men you can repay me—when we are old men who can give to each other our right names" (*The Island of the World* 440). Indeed, as an old man, Josip brings Drago new clothes and boots, but since Drago passed away, he gives them to his daughter, Jelena, grateful to her parents for saving his life.

Furthermore, having discovered that Ariadne and their child are dead, Josip decides to walk until he dies. Collapsed from walking, he is found by a boy picking oranges. The child feels pity. Since his mother read to him the story of St. Francis of Assisi and the leper the night before, the boy kisses Josip's forehead, thinking that he is a leper. Although the boy would rather keep the oranges he has picked, he squeezes them into Josip's mouth and leaves an orange in his hand. O'Brien here depicts a pure heart of a child raised in Catholic faith, trying to follow a saint's example. There are other people throughout Josip's life that do such small acts of kindness, such as give him a lift, water, or food.

Josip's helper in Venice is Slavica, his psychologist in the psychiatric hospital, who takes him from the hospital to her home to meet her family, and they offer him a warm welcome. Since Josip does not have a family of his own and is hospitalized, it means a lot to him to feel the warmth of a family. As always, he wonders about Slavica's motives. She tells him that he reminds her of her father, who was arrested and tortured by various regimes; in the end, he killed himself after he was forced to witness the inhumane torture and murder of his son. Slavica and her husband, Emilio, cover the expenses of Josip's treatment in a private clinic. Slavica introduces Josip to an influential friend, who finds him a job in Rome. Before Josip moves to Rome, Emilio fixes his teeth that were broken on Goli Otok.

Even though different helpers have different motives for helping Josip, they primarily help him because they see a human being who needs help, a human being who is suffering. Many of them need help themselves, but they nevertheless selflessly and compassionately help Josip. Many of them are Christians, not living only for themselves but opening their hearts to others with love, meeting Christ in the sufferer, in Josip. They help Josip not only to survive but to find the meaning of his life.

Strangers and Sojourners

Anne does not seem to have many helpers, since she is an introvert who moves in a narrow circle of family and neighbors. There is, of course, God, who guides her life and puts certain people on her way, such as her husband. Stephen is not a man of many words, so he

often cannot help Anne in the way she wants (through intellectual discussions), but he genuinely loves her and tries to show it with his actions. For instance, as a schoolgirl, Anne saw a bird's nest with an egg, but someone swept it away. Shortly after their wedding, Stephen brings her a baby bird to take care of, which she sees as a replacement for the old memory, as "a form of healing" (*Strangers and Sojourners* 153). Moreover, during Anne's pregnancy, he occasionally sweeps their cabin instead of her as a symbolic act of his love. A particularly poignant moment occurs when Anne is afflicted with darkness and terror, and Stephen provides consolation by holding her and praying for her. Through these and similar gestures, Stephen provides Anne with love, comfort, and peace. Although flawed himself, he gives his best to lead Anne and their family to God with his example and wisdom. One of the most memorable examples occurs when he teaches his grandson Nathaniel about the destructive force of hatred based on his own experience of killing a human being. This sin filled him with horror, from which he could not heal for a long time until Father Andrei's providential intervention. In brief, Stephen serves as the spiritual cornerstone of his family and is one of the people most responsible for Anne's finding the meaning of life.

There is also Turid, at whose rooming house Anne at first lives and who later becomes her neighbor and best friend. An unsophisticated, grounded, and straightforward middle-aged woman, Turid does not seem a likely friend for the intellectual Anne. Although Turid gives the impression of being rough, she is a constant source of support and reliance for Anne, from assisting at childbirth to emotional comfort. When Anne is overwhelmed by her thoughts, Turid is also the voice of reason. Rather than joining other women's gossip about Anne, Turid prefers to defend her, remaining a loyal friend. Her value as Anne's helper is reflected in Anne's deep gratitude for Turid's friendship.

Two priests, a Protestant and a Catholic one, also help Anne in the search for faith and meaning. Despite their initial disagreement about religious questions, Reverend Gunnalls later proves to be one of the greatest sources of Anne's support through advising and consoling her. Although he is in love with her, he never does or says anything inappropriate, but rather helps her even when she comes to him in search of marriage advice, making her realize the value of the love between her and Stephen. Anne acknowledges his immense support by telling him that he helped to save her life. Similarly, Father Andrei instills peace in Anne's mind by telling her that she does not need to be afraid. He prays for her, offers spiritual guidance and comfort as well as encouragement to take a leap of faith, to believe. Providentially arriving only a day before Anne's demise, he takes her confession, enabling her salvation.

A Cry of Stone

Even though Rose often feels abandoned, God's providence leads her to the realization of the meaning of her life, often putting people as helpers on her way. Despite her mother's absence from her life, Rose finds a mother figure in her grandmother, who raises her in Catholic faith. Miss Gorrel encourages her art and later secretly supports her financially. She buys a number of Rose's paintings and bequeaths them to a gallery, enabling a great number of people see them and recognize God in them. The nuns in the residential school continue raising Rose spiritually and facilitate the development of her artistic skills. She considers them her mothers and herself very rich for that reason. In the difficult moment of her grandmother's death, Fr. Andrei sends Rose a box with her grandmother's belongings that he saved and a letter, which "was beautiful and sad, and it gave her new heart, for it showed her that she was not entirely alone, that she was not forgotten" (*A Cry of Stone* 233). Mrs. Boyle leaves a part of her inheritance to Rose, which enables her to study art. Hugo and Esther take Rose in, exercising a significant effect on her artistic development as well on her soul, and Hugo helps her to get an opportunity for her own exhibition. She considers Hugo "the father she had never known" (*A Cry of Stone* 567). The Tobacs take her to their home and take care of her until her death, providing a home in the last days of her life.

There are, however, other helpers that may not be as significant for the story, but who are nevertheless there for Rose when she needs help most. For example, at the art school, where Rose feels alienated, an elderly professor, Dr. Ganze, is not shallow like other professors and students, but insightful and kind-hearted. He also seems to adhere to the Christian worldview. When Rose feels unsuccessful as an artist, he praises her for capturing the feelings of the pictures she has painted. Comparing her paintings to Rousseau's, he believes that she too expresses the depth of perception. Unlike other professors, he encourages her to be faithful to her artistic language.

During Rose's period of homelessness, illness, and walking through Canada, a woman insists on giving her a ride. She gives Rose food and prays a rosary for her. She considers taking her home, thinking why it is so hard for Rose when she herself has a good life. However, Rose does not accept her invitation, so the woman gives her a rosary and a ten-dollar bill. Rose tells her: "Thank you, lady. I will think about you for a very long time. I will carry you and bring you in my heart on the offering-way. I will ask that you may be strong to bear whatever burdens he gives to you" (*A Cry of Stone* 371). An unlikely helper appears in the form of a prostitute. When she finds Rose in the cold city streets, she feels sorry for her and pays for a cab to take her to a woman's shelter. All of these people are sent by God to help Rose achieve the meaning of her life—holiness—making the world a better place along the way.

The Fool of New York City

Apart from Max's grandparents, who are not significantly represented in the novel, the major helpers in Max's life are Billy and, of course, Divine Providence, which sends him. The generous help Billy provides without expecting anything in return has already been analyzed in previous chapters, especially in the chapter on experiential values, since his help stems from his love for people in need. Max could neither have survived nor found meaning without Billy's love and support. He acknowledges it and remarks: "Though it is painful to admit, I know I am totally dependent on Billy's generous hospitality, his guidance, and his patience with me" (*The Fool of New York City* 81). Recognizing Billy's major life task to help not only him, but all those in need, Max sees Billy's role to be that of a rescuer, a guardian angel. When Billy leaves the hooded merganser in front of Max's door for Christmas, Max declares: "I gazed long at the south, over the mountains, toward a city where a giant roves by day and by night in search of the lost. And I knew that its best son, its uncrowned prince, is ever vigilant, ever awake" (*The Fool of New York City* 279). *The Fool of New York City* is ultimately a story about a helper who builds a civilization of love, about a generous giant whose height symbolizes the greatness and goodness of his heart.

Sophia House

Sophia House is a story about Pawel's and David's mutual help, which has been largely analyzed in previous chapters, focusing mostly on Pawel's help to David. What has not been mentioned and is important to note, is that David also helps Pawel. Their philosophical and theological discussions about love, suffering, language, art, faith, and similar topics intrigue Pawel to such an extent that they lead him closer to faith and the meaning of life. In addition, in order to repay Pawel's help, David sorts out his books and does other tasks in his flat and bookstore. He proves to be especially helpful when Pawel gets very sick, and David, who is only a teenager, nurses Pawel to health. Similarly to other novels, God leads the main characters on their life journey in various ways: through other people, through dreams and visions, and through changing their souls. However, here we will focus on other characters who prove to be helpful to Pawel and David.

Firstly, Pawel's family loves him, although he does not acknowledge their love because of the hurt he experienced. They try to make him feel loved and accepted, but Pawel builds a wall around himself in order to prevent further pain, which also prevents their love from reaching him. Despite Pawel's sense of distance between him and his brothers, they care about him so much that they, worried about his soul, urge him to return to the sacraments. They manage to convince him to go on a pilgrimage, where he converts, which would have probably

not happened without their persistence. Furthermore, uncle Tadeusz, who always helped Pawel's family, bequeaths his bookstore to Pawel, which enables him to have a home (in a flat above the bookstore) and a job. Moreover, Pawel's cousin Masha risks coming to Pawel in occupied Poland in order to bring him food. Without her care, both Pawel and David would have starved to death.

