

**THE MAIN CHARACTER'S SELF-DISCOVERY IN *SMALL
THINGS LIKE THESE* BY CLAIRE KEEGAN**

THESIS

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK BRAHIM MALANG
2026**

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THESIS

Presented to

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S.)

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2026**

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MOTTO

"Which of your Lord's blessings do you deny?"

(Q.S Ar-Rahman [55] : 13, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55,
57, 59, 61, 63, 65, 67, 69, 71, 73, 75, and 77)

“Don’t be too hard on yourself. Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses.”

“If you look up to gain motivation, don’t forget to look down to be grateful”

“Although I am going with the flow. I will keep going.”

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents, siblings and entire family, as well as to all of my dear friends who have supported me. I also dedicate it to myself, with all the life and academic lessons I have learned over the past four years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Alhamdulillahillahi robbil 'alamin. Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to Allah SWT for His infinite blessings, grace and bounties, which have made it possible to complete this thesis. The thesis is entitled “The Main Character’s Self-Discovery in *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan”. Secondly, may our beloved Prophet Muhammad SAW, who has guided us from the abyss of ignorance towards the enlightenment of Islam, be forever showered with blessings and peace.

This research could not have been completed without support from all people around me. Therefore, I am very grateful to thank my advisor, Miss Whida Rositama, S.Hum. for her invaluable contributions to correct, guide, and provide suggestion and criticism to this thesis. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to:

1. The Rector of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Prof. Dr. Ilfi Nur Diana, M.Si.
2. The Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Prof. Dr. M. Faisol, M.Ag.
3. Head of the English Literature Department, Dr. Agwin Degaf, M.A.
4. My beloved parents, Yono Mubarak and Nuryaningsih, for the unconditional love, prayers and support they have given me throughout my life. To my younger siblings, Ahmad Sohibulwafa Nuril Mubarak and Muhammad Ulunnuha, who have consistently provided me with comfort

and support. Also to my extended family for their unwavering love, support and prayers.

5. To the extended family of PPGA Sirojul Quran. In particular, Ustadz Syamsul Arifin, Ustadz Irawan, Ustadz Khuzairi, Ustadzah Hilma, Ustadzah Wanda, Ustadzah Fauziyah, and the older sisters in this boarding school, especially the cohort of 2021-2023. During my time there, despite the brevity of my stay, I had the opportunity to grow and learn invaluable lessons and spiritual guidance to confront the unforgiving challenges of the external world.
6. To all my friends who have brightened my days, supported me and inspired me throughout my university years. Especially those who have guided me so much in my studies and assignments. Thank you for sharing so many stories, *asbun*, exciting moments, and for your consistent positivity towards one another. Thank you for celebrating each other's achievements rather than feeling competitive.
7. To all the musicians, singers, and YouTubers whose music, songs, and podcasts have accompanied me, banished boredom, energised me, and made me more productive.
8. To my beloved K-pop groups, AU writers, manhwa, manga, and novelists who have entertained me and recharged my energy when I was tired, lonely, and stressed.
9. To Kopi Kenangan, Tomoro, Fore, and 1001 Cafe in Malang, which I haven't yet explored, as well as the library and Arabic language laboratory

at the Faculty of Humanities on Campus 1, which provide computers with reasonably good internet connections and air conditioning.

10. Finally, I would like to conclude with a thought for myself. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your enthusiasm, patience and optimism. Your struggles, tears and sacrifices have helped you grow and have brought lessons and colour to your life.

ABSTRACT

Malihatullaila (2026) The Main Character's Self-Discovery in *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor Whida Rositama, M.Hum.

Keywords: Logotherapy, Existential Vacuum, Will to Meaning, Self-Transcendence, Self-Discovery

Modern literary narratives frequently reflect the existential vacuum and crisis of meaning that characterise contemporary existence. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that contribute to the main character, Bill Furlong's existential vacuum, and to analyse his process of self-discovery. This study utilises a qualitative literary criticism method that takes a psychological approach, notably Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy (2006). The data source is the novella *Small Things Like These*, which was collected through attentive reading with an emphasis on textual evidence of meaning-making. The findings show that Furlong's starting situation is characterised by an existential vacuum, which manifests as mechanical stagnation and a lack of noö-dynamics caused by monotonous routines and societal conformity. Furthermore, his journey to self-discovery begins with existential frustration, which reawakens his will to meaning through experiential values such as paternal love and empathy for the marginalised. This internal awakening ultimately results in an act of self-transcendence in which Furlong prioritises another person's well-being over his own social stability. The study indicates that Furlong's self-discovery is an unavoidable result of self-forgetfulness and moral responsibility, not an egocentric goal. As a result, this study demonstrates that a meaningful existence can be regarded as a reaction to moral demands, even when confronted with dominating societal and institutional restrictions.