Even though Goudron initially appears to be Pawel's helper, he takes him in and assumes the role of his mentor in art with a hidden motive. However, he does provide a roof over Pawel's head, food, and clothes, thus preventing his starvation. Nevertheless, when Goudron shows his true face, Pawel decides to refuse the worldview that Goudron represents because no true values stand behind it. Unknowingly, Goudron teaches him a lesson about his worldview. In contrast to him, Rouault expresses Christian love toward Pawel, patiently teaching him in his letters about love, suffering, and their relation to art. He prays for Pawel and offers his own sickness for this man he has never met in person. He invites Pawel to visit him, but Pawel does not accept his invitation. Pawel was, nonetheless, "struck by the depth of compassion in this man, an empathy which seemed to contradict what Goudron had said about the old artist's cold and tyrannical version of religion" (*Sophia House* 97). In the darkness of an atheist environment hostile to Christianity, Rouault appears as a ray of light to Pawel, who sees in him a shining example of Christian love. A similar messenger from God is the unnamed author of the *Last Judgment*. Through his painting, he shows Pawel that there is hope in darkness and gives him enough money for the ticket home and several meals. Another Christian who helps Pawel to find faith and the meaning of his life is Father Andrei. He is not only the person who reconciles Pawel with God through the sacrament of confession, but, by expressing care for this anguished man, he invites Pawel to meet outside the confessional, conveying to him the message of God's love. Moreover, Mrs. Lewicki, who sells several books to Pawel, unknowingly helps him by bringing the book about Andrei Rublëv, which becomes significant in Pawel's growth in faith. Thankful for his purchase and the money she earned for her husband's medicine, Mrs. Lewicki prays for Pawel and brings him food. Although Ewa Poselski seems to have an insignificant role in the novel, she is a crucial character for the realization of God's plan for Pawel, David, and the world in general. She, namely, brings Pawel's letter to David many years after it was written, thus enabling David to convert and to participate in God's plan for mankind. All of these people, wittingly or unwittingly, help Pawel and David realize the meaning of their lives.

5. CATEGORIZATION OF MICHAEL D. O'BRIEN'S NOVELS

After the topic of the meaning of life in O'Brien's novels has been analyzed, let us return to the question raised earlier: do O'Brien's novels belong to popular fiction or Literature? Even though they are often advertised as apocalyptic, this does not really reflect the truth. Only several of them deal with apocalyptic topics, while the majority explores broader topics of human existence.

The aforementioned book by John Mort, titled *Christian Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, which considers Christian fiction to be genre literature, places O'Brien's novels published up to that point (*Father Elijah*, *Strangers and Sojourners*, *Eclipse of the Sun*, and *Plague Journal*) in the genre Catholic apocalyptic fiction but categorizes them as "[t]itles with exceptional literary merit, that are strikingly original, or that have caused a stir beyond the ordinary" (XI) with the following comment: "Though O'Brien's passion occasionally turns shrill and punishing, each of these novels is compelling, and all have been popular. They make for an interesting alternative to the Left Behind series" (271). Despite this mixed assessment of O'Brien's novels, it is observed in the same book that Ignatius Press, which publishes O'Brien's novels, publishes high-quality Catholic fiction (Mort 249). Mort's estimation of Ignatius Press's standard of excellence is justified, since one of the selection criteria at Ignatius Press is indeed "outstanding literary and artistic quality" ("About Us," *Ignatius Press*).

Taking into account that Literature is *art* (cf. Gelder), literary and *artistic* quality as the selection criteria at Ignatius Press imply that O'Brien's novels would nevertheless fit into the category of Literature and not popular fiction, which Gelder defines as craft. Furthermore, the characteristics that Gelder uses to describe Literature are applicable to O'Brien's novels—they are creative and original, not commercial and merely entertaining. In the same vein, Maillet claims that it is "reasonable to consider O'Brien's novels as 'high literature,'" since they "creatively explore, or mimetically represent, many diverse aspects of Catholic culture in the 20th and 21st century."[34] Specifically, instead of being simple and formulaic like popular literature, as we have seen in the analysis, O'Brien's novels are complex and deep, covering topics such as: the uniqueness and value of human life, spirituality, freedom, responsibility, conscience, art, altruism, mercy, family, love, sacrifice, suffering, sin, death, social critique, spiritual growth, salvation, Divine Providence, the search for God, one's identity, and the meaning of life. Because of their depth, the seriousness of the issues they address, and their connection with life, O'Brien's novels are rewarding for the readers and could be re-read, both

[34] Gregory Maillet, email message to author, April 29, 2024.

of which are characteristics of Literature that Gelder suggests. There are, nevertheless, some of his novels, which have not been the focus of this analysis, that blend the characteristics of high literature with elements typically found in popular literature. O'Brien's true apocalyptic fiction, historical fiction, as well as his SF novel belong to this category.

6. CONCLUSION

The doctoral thesis studies the topic of the affirmation of the meaning of life in the realistic novels by Canadian Catholic author Michael D. O'Brien through Viktor Frankl's logotherapy and existential analysis and the theological-philosophical approach of Christian anthropology. Through stories about the spiritual journey of an ordinary person, O'Brien explores metaphysical questions of discovering the meaning of life through deeds, love, faith, and the acceptance of suffering, while affirming the uniqueness and value of every human being and addressing the concepts of spirituality, freedom, responsibility, and conscience.

Christian theology and philosophy, as well as existential analysis and logotherapy, take the spiritual dimension of human beings as their starting point and deal with the question of the meaning of life, providing answers compatible to O'Brien's. They are hence used as the theoretical framework of this analysis. According to existential analysis and logotherapy, spirituality, freedom, and responsibility are the fundamental phenomena of existence. Every life is meaningful in all circumstances, and each person has the responsibility to discover the meaning of his or her life. The aim of human activity is the realization of values, and there are three types of values: creative, experiential, and attitudinal values, all of which are realized through self-transcendence. Christianity provides an ontic foundation to this phenomenological manifestation of meaning. This foundation is God, who is love, so, according to Christianity, the experience of meaning is in the experience of love, by which man is saved. Salvation thus represents the ultimate meaning of life. Since one of the biggest problems of today is meaninglessness, the question of meaning is more relevant than ever.

The notion of meaning in O'Brien's novels *The Lighthouse* (2020), *The Island of the World* (2007), *Strangers and Sojourners* (1997), *A Cry of Stone* (2003), *The Fool of New York City* (2016), and *Sophia House* (2005) is analyzed through the following elements: 1) uniqueness and value of life, 2) spirituality, freedom, responsibility and conscience, 3) creative values, 4) experiential values, 5) attitudinal values, 6) the ultimate meaning of life, and 7) the characters of helpers. Based on the analysis, a conclusion was reached about whether O'Brien's novels belong to high or popular literature.

Frankl and Christianity agree that the life of every human being is unique. Namely, every individual has his or her own tasks in life, and no one can replace him or her in completing them. According to Christianity, God wanted every human being and loves him or her immensely, which gives every person value and dignity. In accordance with that, in the novel *The Lighthouse*, O'Brien depicts the irreplaceability of the protagonist, Ethan, through the tasks

only he can accomplish, the most significant one being rescuing people at the cost of his own life. Although Ethan seems like an insignificant person, O'Brien shows that his sacrifice is significant and meaningful and that every human being is not only unique and capable of great accomplishments but also valuable to God. Furthermore, Josip, the protagonist of the novel *The Island of the World*, seeks the confirmation of his value and identity from people until his conversion, after which he realizes that his real identity is known to God, so he accepts his uniqueness, value, and dignity of the beloved child of God, who is invited to creation, love, and serving his neighbor. Similarly, Anne, the main character of *Strangers and Sojourners*, is a unique combination of personality traits, talents, beliefs, and goals. Anne's irreplaceability is reflected in all her roles, and her courage enables her to fully use the potential of life. However, as an agnostic, she is desperate, because she does not see her value and purpose. Only before death does she realize that God wants her, because God is love, thus finding the ultimate meaning of life. In the novel *A Cry of Stone*, a Native American Rose appears as a small and insignificant person, but her greatness and significance are visible through her influence on others with her fervent faith. With this novel, O'Brien demonstrates that every human life, regardless of how worthless it appears, is unique, valuable, and sacred. The main characters of the novel *The Fool of New York City* are unique already at first glance because of their eccentricity, but the story reveals new levels of their uniqueness. Max is an amnesiac who believes that he is Francisco de Goya. Giant Billy, who is irreplaceable in his role of helping the needy, helps Max to find his lost identity and meaning. Billy affirms Max's value by accepting and respecting him, so that, through their friendship, Max accepts his own uniqueness and potential. Pawel, the protagonist of *Sophia House*, believes that his life is worthless. O'Brien attributes his feeling of worthlessness to seeking validation from people instead of God. After a long struggle with himself, Pawel restores his relationship with God and realizes that God suffered precisely for him, which leads him to the realization that every life, including his, is priceless, unique, and sacred.

Moreover, the spiritual dimension makes people human and enables them to ask questions about the meaning of life. Spirit is the prerequisite for freedom, responsibility, and conscience. Frankl defines freedom as a freedom *for* and *before* someone. Namely, human beings are responsible for fulfilling the tasks that they, as unique persons, receive from life. Even though psychotherapy cannot answer to whom or what human beings are responsible, Frankl believes they are responsible to conscience, which guides them in the search for meaning and has a transcendental source. Frankl finds it plausible that this source is God. Christianity has a similar view on these concepts, but it starts from the existence of God. Consequently,

according to Christianity, freedom is to do God's will and to do good. In other words, God gave us a task in this life, about which he will ask us in eternity. In his novels, O'Brien shows these aspects in a similar manner, so he reveals in the novel *The Lighthouse* that spirituality, freedom, responsibility, and conscience are present in all people, not only in believers. Although Ethan has not yet met God, he notices his presence. His strong feeling of conscience is reflected in his decision to always strive to act responsibly and morally correct. However, due to mistrust of people, he becomes a slave to solitude, but God frees him from this slavery. In his newfound freedom, Ethan is invited to act responsibly, which is realized in the invitation to put his life at God's disposal in an unselfish act of sacrifice. In this moment of complete freedom and responsibility, Ethan finds God and thereby himself. One of the main topics of *The Island of the World* is spirituality, which is reflected in Josip's struggle with faith and the freedom to accept or reject God and his mercy. The topic of freedom and responsibility is particularly elaborated in the context of inhumane imprisonment conditions and facing evil. Spirituality is also a key topic in *Strangers and Sojourners*, and O'Brien deals with it through Anne's lifelong struggle to find faith. Anne's discovery that God is gently inviting her to himself, respecting her freedom to reject his love, is juxtaposed to her experience of evil spirits from spiritualist séances, who are aggressive and assertive and negate freedom. Anne uses her freedom responsibly in order to discover the meaning of life. The topic of conscience is addressed by O'Brien through the character of Stephen, Anne's husband, who is tormented by guilt and fear because he killed his father's murderer, but God, in his mercy, forgives him and frees him. Rose's spirituality in the novel *A Cry of Stone* is reflected in her rich spiritual life. Rose feels responsible not only for her actions, which she aligns with her highly developed conscience, but also for other people, for whom she tirelessly prays and offers up sacrifices. Surrendering to God, as one of the main realizations of freedom and responsibility, is among the most important topics of this novel. In the novel *The Fool of New York City*, Billy's freedom and responsibility are reflected in his search for people who need help. Although he wanted to die in his youth due to his inability to accept suffering, a spiritual experience encouraged him to accept his responsibility toward life, so he now inspires others with his attitude. One of these people is Max, who, with Billy's help, learns to deal with trauma, to accept his responsibility, and to mature. Furthermore, in *Sophia House*, Pawel finds God again after a long struggle with faith. His newfound freedom and responsibility are reflected in his choice of a relationship with God, even though he does not feel that God is close to him, and in his acceptance of the role that God intended for him—saving David, thereby sacrificing his own life.

According to Christianity, dying to oneself instead of focusing on oneself helps one to meet God. In this way, one follows Christ, who gave his life out of love for people. A person who seeks oneself loses oneself, but if one humbly and obediently puts oneself at the disposal of God's love, one finds both God and oneself and achieves holiness. A similar concept appears in logotherapy and existential analysis: self-transcendence means that human existence is always directed at something or someone outside of oneself, and its consequence is self-realization. The meaning of life is realized by self-transcendence through the realization of three values: creative, experiential, and attitudinal values.

Creative values refer to work and deeds. According to Frankl, the value of work lies in its contribution to society, and the occupation itself is not what makes work meaningful—it depends on how the individual performs the work. That makes work a means of discovering the meaning of life. Christianity believes that the human spirit is creative and that, through work, human beings participate in God's act of creation, serve God and neighbors, through which they develop spiritually and find meaning. Finding meaning through work rarely appears in O'Brien's novels, but finding meaning through art or good deeds is a frequent topic. For example, Ethan from *The Lighthouse* realizes creative values through mastering skills, helping people in trouble, artistic expression, and good deeds. He decides to do good in order to change the balance of the world, and his deeds have much more far-reaching effects than it seems at first glance. In this way, he develops spiritually, serves God and his neighbors, and God rewards him, making his efforts meaningful. Similarly, *The Island of the World* depicts Josip's discovery of meaning through poetry and doing good deeds. In these ways, Josip develops spiritually, stays human in inhumane conditions, and finds the meaning of his life, but he also helps other people in self-realization and the discovery of meaning, participating in building the civilization of love. Anne from *Strangers and Sojourners* also tries to build a civilization of love in a world marked by a crisis of meaning and values. Creative values are very important to her, and she realizes them in her roles of a wife, mother, grandmother, teacher, journalist, and activist. Through realizing creative values, Anne makes an impact on her family and the society, but she primarily finds the meaning of her life. The realization of creative values is presented in *A Cry of Stone* through good deeds, prayer, and art. In these ways, Rose changes other people and helps them to accept their value and God's love as well as to find the meaning of their lives, whereby she herself finds meaning. Although he lives modestly, Billy from *The Fool of New York City* will do anything in his power to help his fellow human beings, showing generosity and compassion to those in need. On the other hand, Max realizes creative values through art, which is the expression of his soul and his true calling. Therefore, art gives his life

meaning. Pawel from the novel *Sophia House* finds meaning through art, literature, and good deeds. O'Brien demonstrates here how art can be both meaningful and meaningless, taking a negative attitude toward art that has no values in its foundation. One of Pawel's realizations of meaning is also literature, through which Pawel tries to enrich human lives with truth. Apart from that, he realizes the meaning of his life by doing good deeds, which have a far-reaching effect on other people's lives.

Moreover, Frankl interprets experiential values as experiencing love, goodness, truth, and beauty. According to Frankl, through love, we experience another human being as unique and irreplaceable, become aware of the beloved's essence, recognize his or her potentials, and help him or her to fulfill them. Love is stronger than death because the essence of the beloved is eternal. Both Frankl and Christianity take the attitude that love is not an emotion but a free decision. At the foundation of Christianity are therefore the commandments of love. By creating a person, God confirms that it is good this person exists and that he or she is worth of his love, and God's love is repeated in human love. Namely, Christians are invited to love their neighbors in the way God loves human beings—not because they are good and deserve love but because God is good. These views on love as the meaning of life are reflected in O'Brien's novels as well. For example, in the novel *The Lighthouse*, O'Brien deals with the issue of realizing meaning through experiential values in the case when a person is deeply wounded in the area of family relationships. Protecting himself from suffering, Ethan protects himself from love, but this is how he experiences the greatest suffering—loneliness. Having realized that his isolation prevents him from reaching the highest goal of life and the way to salvation—love, he opens up his heart. This enables him to sacrifice his life for others out of love, following Christ, and to find the meaning of life. For Josip, the protagonist of *The Island of the World*, love is often suffering. Namely, the majority of people he loves disappear from his life, and a good part of them die. However, O'Brien shows that love is eternal, echoing the standpoint of Frankl's theory and Christian theology. The suffering caused by love does not diminish the meaning of life Josip realizes through love—it even enhances it, as it contributes to Josip's growth. The love between Anne and Stephen in *Strangers and Sojourners* is crucial in Anne's search for meaning. In accordance with the applied theory, O'Brien demonstrates that love is not a romantic feeling but a conscious decision, and that sacrifice, suffering, and a complete surrender are necessary for true love, which in turn transforms, heals, and fulfills the spouses with meaning. Apart from that, O'Brien emphasizes that one should not search for meaning in receiving love but rather in giving it. Anne's love for God as a result of conversion intensifies her love for Stephen, so she becomes aware of his essence, accepting him completely. Thereby,

both of them are healed and united in love, which results in finding the meaning for both of them. In the novel *A Cry of Stone*, Rose loves nearly everyone she meets with a Christian love, being aware that love for God and for one's neighbor are inseparable. In other words, she unites her suffering and sacrifice with Christ's, transforming them into love. With her love, she shows those she encounters that they are valuable and unique, recognizes their potential, helps them fulfill it, and heals the spiritually wounded, asking for nothing in return. In this way, she finds the meaning of life. Furthermore, in the novel *The Fool of New York City*, O'Brien juxtaposes true love with false love. Namely, the individuals who truly love Max accept him as he is, are caring and patient with him, and, with their help, he discovers and realizes his potential. On the other hand, the individuals who do not love him truly enhance his trauma; they are cruel, manipulative, and do not understand or support him. However, it does not mean that this sort of "love" is meaningless. On the contrary, O'Brien here supports Frankl's premise that even unhappy love encourages the growth and development of a person, so it too is meaningful. The search for meaning in *Sophia House* is closely connected with the search for love. Wounded by the experience of interpersonal relations, Pawel decides not to allow anyone to approach him. After a struggle with himself, he comes to a realization that he should not strive for human love but look for God's love in his heart, which brings meaning. In this novel, O'Brien confirms the theory that love is not a feeling but a choice and shows love as the foundation of meaningful sacrifice.