مستخلص البحث

مالحة الليل (٢٠٢٦) هوية الشخصية الرئيسية في رواية "أشياء صغيرة كهذه" للكاتبة كلير كيغان. أطروحة. قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية، مالانج. المشرفة: ويدا روسيتاما، ماجستير في الآداب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلاج بالكلام، الفراغ الوجودي، الرغبة في البحث عن المعنى، تجاوز الذات، اكتشاف الذات

غالبًا ما تعكس السرديات الأدبية الحديثة الفراغ الوجودي وأزمة المعنى التي تميز الحياة المعاصرة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحديد العوامل التي تسهم في الفراغ الوجودي للشخصية الرئيسية، بيل فورلونج، بالإضافة إلى تحليل عملية اكتشافه لذاته. يستخدم هذا البحث منهج النقد الأدبي النوعي مع اتباع نهج نفسي ونظرية العلاج بالكلام (Logotherapy) لفيلكتور فرانكل. مصدر البيانات هو الرواية القصيرة *Small Things Like These* للكاتبة كلير كيغان، والتي تم جمعها من خلال قراءة متأنية مع التركيز على الأدلة النصية لتكوين المعنى. تشير النتائج إلى أن الوضع الأولي لفورلونج يتسم بفراغ وجودي يتجسد في شكل ركود ميكانيكي ونقص في الديناميكية النوثية نتيجة للروتين والترتيب والامتثال الاجتماعي. علاوة على ذلك، تبدأ رحلته لاكتشاف الذات بالإحباط الوجودي، الذي يُعيد إيقاظ إرادته في البحث عن المعنى من خلال القيم التجريبية مثل الحب كآب والتعاطف مع المهمشين. أدى هذا النهوض الروحي في النهاية إلى عمل من أعمال تجاوز الذات، حيث أعطى فورلونج الأولوية لرغباته الآخرين على حساب استقراره الاجتماعي الخاص. تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن اكتشاف فورلونج لذاته المعنى من خلال القيم التجريبية كان نتيجة ثانوية لنسيان الذات والمسؤولية الأخلاقية، وليس هدفًا ذاتيًا. ونتيجة لذلك، تظهر هذه الدراسة أن الوجود ذي المعنى يمكن اعتباره رد فعل على المطالب الأخلاقية، حتى في مواجهة القيود الاجتماعية والمؤسسية السائدة.

ABSTRAK

Malihatullaila (2026) Penemuan Jati Diri Karakter Utama dalam *Small Things Like These* oleh Claire Keegan. Skripsi. Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Pembimbing Whida Rositama, M.Hum.

Kata kunci: Logoterapi, Kekosongan Eksistensial, Keinginan Mencari Makna, Transendensi Diri, Penemuan Diri

Narasi sastra modern sering kali mencerminkan kekosongan eksistensial dan krisis makna yang menjadi ciri kehidupan kontemporer. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap kekosongan eksistensial tokoh utama, Bill Furlong, serta menganalisis proses penemuan jati dirinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kritik sastra kualitatif dengan pendekatan psikologis dan teori Logoterapi milik Viktor Frankl. Sumber data adalah novella *Small Things Like These* karya Claire Keegan yang dikumpulkan melalui pembacaan cermat dengan penekanan pada bukti tekstual pembentukan makna. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa situasi awal Furlong ditandai oleh kekosongan eksistensial yang terwujud sebagai stagnasi mekanis dan kurangnya dinamika noetik akibat rutinitas monoton dan konformitas sosial. Selain itu, perjalanannya menuju penemuan diri dimulai dengan frustrasi eksistensial, yang membangkitkan kembali kehendaknya untuk mencari makna melalui nilai-nilai pengalaman, seperti kasih sayang sebagai seorang ayah dan empati terhadap kaum terpinggirkan. Kebangkitan batin ini pada akhirnya menghasilkan tindakan transendensi diri di mana Furlong memprioritaskan kesejahteraan orang lain di atas stabilitas sosialnya sendiri. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penemuan jati diri Furlong merupakan efek samping dari melupakan diri dan tanggung jawab moral, bukan tujuan egosentris. Akibatnya, studi ini menunjukkan bahwa keberadaan yang bermakna dapat dianggap sebagai reaksi terhadap tuntutan moral, bahkan ketika dihadapkan pada pembatasan sosial dan institusional yang mendominasi.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the background of the study, the previous study, the research question, the significance of the study, the scope and limitations, and the definitions of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