Attitudinal values in Frankl's theory refer to the attitude toward inevitable suffering. Suffering plays an especially important role in the search for the meaning of life, because precisely suffering prompts a person to question the meaning of life and the existence as well as the role of God in it. According to Frankl, a person cannot be deprived of the freedom to choose one's attitude regardless of circumstances, even in suffering. Suffering can be transformed into something positive and constructive, be it growth, maturation, repentance, or change. A positive attitude toward suffering is important not only for the person suffering to find meaning but also for those who witness the human capacity for heroic endurance of suffering. Christianity believes that God allows suffering because it can be useful for a person, for instance, as a chance for conversion or perfection of faith. It can also teach one humility, forgiveness, and togetherness. Due to his endless love for human beings, God gave his only son in order to save the world through suffering and death on the cross. Love is thus the Christian answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. It is important to note that human beings do not suffer alone: God is close to them in their suffering, offering consolation. Apart from that, through Christ's suffering, God protects people from eternal suffering, i.e., damnation. By

participating in Christ's suffering, a person becomes worthy of the Kingdom of God, and by following Christ, one participates in the salvation of the world. A similar approach to suffering is taken by O'Brien, whose characters are regularly individuals for whom suffering is a significant part of life. The novel *The Lighthouse* presents suffering related to parental abandonment in the case of three characters. Esau, Ethan, and Ross take different approaches to suffering, and O'Brien shows which of them bring the protagonist to meaning and which not. Namely, Esau's reaction to the death of his parents is repaying evil for evil. Instead of transforming his pain into something constructive, he becomes destructive. However, he confesses before death and thus still manages to find meaning. Ethan's reaction to his parents' abandonment is twofold. On the one hand, he decides to be virtuous, and on the other hand, he isolates himself from the world. The latter attitude changes over time, so Ethan sacrifices himself in the end in order to save other people and thus finds meaning. Ross has never met his biological father, and he overcame his anger by praying for him. He was aware that God was close to him in suffering, which provided comfort. With his correct attitude toward suffering, he transforms suffering into an accomplishment and matures, but he also serves as an example to others, primarily Ethan. In the novel *The Island of the World*, Josip's initial reaction to suffering is despair and hatred. Yet, when he opens his heart to God and experiences conversion, which allows him to accept his suffering and unite it with Christ's suffering, he learns humility, develops compassion, and frees himself from hatred. In other words, he self-transcends, which leads to his growth and finding meaning in suffering. With his correct attitude, he also serves as an example to others. *Strangers and Sojourners* deals primarily with the issue of spiritual suffering. Namely, Anne's loneliness and despair despite a good life are the result of, in the beginning unrecognized, longing for God. Anne does not passively accept her suffering but goes in search of God. Realizing that meaning cannot be found in external factors but in choosing the right attitude, Anne becomes an inspiration to others by enduring her suffering. When she finds faith at the end of her life, she gives her emptiness to God, finding meaning. *A Cry of Stone* presents numerous sufferings of a seemingly "small" person Rose. Despite the suffering or precisely because of it, Rose loves her neighbors in her freedom and heroically offers up her pain for the benefit of others, uniting her sacrifice with Christ's suffering. When she is sad about her suffering, she actively redirects her attention to the gratitude for God's blessings and reminds herself of the purpose of her sacrifices. The result of a correct attitude toward suffering is the discovery of the meaning of life and her participation in building a civilization of love. The novel *The Fool of New York City* contrasts Billy's and Max's response to similar life suffering. Billy's correct attitude—shifting the focus from his pain to helping

others who are suffering as well as gratefulness for the small things in life—brings him to meaning, so he serves as an example to Max. On the other hand, Max initially reacts to his trauma by ignoring it, then starts drinking, and thinks about committing suicide. With Billy's help, he realizes that it is necessary to transform his suffering into something that gives life and thus matures, which makes his life meaningful. The life of Pawel from the novel *Sophia House* is marked by many sufferings, to which he initially reacts with despair and suicidal thoughts. However, his conversion gradually changes his attitude toward suffering, so, with the help of prayer and the sacraments, Pawel learns to accept his suffering, forgives, and surrenders himself completely to God, which makes his suffering meaningful. Purified in this way, he accepts the sacrifice that God intended for him and gives his life for David, changing the balance of the world.

According to Frankl, religious faith is faith in the ultimate meaning of life. The ultimate meaning of life cannot be known until the last moment of our lives because it depends on how a person realized the potential meaning of every life situation. Theology also agrees that faith and God are necessary for the realization of the ultimate meaning. Holiness, that is, conformity to Christ, is the way toward eternal salvation, and eternal life in paradise represents the ultimate meaning of life. O'Brien's novels demonstrate the discovery of the ultimate meaning of life in a similar way. For instance, in *The Lighthouse*, everything in Ethan's life brings him to his eventual sacrifice, in which he gives his life so that others could live. Apart from that, in the last moments of his life, he reaches for the light, which symbolizes his conversion. The arrival of Christ and Mary signifies Ethan's eternal life in heaven that awaits him, through which Ethan realizes the ultimate meaning of life. This topic is covered in *The Island of the World* through Josip's questions about identity and meaning and through his rediscovery of faith. His life is depicted as a spiritual journey during which he has to overcome life's difficulties in order to meet Christ in eternity. Furthermore, in the vision he receives near the end of his life, he gets an opportunity to see that Christ was with him throughout his life. Asking metaphysical questions leads Anne from *Strangers and Sojourners* on her search for the ultimate meaning. Faced with death, she realizes that she has been preparing for it all her life and believes that she can give God nothing but her trust in what she cannot yet see. After her conversion and confession on her deathbed, she understands that her true home, for which she so longed, is communion with God in eternity. Moreover, O'Brien confirms Frankl's theory that even a brief life or a childless life is meaningful in the character of Rose in the novel *A Cry of Stone*. Throughout her life, God asks her for complete trust and leads her through numerous sufferings, bringing her closer to himself, and Rose remains faithful to him despite the trials, realizing that

her suffering must have some ultimate meaning. Rose believes that God can transform her meaningless and unsuccessful life, as she sees it, into something meaningful and fruitful and thus realize the ultimate meaning. The end of the novel implies Rose's soon departure to heaven, which represents the ultimate meaning of her life. *The Fool of New York City* emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between what is important and unimportant in life, highlighting that it is important to lead a simple life, love, help one's neighbors, and become your true self in order to achieve ultimate meaning. O'Brien touches on the subject of faith only at the end, when Max comes to Mass, where he feels as if he has come home, implying his conversion. In the novel *Sophia House,* Pawel opens himself to the possibility of discovering the ultimate meaning of life when he stops striving for human success and accepts God's will for his life. His sacrifice represents the triumph of good over evil and leads him toward eternal life, which represents the ultimate meaning of his life.

The helper characters help the heroes to find the meaning of life. Frankl claims that in difficult times, someone is always looking out for us—a human being or God—and expects us not to disappoint him or her. Christianity believes that God helps us through people, and the acts of mercy that people do free them from egoism and help them to focus on life in communion with others. In O'Brien's novels, helpers also have the task of helping people to find the meaning of life. Help ultimately comes from God, who acts through people as well. For example, in the novel *The Lighthouse*, several men in Ethan's childhood helped him to become the person he became, guiding him and affirming his identity. Apart from them, Elsie and Ross help him to realize that people are created for community and that he should open his heart for love. Josip from the novel *The Island of the World* has many helpers: God, people who are close to him, and complete strangers. Although each of them has a different motive for helping, they primarily help Josip because they see a human being in need. Although many of them need help themselves, they selflessly provide it. Many are Christians, and for this reason, they do not live only for themselves, but open their hearts to their neighbor, meeting Christ in the suffering Josip. Moreover, in *Strangers and Sojourners*, Anne's main helper is God, who leads her life and puts on her path people who provide her with what is necessary to her in her despair of seeking God and purpose: love, support, advice, consolation, peace, prayer, and spiritual guidance. Even though it often seems to Rose from *A Cry of Stone* that she is alone in the world, God's Providence guides her, sending her helpers, so that she knows she is not alone, realizes the meaning of her life, and makes the world a better place. Simply put, *The Fool of New York City* is the story of Billy, a helper who builds a civilization of love on the streets of

New York, while *Sophia House* shows the many messengers of God who bring Pawel closer to faith and meaning.

The analysis carried out leads to the conclusion that, in his novels, O'Brien affirms the value, dignity, holiness, and uniqueness of each person, no matter how insignificant they may seem. He confirms that life is meaningful in all circumstances, and every individual is invited to discover the meaning of life through free and responsible acts in accordance with one's own conscience. All of O'Brien's protagonists realize meaning through all the values distinguished by Frankl: creative, experiential, and attitudinal values, but the extent to which they realize meaning through these different values is not evenly distributed among all characters. While some characters to a greater extent realize meaning through love, and others through art, the most represented way of finding meaning in O'Brien's novels is through a correct attitude toward suffering and through a relationship with God. Every act of value realization, even a seemingly insignificant good deed, is presented as important for realizing meaning for the individual and, indirectly, for others as well. While certain plots focus on the realization of meaning through the relationship between an individual and God, others emphasize that discovering one's own meaning, through God's mediation, influences the realization of meaning in others, thereby helping the characters to contribute to building a civilization of love. It is important to emphasize that the salvation of a person stands out in all novels as the realization of the ultimate meaning of life.

This research compiled a typology of affirmative elements of the meaning of life in Catholic prose based on Michael D. O'Brien's novels. It confirmed the thesis that the elements that make up the meaning of life in Michael D. O'Brien's realistic novels are consistent with those from Christianity, logotherapy and existential analysis, namely: creative values, experiential values, attitudinal values, and the ultimate meaning of life. The phenomena of the uniqueness and value of life and the aspects of spirituality, freedom, responsibility, and conscience are closely related to the topic of the meaning of life, which play a key role in the protagonist's search for meaning, in which the characters of helpers help him or her. Considering the complex and deep themes that O'Brien deals with in his novels, it was concluded that his novels covered in this analysis belong to high literature, while some of his other novels represent high literature with elements of popular literature. Since the introductory chapters of the dissertation highlight the problem of the marginal position of Catholic literature in literary criticism and the often inadequate scholarly approach to this category of literature, this research contributes to the presence of Catholic literature in literary studies, the analysis of Catholic literature from a perspective consistent with the Catholic worldview, and affirms

Michael D. O'Brien as one of the most important contemporary representatives of Catholic literature. In addition, this research can be useful to therapists who apply bibliotherapy in their practice.