In contemporary life, a rising number of people suffer from burnout, anxiety, and feelings of emptiness despite achieving success according to conventional standards. Mental health issues have gotten out of control over the last two decades (McGorry et al., 2025). A national mental health study in the United States revealed that over 60% of students across 375 campuses met the criteria for at least one mental health issue (Lipson et al., 2022). Further data indicate that young men aged 16 to 25 have significant feelings of meaninglessness, leading to significant depression and the need for professional care (Kaleda & Popovich, 2024). These people frequently struggle with profound questions about life purpose, self-esteem, and identity crises. Even intellectually gifted adults face heightened risks of what Viktor Frankl (2006) called “existential vacuum”, a crisis of meaning which can impede life fulfilment (Riethof & Bob, 2019; Uddin, 2024; Vötter, 2019). Frankl’s concept is particularly significant in literary narratives of individuals leading stable but spiritually hollow lives.

Moments of moral crisis serve as catalysts for profound self-discovery, forcing individuals to confront fundamental questions regarding their identity,

values, and purpose in life. Psychological crises, particularly those involving existential and moral dilemmas, create significant opportunities for meaning-making and identity reconstruction (Kalashnikova et al., 2022). Dealing with moral crises often involves “meaning formation”, in which individuals reflect to align their experiences with their core values and beliefs, leading to a more authentic identity (Youvan, 2024).

Literature is often used as an instrument for discussing significant issues about what humans are. Stories make it easier for us to understand the decision-making process of individuals and how their identities develop. More than just enjoyment, literature also reflects and shapes social realities by depicting the intricacies of human experiences in certain cultural and historical situations (Rahayu, 2021). Through literary narratives, readers are allowed to investigate the relationship between individual consciousness and the larger social factors that impact human behaviour, including emotional realities (Thoyib & Kusuma, 2025). As Zunshine (2006) argues, interacting with works of fiction allows one to learn more about themselves by becoming empathic towards the complex characters in them and finding ways to deal with various circumstances.

The psychological realism genre of literature is exceptionally good at capturing this inner struggle, as it uses narrative devices such as stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and free indirect discourse to show the invisible decision-making and self-reflection processes. According to Høeg (2023), this portrayal illustrates characters’ efforts to reconcile their own desires and morality, which is identified as the cause of identity formation. In other words, literature

becomes a source of moral experience, which can be beneficial for improving ethics and personal growth (Gasser et al., 2022). Morality in the given piece of writing analyses why people have a need to comprehend life through stories and explores psychological growth. Through psychological realism, literature becomes a source of moral experience that encourages readers to reflect on personal values and psychological growth.

Claire Keegan's *Small Things Like These* (2021) exemplifies this tradition through its exploration of one man's moral awakening in the context of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries. The book has received critical acclaim for its minimalist realism, as evidenced by winning the 2022 Orwell Prize for Political Fiction, earned a place on the Booker Prize shortlist, and even adapted into a film. This book, set in the small town of New Ross, Ireland, in 1985, when the Catholic Church wielded considerable influence (Keegan, 2021). This story follows Bill Furlong, a coal and timber merchant and father of five daughters, during the busy weeks leading up to Christmas. During the delivery process, Furlong discovers a number of young women confined within a convent warehouse, in deplorable conditions. The young women are workers at the Magdalene laundry, a business owned by the local convent.

Given his own past as the son of an unmarried mother, Furlong is faced with a moral dilemma. He must choose between following the community's silence to ensure the safety and social status of his family, or pursuing his personal moral and ethical convictions (Keegan, 2021). This internal struggle elevates the narrative beyond social critique into a psychological exploration of the "will to meaning".

Furlong experiences existential frustration as he becomes increasingly aware of the emptiness and conformity that shape his life. Ultimately, he must decide whether to remain in the existential vacuum of conformity or to pursue self-transcendence by taking action against injustice. While the book's critical acclaim is well-established, its psychological dimensions warrant deeper scholarly attention.

The novella *Small Things Like These* addresses the issue of Magdalene Laundries in Ireland, situating Bill Furlong's personal crisis within the broader historical context of institutional violence and collective silence. As Rahayu (2021) argues, literary works often voice social complexities and reveal structures of power that shape human experience. Literary narratives may also be used to explore existential concerns and questions about human life (Harahap & Rahayu, 2025). In this regard, the function of this book is not only as a narrative about an individual but also as a critique of social conformity and institutional authority.

Between 1922 and 1996, Catholic religious congregations operated Magdalene Laundries. In these institutions, approximately 30,000 women and girls were held captive as punishment for various immoral actions such as pregnancies outside of marriage, promiscuity, or inability to be taken care of by family members (Brangan, 2024). It has been found that Magdalene Laundries served as institutions that were "an ideological drive for cleansing" and sustained the illusion of moral integrity while ignoring social issues that contradicted the narrative of the Irish nation (Brangan, 2024). Set in 1985, before the abuse in Magdalene Laundries was publicly acknowledged, this book portrays a community shaped by denial and institutional protection.

Bill Furlong's moral struggle in this societal environment reflects questions about meaning, values, and personal responsibility. His rising awareness of unfairness and discontent with passive conformity make the book particularly relevant to Viktor Frankl's (2006) Logotherapy. Through Furlong's psychological development, the narrative depicts how existential self-discovery can occur as a result of moral obligation and the search for meaning.

The researcher has identified 10 studies related to the topic of this research. Three studies examined *Small Things Like These* in particular. In particular, Pérez-Vides (2024) has examined Bill's empathy using the lens of affect theory and cruel optimism, with special attention being paid to its feminist undertones and affective politics. Nonetheless, it fails to explore the existential-psychological mechanisms behind Bill's moral epiphany. On the contrary, Hakkioğlu and Güneş (2023) have employed the scapegoat hypothesis formulated by René Girard to evaluate the level of institutional involvement. While it offers considerable knowledge about the dynamics of the phenomenon, it does not consider Bill's internal psychological changes. Finally, Holmqvist (2025) discusses the existentialist underpinnings of Keegan's work, paying attention to how emotional silences can convey deeper meaning.

Other studies provide historical and narrative context Keegan's (2021) work and the Magdalene Laundries. Terrazas-Gallego (2014) analyses Keegan's use of satire across three stories from *Walk the Blue Fields*, demonstrating how her minimalist prose, detached stance, and exploitation of rhetorical devices enable. Lieghio (2024) conducts a feminist narrative analysis of historical trauma in Irish

contemporary media, examining how the Magdalene Laundries are represented in documentary form through the lens of Ireland's postcolonial national imaginary and Catholic conservatism. While this provides crucial historical context for understanding Magdalene Laundries' cultural significance, it focuses on documentary media rather than literary fiction and does not engage with individual psychological processes of moral consciousness depicted in Keegan's work.

Several literary studies demonstrate how Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy can be used to analyse fictional characters' search for meaning. Dini et al. (2025) concluded that the protagonist in novel *Hector and the Search for Happiness* overcame emptiness by embarking on an inner journey through Frankl's three core values: creative value, experiential value, and attitudinal value, which ultimately led to an existential transformation. Akshaya. T & Niranjani (2025) analysed Satyavati in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* and explicitly utilized Frankl's concept that meaning can be discovered through creating a work, experiencing something, and the attitude taken toward unavoidable suffering. They demonstrated that the character's ambition and acceptance of suffering were manifestations of her will to meaning. In another study, Jissmon K. J. (2021) analysed *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed. The research utilized Frankl's concept of the "Tragic Triad" (pain, guilt, and death) to explain the character's existential vacuum following her mother's death. Jissmon argued that the protagonist attained self-actualization and redemption not by avoiding suffering, but by converting her suffering into meaning through solitary travel (experiential value) and connection with nature and people.

Moreover, two other researches provide substantial comparative angles. Firstly, Wintama (2024) explored the application of Frankl's existentialism on the novel *Re:Zero*, where he found that the protagonist of the book, Natsuki Subaru, showed a strong will to meaning through his repeated suffering and death. Another research is conducted by Rasyada (2023), who analysed the novella *Alzahaymar* by Gazi Al-Qusaibi and argued that although the protagonist suffers from Alzheimer's, he undergoes three stages of meaning, namely, facing the existential problem, applying the principles of logotherapy, and actualising values through love and memory. Nevertheless, all of these papers focus on myths or a contemporary American perspective. They do not address the specific interplay between institutional religious abuse, communal silence and an ordinary man's conscience in late 20th-century Ireland.