Using the typology of affirmative elements of the meaning of life from this research, future research can deal with the analysis of the meaning of life in O'Brien's other novels, but also in the novels by other Catholic authors, for example, Myles Connolly or Lucy Beckett, in order to get a more comprehensive insight into the theme of affirmation of the meaning of life in Catholic prose. Future research could be extended to the prose of authors who do not declare themselves Catholic in order to research whether non-Catholic authors also affirm the meaning of life and what the elements of the meaning of life in non-Catholic prose are. In addition, this paper can serve as a starting point for future research in the field of bibliotherapy.

The novels by Michael D. O'Brien do not offer merely a psychological, philosophical, and theological interpretation of the topic of the meaning of life but also encourage the search for answers about one's own meaning of life. O'Brien's novels can have a positive impact on the spiritual growth and development of their readers, and stories about the spiritual journey of an ordinary human being, with whom it is easy to identify, can serve as guidelines for approaching difficult life situations, for discovering the meaning of one's own life, and as a reminder that life is always meaningful.

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ABSTRACT

The doctoral thesis studies the topic of the affirmation of the meaning of life in the realistic novels by Canadian Catholic author Michael D. O'Brien through Viktor Frankl's logotherapy and existential analysis and the theological-philosophical approach of Christian anthropology. Through stories about the spiritual journey of an ordinary person, O'Brien explores metaphysical questions of discovering the meaning of life through deeds, love, faith, and the acceptance of suffering, while affirming the uniqueness and value of every human life and addressing the concepts of spirituality, freedom, responsibility, and conscience.

Similarly to O'Brien's novels, Christian theology and philosophy, as well as existential analysis and logotherapy, take the spiritual dimension of human beings as their starting point and deal with the question of the meaning of life, providing answers compatible to O'Brien's. According to existential analysis and logotherapy, each person has the responsibility to discover the meaning of their life through self-transcendence, which is realized through deeds, experiences such as love, and their attitude toward inevitable suffering. Christianity provides an ontic foundation to this phenomenological manifestation of meaning. This foundation is God, who is love, so that, according to Christianity, the experience of meaning is in the experience of love, by which man is saved. Salvation thus represents the ultimate meaning of life.

The aim of this research is to study, describe, and typify the affirmative elements that represent the meaning of life in Michael D. O'Brien's realistic novels as well as to determine whether O'Brien's novels belong to high or popular literature.

Keywords: Michael D. O'Brien, Viktor Frankl, logotherapy and existential analysis, Christianity, metaphysical questions, the meaning of life.

SAŽETAK

Doktorska disertacija proučava temu afirmacije smisla života u realističkim romanima kanadskoga katoličkog književnika Michaela D. O'Briena primjenom egzistencijske analize i logoterapije Viktora Frankla te teološko-filozofskog pristupa kršćanske antropologije. Pričama o duhovnom putovanju „maloga" čovjeka, O'Brien se bavi metafizičkim pitanjima o otkrivanju smisla života putem djela, ljubavi, vjere i prihvaćanja patnje, afirmirajući jedinstvenost i vrijednost svakoga ljudskog bića te baveći se konceptima duhovnosti, slobode, odgovornosti i savjesti.

Kršćanska teologija i filozofija te egzistencijska analiza i logoterapija za svoje polazište uzimaju čovjekovu duhovnu dimenziju te se bave pitanjem smisla života, dajući odgovore kompatibilne O'Brienovima pa su stoga upotrijebljene kao teorijski okvir ove analize. Prema egzistencijskoj analizi i logoterapiji, duhovnost, sloboda i odgovornost osnovni su fenomeni postojanja. Svaki život ima smisla u svim okolnostima, a svaka je osoba odgovorna za otkrivanje vlastitoga životnog smisla. Cilj je ljudske aktivnosti realizacija vrijednosti, a tri su tipa vrijednosti: stvaralačke, doživljajne i vrijednosti stava. Sve se one ostvaruju sebe-nadilaženjem. Ovomu fenomenološkomu očitovanju smisla kršćanstvo pruža ontički temelj. Taj temelj jest Bog, koji je ljubav, tako da je, prema kršćanstvu, iskustvo smisla u iskustvu ljubavi, po kojoj se čovjek spašava. Spasenje stoga predstavlja konačni smisao života. Budući da je jedan od najvećih problema današnjice besmisao, pitanje smisla aktualnije je nego ikada.

Pojam smisla u O'Brienovim romanima *The Lighthouse* (2020.), *The Island of the World* (2007.), *Strangers and Sojourners* (1997.), *A Cry of Stone* (2003.), *The Fool of New York City* (2016.) i *Sophia House* (2005.) analiziran je na temelju sljedećih elemenata: 1) jedinstvenost i vrijednost života; 2) duhovnost, sloboda, odgovornost i savjest; 3) stvaralačke vrijednosti; 4) doživljajne vrijednosti; 5) vrijednosti stava; 6) konačni smisao života te 7) likovi pomoćnika. Na temelju analize došlo se do odgovora na pitanje spadaju li O'Brienovi romani u visoku ili popularnu književnost.

Frankl i kršćanstvo slažu se da je život svakog ljudskoga bića jedinstven. Naime, svaki pojedinac ima vlastite zadatke u životu i nitko ga ne može zamijeniti u njihovu ispunjavanju. Prema kršćanstvu, Bog je htio svakoga čovjeka i neizmjerno ga voli, što svakoj osobi daje vrijednost i dostojanstvo. Tako u romanu *The Lighthouse* O'Brien prikazuje nezamjenjivost protagonista, Ethana, naglašavajući zadatke koje samo on može izvršiti, od kojih je najznačajniji spašavanje ljudi pod cijenu vlastitoga života. Iako se Ethan čini beznačajnom osobom, O'Brien pokazuje da je njegova žrtva značajna i smislena te da je svaki čovjek

jedinstven, sposoban za velika djela, ali i vrijedan Bogu. Nadalje, Josip, protagonist romana *The Island of the World*, potvrdu vrijednosti i identiteta traži od ljudi, sve do obraćenja, nakon čega shvati da je njegov pravi identitet poznat Bogu te prihvaća svoju jedinstvenost, vrijednost i dostojanstvo ljubljenog djeteta Božjega, koje je pozvano na stvaranje, ljubav i služenje bližnjemu. Slično njemu, Anne, glavni lik romana *Strangers and Sojourners*, jedinstvena je kombinacija osobnosti, talenata, uvjerenja i ciljeva. Anneina nezamjenjivost odražava se u svim njezinim ulogama, a hrabrost joj omogućuje potpuno iskoristiti potencijal života. Međutim, kao agnostikinja, očajna je jer ne vidi svoju vrijednost i smisao te tek pred smrt shvaća da ju Bog želi, jer Bog je ljubav, pronalazeći konačni smisao života. U romanu *A Cry of Stone*, Indijanka Rose djeluje kao malena i beznačajna osoba, ali njezina veličina i značaj vidljivi su u njezinu utjecaju na druge žarkom vjerom. O'Brien ovim romanom pokazuje da je svaki ljudski život, koliko god bezvrijedno izgledao, jedinstven, vrijedan i svet. Glavni likovi romana *The Fool of New York City* već su na prvi pogled jedinstveni zbog svoje ekscentričnosti, ali se pričom otkrivaju nove razine njihove osobitosti. Maxu, koji ima amneziju i vjeruje da je Francisco de Goya, u pronalasku izgubljena identiteta i smisla pomaže div Billy, koji je nezamjenjiv u ulozi pomaganja potrebitima. Billy potvrđuje Maxovu vrijednost prihvaćajući i poštujući ga te, zahvaljujući njihovu prijateljstvu, Max prihvaća svoju jedinstvenost i potencijal. Pawel, protagonist romana *Sophia House*, smatra da je njegov život bezvrijedan. O'Brien pripisuje njegov osjećaj bezvrijednosti potrazi za potvrđivanjem od ljudi, umjesto od Boga. Nakon duge borbe sa samim sobom, Pawel obnavlja odnos s Bogom te uviđa da je Bog patio baš za njega, što ga dovodi do spoznaje da je svaki život – pa tako i njegov – neprocjenjiv, jedinstven i svet.

Nadalje, duhovna dimenzija ljude čini ljudima te im omogućuje da se zapitaju o smislu života. Duh je preduvjet za slobodu, odgovornost i savjest. Frankl definira slobodu kao slobodu *za* nešto i *pred* nekim. Naime, čovjek je odgovoran za ispunjenje zadataka koje, kao jedinstvena osoba, prima od života. Iako psihoterapija ne može odgovoriti komu ili čemu je čovjek odgovoran, Frankl smatra da je odgovoran savjesti, koja ga vodi u potrazi za smislom, a ima transcendentan izvor. Frankl drži vjerojatnim da je taj izvor Bog. Kršćanstvo ima sličan stav o ovim pojmovima, ali kreće od postojanja Boga, stoga je, prema kršćanstvu, sloboda vršiti volju Božju i činiti dobro. Drugim riječima, Bog nam je dao zadatak u ovom životu, o kojem će nas pitati u vječnosti. U svojim romanima, O'Brien ove aspekte prikazuje na sličan način pa u romanu *The Lighthouse* pokazuje da su duhovnost, sloboda, odgovornost i savjest prisutni kod svih ljudi, a ne samo kod vjernika. Iako Ethan još nije upoznao Boga, primjećuje njegovu prisutnost. Njegov jak osjećaj savjesti odražava se u odluci da će uvijek nastojati postupati odgovorno i ispravno. Međutim, zbog nepovjerenja prema ljudima, postaje rob samoće, ali Bog