This is where the discrepancy lies. Although previous studies have been done on the novel through sociological and feminist approaches, Logotherapy is currently being used for other genres like fantasy or mythology. However, there is still a gap in the studies regarding the psychological aspect of the main character in a realistic and historical environment. This research addresses this gap by applying Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy specifically to the context of 1985 Ireland, where the emphasis is made not on the institutional involvement of the community but on the personal journey towards self-realization.

B. The Problems of the Study

According to the research background, the researcher will focus on two research questions as follows:

1. What factors contribute to Bill Furlong's existential vacuum as represented in Claire Keegan's *Small Things Like These* according to Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy?
2. How does Bill Furlong's process of self-discovery unfold in Claire Keegan's *Small Things Like These* as interpreted through Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy?

C. Significance of the Study

This research is expected to make a significant contribution both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research contributes to literary scholarship by demonstrating the applicability of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy to contemporary fiction analysis, a methodological approach that is still limited in the humanities. This research also enriches Irish literary studies by providing a psychological individual lens that complements existing macro-level analyses of collective trauma. Furthermore, this research deepens the understanding of how Keegan's minimalist narrative technique represents existential consciousness.

Practically, the study offers frameworks for literary pedagogy that illuminate how fiction represents authentic ethical consciousness and moral awakening. It contributes to contemporary discourse on institutional accountability and individual responsibility by demonstrating how literature functions as a space for exploring these existential concerns. Additionally, by modelling interdisciplinary dialogue between the humanities and psychology, the study encourages scholars to engage complex human experiences through multiple theoretical lenses.

D. The Scope and Limitation

This research will focus on analysing Bill Furlong's process of self-discovery in Claire Keegan's novella *Small Things Like These* by applying a single theoretical framework, namely the concept of meaning in life in Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy theory. The study will concentrate on the transformation of the character from a condition of existential vacuum to meaning-making. This approach facilitates an in-depth examination of the character's inner journey. The scope of this research paper will be confined to only one literary piece, excluding the 2024 movie adaptation of the same work. This narrow focus restricts the generalisability of findings and precludes consideration of alternative theoretical perspectives. Alternative theoretical approaches may be explored by future researchers on the same literary pieces.

E. Definition of Key Terms

The following definitions of key terms are provided as a guideline to prevent misunderstanding:

1. Logotherapy: a psychotherapy school founded by Viktor Frankl which posits that the search for meaning is the primary motivation in human life (Frankl, 2006).
2. Existential Vacuum: a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness due to individuals failing to identify meaning and purpose in their lives (Frankl, 2006).

3. Existential Frustration: The frustration that arises when human desire to find the meaning of life is obstructed (Frankl, 2006).
4. Will to Meaning: human drive to find purpose and significance in life, even amidst suffering and adversity (Frankl, 2006).
5. Self-Transcendence: the capacity to move beyond self-centred concerns toward meaningful engagement with something greater than oneself, including other people, causes, or values, leading to authentic fulfilment (Frankl, 2006).
6. Self-Discovery: in the context of Logotherapy, self-discovery is not pursued as a direct, egocentric goal. Instead, it is a psychological process through which an individual achieves an authentic understanding of themselves as a result of self-transcendence (Frankl, 2006).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents the theories that were used to analyse the data. It consists of an explanation about psychological approach, Logotherapy, existential vacuum, will to meaning, and self-transcendence.

A. Psychological Approach in Literary Criticism

The psychological approach to literary criticism examines texts through the lens of psychological theories, which used to understand character's behaviour and mental processes. According to Wellek and Warren (1956), this approach investigates the types and laws found in literary works, viewing them as more than just imaginative creation, also as reflections of psychological truth. This perspective considers literature as a profound record of human consciousness (Packer, 2003), providing insights into the complex workings of the human mind, which are frequently reflected in fictional narratives.

Psychological perspective is justified because of the inherent connection between psychology and literature. Both sciences investigate the human being. In psychology, human behaviour is analysed using scientific means, while literature uses artistry to depict the human experience. As mentioned by Aras (2015), both sciences deal with human perceptions of the world, encompassing sadness, desires, wishes, fears, and problems. Therefore, using psychological perspectives to analyse literature would help one gain more insight into the realistic portrayal of human behaviour and motivation.

According to Wellek and Warren (1956) the psychological method may be divided into four categories: studies about the psychology of the author both in terms of his type and person, creation, psychology contained within the work and the impact that literature has on the reader. The primary emphasis of this study is on the latter category; which is character psychology. From this aspect, fictional characters are viewed as if they were actual individuals with complex inner lives. Their internal tensions and behavioural changes are considered in order to detect psychological motives in literature.

Furthermore, literature is a particularly effective medium for this approach because it is frequently regarded as humanity's most successful attempt to describe the experiences of people moving through place and time, also their emotional realities (Aras, 2015; Thoyib & Kusuma, 2025). Narrative fiction reveals the various layers of personality. According to Aras (2015) literature allows us to see the "whole" of the human experience, which includes the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects of humanity. The psychological approach to literature provides a thorough understanding of how characters deal with their existential realities.

As a result, this study employs a psychological approach to investigate the moral and existential evolution of Claire Keegan's protagonist, Bill Furlong. Using Viktor Frankl's (2006) Logotherapy as a theoretical framework, the researcher aims to uncover the motivations driving the protagonist's actions. This approach explores how the protagonist moves from an existential vacuum to finding meaning in the face of moral challenge, resulting in an organised comprehension of his psychological journey.

B. Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

Logotherapy, developed by Viktor E. Frankl, is a form of existential psychology that emphasises the search for meaning as the primary motivation for humans. It is also known as the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy, which focuses on the will to meaning (Frankl, 2006). Unlike the ideas of Freud and Adler, which focused on psychological drives, Logotherapy introduces the concept of the spiritual or “noological” dimension as the foundation for this will to meaning (Frankl, 2006). Therefore, Logotherapy views humans not merely as beings driven by biological urges or the desire for power, but as individuals who always try to find unique meaning in life.

The idea of Frankl's Logotherapy was born from his extreme experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. Viktor Frankl is a figure in Austrian psychiatry and neurology. The experience of losing almost his entire family and dignity in a concentration camp ultimately shaped his philosophy of human nature (Bushkin et al., 2021). He subsequently distilled these experiences into his work entitled *Man's Search for Meaning*, which formed the foundation for Frankl's Logotherapy theory. Frankl emphasises that suffering is not automatically destructive to humans but instead can be a catalyst for finding meaning.

The most important idea in logotherapy is the will to meaning. This is the basic human desire to find a special purpose and meaning in life. According to Frankl (2006), people are not only motivated by the desire to avoid pain or pleasure. They can also be driven to live for their ideals and values and are capable of sacrificing themselves for what they believe in. Frankl did a survey at his hospital

in Vienna. The results showed that most people said that they need something or someone to live for, and they even said they would be willing to die for it (Frankl, 2006). When this need for meaning is hindered or unfulfilled, people can feel a sense of emptiness.

Unlike psychoanalysis, which focuses on the past and looks inward at the patient, Logotherapy is a therapeutic technique that views humans as beings who can transcend their environment to realise the meaning of their lives (Frankl, 2006). This principle forms the basis of Logotherapy, which focuses more on future orientation and the individual's responsibility to find their purpose in life. Even in the worst of situations, there are always "seeds of meaning" that can be discovered by individuals (Bushkin et al., 2021). Therefore, Frankl's existential psychology theory views humans as agents who are capable of responding to and giving direction to their lives through the creation of meaning.

The relevance of the logotherapy framework to this study is in its provision of a set of concepts for the systematic interpretation of the inner dynamics of fictional characters, with reference to a crisis of meaning and the process of searching for life purpose. The concepts of existential vacuum, existential frustration, will to meaning and self-transcendence enable analysis of conditions of emptiness, the drive to find meaning and a character's ability to transcend their own interests for the sake of higher values (Frankl, 2006). In this study the concepts are examined to establish a correlation between the character's transition from a state of internal emptiness to a sense of fulfilment. To establish a comprehensive analysis

of this journey, the discussion begins with a thorough examination of the existential vacuum as the root of the character's initial internal crisis.