ga oslobađa ovoga ropstva. U novoostvarenoj slobodi, Ethan je pozvan na odgovorno djelovanje, koje se očituje u pozivu da stavi svoj život Bogu na raspolaganje u nesebičnom činu žrtve. U tom trenutku potpune slobode i odgovornosti, Ethan pronalazi Boga, a time i sebe. Jedna od glavnih tema romana *The Island of the World* upravo je duhovnost, koja se odražava u Josipovoj borbi s vjerom te slobodom da prihvati ili odbije Boga i njegovo milosrđe. Tema slobode i odgovornosti osobito je razrađena u kontekstu neljudskih uvjeta zatočeništva i suočavanja sa zlom. Duhovnost je u romanu *Strangers and Sojourners* također ključna tema te ju O'Brien obrađuje prikazujući Anneinu cjeloživotnu borbu za pronalazak vjere. Anneino otkrivanje da je Bog nježno poziva k sebi, poštujući njezinu slobodu i da odbije njegovu ljubav, suprotstavljeno je njezinu iskustvu zlih duhova sa spiritističkih seansi, koji su agresivni i asertivni te negiraju slobodu. Anne svoju slobodu koristi odgovorno kako bi otkrila smisao života. Temu savjesti O'Brien obrađuje likom Stephena, Anneina supruga, kojega more krivnja i strah zbog činjenice da je ubio ubojicu svojega oca, ali mu Bog u svojem milosrđu prašta i oslobađa ga. Roseina duhovnost u romanu *A Cry of Stone* odražava se u njezinu bogatom duhovnom životu. Rose osjeća odgovornost ne samo za svoje postupke, koje usklađuje sa svojom vrlo osjetljivom savješću, nego i za druge ljude, za koje neumorno moli i prikazuje žrtve. Predanost Bogu, kao jedna od glavnih realizacija slobode i odgovornosti, među najvažnijim je temama ovoga romana. U romanu *The Fool of New York City*, Billyjeva sloboda i odgovornost odražavaju se u njegovu traganju za ljudima kojima je potrebna pomoć. Iako je kao mladić želio umrijeti zbog nemogućnosti prihvaćanja patnje, duhovno iskustvo potaknulo ga je da prihvati odgovornost prema životu te on sada svojim stavom inspirira druge. Jedna je od tih osoba Max, koji se, uz Billyjevu pomoć, uči nositi s traumom, prihvatiti odgovornost i postati zrela osoba. Nadalje, u romanu *Sophia House,* Pawel ponovno pronalazi Boga nakon duge borbe s vjerom. Njegova novopronađena sloboda i odgovornost odražavaju se u odabiru odnosa s Bogom, iako ne osjeća da mu je Bog blizu, te u njegovu prihvaćanju uloge koju mu je Bog namijenio – spašavanju Davida, pritom žrtvujući vlastiti život.

Prema kršćanstvu, umiranje samomu sebi umjesto fokusiranja na sebe, pomaže ostvarenju susreta s Bogom. Na taj način čovjek slijedi Krista, koji je dao svoj život iz ljubavi prema čovjeku. Čovjek koji traži sebe gubi sebe, ali ako se ponizno i poslušno stavi na raspolaganje Božjoj ljubavi, pronalazi i Boga i sebe te postiže svetost. Sličan koncept pojavljuje se u logoterapiji i egzistencijalnoj analizi: sebe-nadilaženje označava da je ljudsko postojanje uvijek usmjereno na nešto ili na nekoga izvan sebe, a posljedica mu je samoostvarenje. Smisao života postiže se sebe-nadilaženjem kroz ostvarivanje triju vrijednosti: stvaralačkih, doživljajnih i vrijednosti stava.

Stvaralačke vrijednosti odnose se na rad ili činjenje djela. Prema Franklu, vrijednost posla doprinos je društvu, a samo zanimanje nije važno da bi rad bio smislen – to ovisi o tome kako će osoba obavljati posao. Rad je, stoga, sredstvo za otkrivanje smisla života. Kršćanstvo smatra da je ljudski duh kreativan te da čovjek radom sudjeluje u Božjem činu stvaranja, služi Bogu i bližnjemu, čime se duhovno razvija i pronalazi smisao. Pronalaženje smisla obavljanjem nekog rada rijetko se pojavljuje u O'Brienovim romanima, ali pronalazak smisla pomoću umjetnosti ili dobrih djela česta je tema. Primjerice, Ethan u romanu *The Lighthouse* realizira stvaralačke vrijednosti ovladavanjem vještinama, pomaganjem ljudima u nevolji, umjetničkim izražavanjem i dobročinstvom. On odlučuje činiti dobro kako bi ispravio neravnotežu u svijetu te njegova djela imaju mnogo dalekosežnije učinke nego što se na prvi pogled čini. Na taj način, on se duhovno razvija, služi Bogu i bližnjemu, a Bog ga nagrađuje, čineći njegov trud smislenim. Slično tomu, *The Island of the World* prikazuje Josipovo otkrivanje smisla pomoću poezije i činjenja dobrih djela. Na te načine Josip se razvija duhovno, ostaje čovjekom u neljudskim situacijama i pronalazi smisao života, ali također pomaže i drugima u samoostvarenju i otkrivanju smisla, sudjelujući u gradnji civilizacije ljubavi. Anne, iz romana *Strangers and Sojourners*, također pokušava izgraditi civilizaciju ljubavi u svijetu u kojem vladaju kriza smisla i vrijednosti. Stvaralačke vrijednosti vrlo su joj važne te ih ona realizira u ulogama supruge, majke, bake, učiteljice, novinarke i aktivistice. Ostvarivanjem stvaralačkih vrijednosti, Anne utječe na svoju obitelj i društvo, ali prvenstveno pronalazi smisao svojega života. Realizacija stvaralačkih vrijednosti prikazana je u romanu *A Cry of Stone* putem dobročinstava, molitve i umjetnosti. Rose na ove načine mijenja druge te im pomaže da prihvate svoju vrijednost i ljubav Božju te da pronađu smisao života, čime i ona sama otkriva smisao. Iako sam živi skromno, Billy iz romana *The Fool of New York City* učinit će sve što je u njegovoj moći da pomogne bližnjemu, iskazujući velikodušnost i suosjećajnost prema čovjeku u potrebi. S druge strane, Max realizira stvaralačke vrijednosti putem umjetnosti, koja je izraz njegove duše i njegov istinski poziv te mu stoga daje smisao. Pawel iz romana *Sophia House* pronalazi smisao u umjetnosti, književnosti i dobrim djelima. O'Brien ovdje demonstrira kako umjetnost može biti smislena, ali i besmislena, zauzimajući negativan stav prema umjetnosti koja u svojem temelju nema vrijednosti. Jedna od Pawelovih realizacija vrijednosti također je književnost, kojom Pawel nastoji obogatiti ljudske živote istinom. Osim toga, on ostvaruje smisao čineći dobra djela, koja imaju dalekosežan utjecaj na tuđe živote.

Nadalje, doživljajne vrijednosti Frankl tumači kao doživljavanje ljubavi, dobrote, istine i ljepote. Prema Franklu, ljubavlju doživljavamo drugu osobu kao jedinstvenu i nezamjenjivu, postajemo svjesni njezine biti, prepoznajemo njezine mogućnosti i pomažemo joj da ih ispuni.

Ljubav je jača od smrti jer je bit voljene osobe vječna. I Frankl i kršćanstvo stava su da ljubav nije emocija nego slobodna odluka. Temelj kršćanstva stoga su zapovijedi ljubavi. Stvarajući osobu, Bog potvrđuje da je dobro da ona postoji i da je vrijedna njegove ljubavi, a Božja ljubav ponavlja se u ljudskoj ljubavi. Naime, kršćani su pozvani ljubiti bližnje onako kako Bog ljubi čovjeka – ne zato što je čovjek dobar i što je zaslužio ljubav, nego zato što je Bog dobar. Ovi pogledi na ljubav kao smisao života odražavaju se i u O'Brienovim romanima. Primjerice, u romanu *The Lighthouse* O'Brien se bavi problematikom ostvarivanja smisla putem doživljajnih vrijednosti u slučaju kada je osoba duboko ranjena na području obiteljskih odnosa. Ethan, kao takva osoba, štiteći se od patnje, štiti se od ljubavi, ali tako doživljava najveću patnju – usamljenost. Uvidjevši da je njegova izolacija razlog zbog kojega ne može ostvariti najviši cilj života i put prema spasenju – ljubav, otvara svoje srce. To mu omogućuje da, slijedeći Krista, iz ljubavi žrtvuje život za druge, pronalazeći smisao života. Za Josipa, protagonista romana *The Island of the World*, ljubav je često patnja. Naime, većina ljudi koje on voli nestaje iz njegova života, a dobar dio njih umire. Međutim, O'Brien pokazuje da je ljubav vječna, odražavajući stav Franklove teorije i kršćanske teologije. Patnja koju ljubav uzrokuje kod Josipa ne umanjuje smisao života koji on ostvaruje ljubavlju – ona ga čak povećava jer doprinosi Josipovu rastu. Ljubav između Anne i Stephena u romanu *Strangers and Sojourners* ključna je u Anneinoj potrazi za smislom. Sukladno teoriji, O'Brien demonstrira da ljubav nije romantični osjećaj, nego svjesna odluka te da su žrtva, patnja i potpuna predanost nužni za pravu ljubav, koja zauzvrat preobražava, iscjeljuje i ispunjava supružnike smislom. Osim toga, O'Brien naglašava da ne treba tražiti smisao u primanju ljubavi, nego u davanju. Anneina ljubav prema Bogu, kao rezultat obraćenja, intenzivira njezinu ljubav prema Stephenu te ona postaje svjesna njegove biti, prihvaćajući ga u potpunosti. Time su oboje iscijeljeni i ujedinjeni u ljubavi, što rezultira pronalaskom smisla za oboje. U romanu *A Cry of Stone*, Rose ljubi kršćanskom ljubavlju gotovo svakoga koga sretne, shvaćajući da su ljubav prema Bogu i bližnjem neodvojive. Drugim riječima, ona ujedinjuje svoju patnju i žrtvu s Kristovom, transformirajući ih u ljubav. Svojom ljubavlju pokazuje bližnjima da su vrijedni i jedinstveni, prepoznaje njihove mogućnosti i pomaže im da ih ostvare te iscjeljuje duhovno ranjene, ne tražeći ništa zauzvrat. Na taj način pronalazi smisao života. Nadalje, u romanu *The Fool of New York City,* O'Brien suprotstavlja ispravne pogrešnim načinima ljubavi. Naime, osobe koje istinski vole Maxa prihvaćaju ga kakav jest, prema njemu brižni su i strpljivi, a on uz njih otkriva i ostvaruje svoje mogućnosti. S druge strane, osobe koje ga ne vole na ispravan način pojačavaju njegovu traumu, okrutne su, manipulativne, ne razumiju ga i ne podupiru. Međutim, to ne znači da je takva „ljubav" besmislena. O'Brien ovdje podupire Franklovu tezu da čak i nesretna ljubav potiče rast i razvoj