1. Existential Vacuum

When humans' search for meaning encounters obstacles, a state of internal emptiness known as the existential vacuum is produced. Frankl (2006) describes this condition not merely as a temporary mood but as a continuous sense of meaninglessness that affects people who lack an awareness of a specific purpose worth living for.

a. Boredom

The existential vacuum tends to be experienced as a sense of boredom. Following the philosophy of Schopenhauer, Frankl (2006) suggests that humanity is destined to oscillate between the extremes of distress and boredom. In today's society, boredom has become a more serious psychological condition than suffering, creating a void inside the individual's self that needs to be filled.

b. Sunday Neurosis

Psychological issues such as distress and boredom will continue to evolve swiftly in line with the pace of automation, thereby producing an abundance of free time on the part of workers who may not know how to use their newfound spare time wisely. Frankl (2006) emphasises that this boredom often manifests as "sunday neurosis", which is a form of depression characterized by feelings of emptiness caused by dissatisfaction with life after a busy week has ended. If this inner void remains unfilled, it may lead to a "mass neurotic triad" comprising of depression, aggression, and addiction (Frankl, 2006). It should be point out that this

phenomenon may not be fully understood without first grasping the fundamental emptiness of life. These symptoms indicate a profound loss of purpose or direction in life.

c. Conformism and Totalitarianism

According to Frankl (2006), the existential vacuum is the result of two kinds of loss that humanity has experienced throughout its evolution. Humans have lost the basic animal instincts that dictate what they must do for survival, which provide a sense of security. Furthermore, the traditions that have historically shaped human behaviour and determined how people should act are rapidly decreasing. Consequently, individuals in the modern age often do not even know what they wish to do. Without the guidance of instinct or the security of tradition, they are left without a clear direction, and a deep sense of futility in their existence is revealed.

This lack of direction causes individuals to be compelled to fill the void through compensatory behaviours. Frankl (2006) argues that rather than pursuing authentic meaning, they often conform to what other people do or submit to totalitarianism, doing what others wish them to do. Moreover, the existential vacuum may manifest in masked forms, in which the frustrated will to meaning is vicariously compensated by a will to power (including the pursuit of money) or a will to pleasure (Frankl, 2006). These behaviours serve as defence mechanisms, distracting the individual from the terrifying awareness of their inner emptiness. This condition is particularly relevant to Bill Furlong, whose seemingly stable life masks moral passivity and suppressed ethical conflict.

2. Existential Frustration

In Logotherapy, “existential frustration” refers to the human desire to find meaning in life, which can lead to a sense of frustration. This frustration arises when an individual’s fundamental human drive to find a purpose in life remains unfulfilled, leaving them with a sense of emptiness (Frankl, 2006). According to Frankl (2006), this frustration is not necessarily linked to psychological conflict or instinctual drives, but rather to the human existential dimension, specifically the “noölogical” dimension (derived from the Greek word *noös*, meaning mind or spirit). In this state, individuals may experience a sense of uncertainty regarding their future direction.

a. Noö Dynamic

Furthermore, the pursuit of meaning inevitably involves a certain amount of tension, which Frankl refers to as “noö-dynamics”. Mental health is not about having equilibrium (homeostasis), which means having the same internal state in all areas of life (Bushkin et al., 2021). It is about having a balance between who you are and who you think you should be. Frankl (2006) stated that this tension is a healthy process because it acts as a driving force for the soul. This tension motivates people to move beyond their current circumstances to fulfil the potential meaning of their lives. Therefore, noö-dynamics should not be viewed as a disease, but rather as an indication that an individual is actively seeking meaning. A person who feels inner tension in their struggle to find meaning is indicative of a strong will to live.

b. Noögenik Neurosis

While existential frustration and noö-dynamics are part of the normal dynamics of life, noögenic neuroses are pathological forms or conditions that arise when such existential frustration remains unresolved for a prolonged period, causing the individual to lose the ability to function normally (Frankl, 2006). Noögenic neuroses do not stem from a conflict between instinctual drives (psychogenic), but rather from an individual's inability to resolve their existential crisis.

In the context of noögenetic neurosis, the concept of noö-dynamics can be understood as the driving force behind the pursuit of meaning. However, when an individual surrenders to inner emptiness, this force is extinguished. In this analysis, it is important to distinguish between a normal existential crisis (experienced by Furlong through the process of noö-dynamics) and a debilitating noögenetic neurosis, to understand that Furlong remains within the realm of a healthy and constructive search for meaning.