osobe, pa je također smislena. Potraga za smislom u romanu *Sophia House* usko je povezana s potragom za ljubavlju. Ranjen iskustvom međuljudskih odnosa, Pawel odlučuje ne dopustiti nikomu da mu se približi. Nakon borbe sa samim sobom dolazi do spoznaje da ne treba težiti za ljudskom ljubavlju, nego u svojem srcu tražiti Božju ljubav, koja donosi smisao. U ovom romanu O'Brien potvrđuje teoriju da ljubav nije osjećaj, nego izbor te prikazuje ljubav kao temelj smislene žrtve.

Vrijednosti stava kod Frankla odnose se na stav prema neizbježnoj patnji. Patnja ima osobito važnu ulogu u traženju smisla života jer upravo ona potiče čovjeka da se zapita o smislu života te o postojanju i ulozi Boga. Prema Franklu, čovjeku se ne može oduzeti sloboda da odabere svoj stav neovisno o okolnostima, čak i u patnji. Patnju se može preobraziti u nešto pozitivno i konstruktivno, bili to razvoj, sazrijevanje, kajanje ili promjena. Pozitivan stav prema patnji nije važan samo za pronalaženje smisla kod patnika nego i za one koji svjedoče sposobnosti čovjeka za herojsko podnošenje patnje. Kršćanstvo smatra da Bog dopušta patnju jer ona može biti korisna za čovjeka, primjerice, kao prilika za obraćenje ili usavršavanje vjere. Ona također može učiti poniznosti, praštanju i zajedništvu. Zbog svoje beskrajne ljubavi prema čovjeku, Bog je dao svojega Sina kako bi spasio svijet patnjom i smrću na križu te je stoga ljubav kršćanski odgovor na pitanje smisla patnje. Važno je napomenuti da čovjek nije sam u patnji: Bog je u patnji blizu čovjeku i tješi ga. Osim toga, zahvaljujući Kristovoj patnji, Bog štiti čovjeka od konačne patnje, odnosno, prokletstva. Sudjelujući u Kristovoj patnji, čovjek postaje dostojan Kraljevstva Božjega, a slijedeći Krista, sudjeluje u spasenju svijeta. Sličan pristup temi patnje zauzima i O'Brien, čiji su protagonisti redovito osobe kojima patnja predstavlja značajan dio života. Roman *The Lighthouse* predstavlja patnju povezanu s roditeljskim napuštanjem kod triju likova. Esau, Ethan i Ross imaju različite pristupe patnji, a O'Brien prikazuje koji stavovi dovode do smisla, a koji ne. Naime, Esauova reakcija na smrt roditelja odgovaranje je zlom na zlo. Umjesto da transformira bol u nešto konstruktivno, postaje destruktivan. Međutim, prije smrti ispovijedi se i tako ipak pronalazi smisao. Ethan na napuštanje roditelja reagira dvojako. S jedne strane, odlučuje biti čestit, a s druge strane, izolira se od svijeta. Potonji se stav tijekom vremena mijenja te se Ethan na kraju žrtvuje kako bi spasio druge te tako pronalazi smisao. Ross nikada nije upoznao biološkoga oca te je nadišao svoju ljutnju moleći se za njega. Bio je svjestan da mu je Bog blizu u patnji, što mu je donosilo utjehu. Svojim ispravnim stavom on patnju transformira u postignuće i sazrijeva, ali i služi kao primjer drugima, prvenstveno Ethanu. U romanu *The Island of the World* Josip najprije na patnju reagira beznađem i mržnjom. Međutim, kada otvori srce Bogu i doživi obraćenje, koje mu omogućuje da prihvati patnju i ujedini ju s Kristovom patnjom, uči se poniznosti, razvija suosjećanje i

oslobađa se mržnje. Drugim riječima, nadilazi sam sebe, što vodi do njegova rasta i pronalaska smisla u patnji. Svojim ispravnim stavom on također služi kao primjer drugima. *Strangers and Sojourners* bavi se ponajprije pitanjem duhovne patnje. Naime, Anneina usamljenost i očaj, unatoč dobru životu, rezultat su, u početku neprepoznate, čežnje za Bogom. Anne ne prihvaća pasivno svoju patnju, nego kreće u potragu za Bogom. Shvaćajući da se smisao ne može pronaći u vanjskim čimbenicima, nego odabirom stava, Anne svojim podnošenjem patnje postaje inspiracija drugima. Kada na kraju života pronađe vjeru, predaje Bogu svoju prazninu, nalazeći smisao. *A Cry of Stone* prikazuje brojne patnje naizgled „malene" osobe Rose. Unatoč patnji ili upravo zbog nje, Rose u svojoj slobodi ljubi bližnje i herojski prikazuje svoju bol za dobrobit drugih, sjedinjujući svoju žrtvu s Kristovom patnjom. Kada osjeća tugu zbog patnje, ona aktivno preusmjerava pozornost na zahvalnost za Božje blagoslove i podsjeća sebe na svrhu svojih žrtvi. Rezultat ispravna stava prema patnji njezin je smisao života i pomaganje građenja civilizacije ljubavi. Roman *The Fool of New York City* suprotstavlja Billyjev i Maxov odgovor na slične životne patnje. Billyjev ispravan stav – preusmjeravanje fokusa sa svoje patnje na pomoć drugima koji pate, kao i zahvalnost za male stvari u životu – dovode ga do smisla te on služi kao primjer Maxu. S druge strane, Max na traumu reagira najprije njezinim ignoriranjem, a zatim se odaje alkoholu i razmišlja o samoubojstvu. Uz Billyja shvaća da je patnju potrebno transformirati u nešto što daje život te na taj način sazrijeva, što njegov život čini smislenim. Život Pawela iz romana *Sophia House* obilježen je mnogim patnjama, na koje on prvotno reagira očajem i suicidalnim mislima. Međutim, obraćenje postupno mijenja njegov stav prema patnji te, uz pomoć molitve i sakramenata, Pawel uči prihvaćati svoju patnju, oprašta i predaje se potpuno Bogu, što njegovu patnju čini smislenom. Ovako pročišćen, prihvaća žrtvu koju mu je Bog namijenio te daje svoj život za Davida, mijenjajući ravnotežu u svijetu.

Prema Franklu, religiozna vjera jest vjera u konačni smisao života. Konačni smisao života ne možemo spoznati sve do posljednjega trenutka života, jer on ovisi o tome kako je osoba ostvarila potencijalni smisao svake životne situacije. Teologija također smatra da su vjera i Bog nužni za ostvarivanje konačnoga smisla. Svetost, odnosno sličnost Kristu, put je prema vječnom spasu, a vječni život u raju predstavlja konačni smisao života. O'Brienovi romani na isti način demonstriraju pronalazak konačnoga smisla života. Primjerice, u romanu *The Lighthouse*, sve u Ethanovu životu vodi ga prema njegovoj konačnoj žrtvi, u kojoj daje svoj život kako bi drugi mogli živjeti. Osim toga, u posljednjim trenutcima života poseže za svjetlom, što simbolizira njegovo obraćenje. Kristov i Marijin dolazak po njega označava vječni život u raju koji ga očekuje, čime Ethan ostvaruje konačni smisao života. Ova tema u romanu *The Island of the World* obrađena je na temelju Josipovih pitanja o identitetu i smislu te njegova

ponovnoga pronalaska vjere. Njegov život prikazan je kao duhovno putovanje na kojem mora nadići životne teškoće kako bi susreo Krista u vječnosti. Osim toga, u viziji koju prima pred kraj života, dobiva priliku vidjeti da je Krist bio uz njega tijekom cijeloga života. Postavljanje metafizičkih pitanja vodi Anne iz *Strangers and Sojourners* u potrazi za konačnim smislom. Suočena sa smrću, ona uviđa da se za nju pripremala cijeli život te vjeruje da Bogu ne može dati ništa osim povjerenja u ono što još ne može vidjeti. Nakon obraćenja i konačne ispovijedi na smrtnoj postelji, ona shvaća da je njezin istinski dom, za kojim je tako čeznula, zajedništvo s Bogom u vječnosti. Nadalje, O'Brien potvrđuje Franklovu teoriju da i kratak život ili život bez djece ima smisla u liku Rose iz romana *A Cry of Stone*. Tijekom života, Bog od nje traži potpuno povjerenje te ju vodi u brojnim patnjama, približavajući ju k sebi, a Rose mu ostaje vjerna, unatoč kušnjama, shvaćajući da njezina patnja mora imati neki konačni smisao. Rose vjeruje da Bog može preobraziti njezin, kako ona smatra, beznačajni i neuspješni život u nešto smisleno i plodonosno te time ostvariti konačni smisao. Kraj romana implicira Rosein skori odlazak u nebo, koji predstavlja konačni smisao njezina života. *The Fool of New York City* ističe važnost razlikovanja važnoga od nevažnoga u životu, pokazujući da je za konačni smisao važno voditi jednostavan život, voljeti, pomagati bližnjima te postati ono što uistinu jesi. Teme vjere O'Brien se dotiče tek na kraju, kada Max dolazi na misu, gdje se osjeća kao da je došao kući, što implicira njegovo obraćenje. U romanu *Sophia House* Pawel se otvara mogućnosti otkrivanja konačnoga smisla kada prestane težiti za ljudskim uspjehom te prihvaća volju Božju za svoj život. Njegova žrtva predstavlja trijumf dobra nad zlom te ga vodi prema vječnom životu, predstavljajući konačni smisao njegova života.

Likovi pomagača pomažu junacima pronaći smisao života. Frankl tvrdi da u teškim trenutcima uvijek netko pazi na nas – netko od ljudi ili Bog – te očekuje da ga ne razočaramo. Kršćanstvo vjeruje da nam Bog pomaže po ljudima, a djela milosrđa koja ljudi čine oslobađaju ih od egoizma i pomažu im da se usredotoče na život u zajedništvu s drugima. Zadaću pomaganja pronalaska smisla u životu imaju i pomagači u O'Brienovim romanima – to je uvijek Bog, koji djeluje i po ljudima. Primjerice, u romanu *The Lighthouse*, nekoliko muškaraca u Ethanovu djetinjstvu pomoglo mu je postati čovjekom kakav je postao, usmjeravajući ga i afirmirajući njegov identitet. Osim njih, Elsie i Ross pomažu mu da shvati kako su ljudi stvoreni za zajedništvo te da treba otvoriti srce za ljubav. Josip iz romana *The Island of the World* ima mnogo pomagača: od Boga, preko ljudi koji su mu bliski, pa do potpunih stranaca. Iako svatko od njih ima različit motiv za pomoć, prvenstveno pomažu Josipu jer vide ljudsko biće u potrebi. Iako mnogi od njih i sami trebaju pomoć, nesebično ju pružaju. Mnogi su kršćani te iz tog razloga ne žive samo za sebe nego otvaraju srca bližnjemu, susrećući Krista u patniku Josipu.

Nadalje, u romanu *Strangers and Sojourners*, Annien glavni pomagač, Bog, vodi njezin život i stavlja joj na put osobe koje će joj pružiti ono što joj je potrebno u njezinu očaju potrage za Bogom i smislom: ljubav, potporu, savjet, utjehu, mir, molitvu te duhovno vodstvo. Iako se Rose iz *A Cry of Stone* često čini da je sama na svijetu, Božja providnost vodi ju, šaljući joj pomagače kako bi znala da nije sama te kako bi ostvarila smisao svojega života i učinila svijet boljim mjestom. Jednostavno rečeno, *The Fool of New York City* priča je o Billyju, pomagaču koji gradi civilizaciju ljubavi na ulicama New Yorka, dok *Sophia House* prikazuje brojne Božje glasnike koji Pawela približavaju vjeri i smislu.

Provedena analiza dovodi do zaključka da O'Brien u svojim romanima afirmira vrijednost, dostojanstvo, svetost i jedinstvenost svake osobe, koliko god se ona malenom činila. On potvrđuje da život ima smisla u svim okolnostima, a čovjek je pozvan otkriti smisao života djelujući slobodno i odgovorno u skladu s vlastitom savješću. Svi O'Brienovi protagonisti ostvaruju smisao putem svih vrijednosti koje razlikuje Frankl: stvaralačkih, doživljajnih i vrijednosti stava, ali realizacija smisla putem različitih vrijednosti nije ravnomjerno raspoređena kod svih likova. Dok neki likovi u većoj mjeri smisao realiziraju putem ljubavi, a drugi putem umjetnosti, najzastupljeniji način pronalaska smisla u O'Brienovim romanima jest ispravnim stavom prema patnji i ispravnim odnosom s Bogom. Svaki čin realizacije vrijednosti, makar to bilo naizgled beznačajno dobro djelo, prikazan je kao važan za ostvarivanje smisla za pojedinca, a posredno i za druge. Iako se pojedine priče fokusiraju na ostvarivanje smisla u odnosu pojedinca i Boga, druge naglašavaju kako ostvarivanje vlastitoga smisla, uz posredstvo Boga, utječe na ostvarivanje smisla kod drugih, čime likovi pomažu graditi civilizaciju ljubavi. Važno je naglasiti da se spasenje čovjeka u svim romanima ističe kao realizacija konačnoga smisla života.

Ovim istraživanjem ususta vljena je tipologija afirmativnih elemenata smisla života u katoličkoj prozi na temelju romana Michaela D. O'Briena te je potvrđena teza da su elementi koji čine smisao života u realističkim romanima Michaela D. O'Briena podudarni s onima iz kršćanstva te logoterapije i egzistencijske analize, a to su: stvaralačke vrijednosti, doživljajne vrijednosti, vrijednosti stava i konačni smisao života. Uz temu smisla života usko su povezani fenomeni jedinstvenosti i vrijednosti života te aspekti duhovnosti, slobode, odgovornosti i savjesti, koji imaju ključnu ulogu u protagonistovu traženju smisla, u čemu mu pomažu likovi pomoćnika. S obzirom na kompleksne i duboke teme koje O'Brien u svojim romanima obrađuje, došlo se do zaključka da njegovi romani obrađeni u ovoj analizi pripadaju visokoj književnosti, dok neki od njegovih romana predstavljaju visoku književnost s elementima popularne književnosti. Budući da je u uvodnim poglavljima disertacije istaknut problem

marginalnoga položaja katoličke književnosti u znanosti te često neadekvatna znanstvenog pristupa ovoj kategoriji književnosti, ovo istraživanje daje doprinos prisutnosti katoličke književnosti u znanosti, analizi katoličke književnosti s perspektive sukladne katoličkomu svjetonazoru te afirmira Michaela D. O'Briena kao jednoga od najvažnijih suvremenih predstavnika katoličke književnosti. Osim toga, ovo istraživanje može biti korisno terapeutima koji u svojoj praksi primjenjuju biblioterapiju.

Ključne riječi: Michael D. O'Brien, Viktor Frankl, logoterapija i egzistencijska analiza, kršćanstvo, metafizička pitanja, smisao života.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Sanja Matković was born in 1987 in Našice, where she completed her primary and secondary education. In 2011, she graduated *cum laude* with an MA degree in English and German language and literature, majoring in translation, from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek. In the same year, she completed Pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodical training. After finishing her studies, she worked as a substitute teacher of English and German language in several primary and secondary schools. As a teaching assistant, she taught English and German language at the Faculty of Education in Osijek and courses in the history of world drama and theater at the Academy of Arts. She has also been active as a freelance translator. Since 2018, she has been working as an English and German language teacher at the Jesuit Classical Grammar School in Osijek. She has published nine papers, presented at eight international conferences, and in 2018, she initiated and organized "The International Conference on Literature in Osijek" at her alma mater. Furthermore, she participated in the ZBIDRAM project (a digital repository of Croatian drama from the 19th and 20th centuries), several international summer schools and workshops, and has two published translations. She is a member of the Croatian Association for American Studies and the Croatian Association for the Study of English. She is also a recipient of Erasmus and DAAD scholarships for professional development. Her research interests include Catholic literature, popular literature, and the affirmation of values and the meaning of life in literature.

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ŽIVOTOPIS

Sanja Matković rođena je 1987. godine u Našicama, gdje je završila osnovnoškolsko i srednjoškolsko obrazovanje. Godine 2011. na Filozofskom fakultetu u Osijeku diplomirala je *cum laude* Engleski i Njemački jezik i književnost, prevoditeljski smjer. Iste godine završila je Pedagoško-psihološko i didaktičko-metodičko obrazovanje. Po završetku studija radila je kao nastavnica engleskoga i njemačkoga jezika na zamjenama u više osnovnih i srednjih škola. U zvanju asistentice na Fakultetu za odgojne i obrazovne znanosti predavala je engleski i njemački jezik, a na Umjetničkoj akademiji kolegije iz povijesti svjetske drame i kazališta. Kontinuirano se bavi prevođenjem. Od 2018. godine radi kao nastavnica engleskoga i njemačkoga jezika u Isusovačkoj klasičnoj gimnaziji s pravom javnosti u Osijeku. Objavila je devet radova, izlagala na osam međunarodnih konferencija, a 2018. godine inicirala je i organizirala konferenciju „International Conference on Literature in Osijek" na Filozofskom fakultetu u Osijeku. Osim toga, sudjelovala je na projektu ZBIDRAM (Zbirka drama – digitalni repozitorij hrvatske drame 19. i 20. stoljeća), na više međunarodnih ljetnih škola i radionica te ima dva objavljena prijevoda. Članica je Hrvatskoga udruženja za američke studije i Hrvatskoga društva anglističkih studija te je dobitnica stipendija „Erasmus" i DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) za stručno usavršavanje. Njezini znanstveni interesi uključuju katoličku književnost, popularnu književnost te afirmaciju vrijednosti i smisla života u književnosti.

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