3. Will to Meaning

The central concept of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy is the will to meaning, which is the primary motivator in humans. This concept distinguishes Logotherapy from other ideas of psychotherapy. Unlike Freud's psychoanalysis, which asserts the "will to pleasure" or Adler's individual psychology, which emphasises "will to power", Frankl (2006) argues that humans are largely motivated by a desire to find meaning in their lives. This motivation is not a secondary rationalisation of innate desire but rather an independent and authentic desire unique to each individual. As

a result, achieving this will provide a sense of significance, whereas its blockage leads to a state of existential frustration.

Frankl (2006) emphasises that meaning is not an abstract concept but a concrete reality that is specific to each individual. It is the individual's responsibility to find and fulfil meaning, as this is the only way in which the will to meaning can be satisfied. Humans have the capacity to live and even die for the sake of their ideals and values (Frankl, 2006). This suggests that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world outside through interaction, action, and connection, rather than within man or his own psyche as a closed system.

To fulfil the will to meaning, Frankl (2006, p. 50) in Logotherapy proposes that individuals can discover meaning in life through three distinct avenues:

1. Creative values by creating a work or doing a deed. For example, through acts of helping others (Frankl, 2006).
2. Experiential values by experiencing something, such as experiencing kindness, love, relationships, beauty and encounters with other people (Frankl, 2006).
3. Attitudinal values by the attitude taken toward unavoidable suffering. For example, how a person responds to pain, guilt and loss (Frankl, 2006).

These three categories of values serve as practical pathways for individuals to realise their will to meaning in everyday situations (Frankl, 2006). Even in hopeless situations where individuals cannot change the circumstances, the will to

meaning compels the individual to transform their personal tragedy into a triumph through a change in attitude.

In situations of existential crises, the will to meaning functions as a dynamic response mechanism. It forces people to search for meaning amid suffering or meaninglessness (Frankl, 2006). Frankl's observations highlighted that, even in challenging conditions, the main determining factor influencing survival is frequently an individual's ability survive is often their commitment to their future objectives or purposes rather than their physical power. He stated, "those who know 'why' they live can bear with almost any 'how'" (Frankl, 2006, p. 37) building on Nietzsche's ideas but grounded in empirical suffering. This quality transforms passive endurance into active meaning-making. This positions the will to meaning not merely as an innate drive but as the psychological thing that enables self-transcendence in the face of adversity.

4. Self-Transcendence

Based to Frankl (2006), the pursuit of meaning is not an inside endeavor where one looks for it in his psyche or self but rather the quest for meaning is sought out in the external world. Frankl (2006) refers this element of life as self-transcendence, describing it as the ability to put oneself aside in order to serve a cause or to love others. Humans are fundamentally oriented towards a certain goal or being that is outside themselves (Frankl, 2006). Therefore, meaning in life is achieved through actions like completing a task, doing something or forming relationships.

It is essential for understanding self-fulfilment in a broader way. Frankl (2006), says that the aim of attaining self-actualization or happiness is meaningless and doomed to failure. He explains that self-actualization is just a consequence of self-transcendence. Self-fulfilment is attained effortlessly when one gives up his life for something beyond his life. Self-fulfilment is realized by moving out of the shell of the self and taking care of other's interest first over their own.

This concept fundamentally clarifies the nature of self-discovery and self-actualization. Frankl (2006) emphasises that self-actualization cannot be pursued as an end in itself. He explicitly argues that “self-actualization as such is not a reachable goal, simply because the harder one tries to reach it, the more one misses out on achieving it” (p. 133). Instead, Frankl claims that authentic self-discovery can only occur as a “side effect of self-transcendence” (2006). It means that human life is always aimed at something or someone other than oneself. Consequently, within the scope of this research, self-discovery by Bill Furlong should not be understood as a selfish process but as an inevitable consequence of choosing to forget himself to serve a higher cause.

This theory was empirically proven by Frankl (2006) among the prisoners of concentration camps during World War II. He found that there was an observable distinction between the two groups (Frankl, 2006). Those who had lost hope and believed there was “nothing more to expect from life” experienced a rapid deterioration of both body and mind and died soon after. Those who were able to live survived due to having what could be termed an “anchor of meaning” which had nothing to do with their present sufferings (Frankl, 2006). They found the

thought of future purposes in life, such as reuniting with family members or accomplishing a life's goal, as being a sufficient motivation for them to continue living. This suggests that the ability to overcome current sufferings by finding meaning in the future is crucial for psychological survival. This concept serves as the primary analytical lens for understanding Bill Furlong's final moral decision in the book.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter explains the methodology that will be used in this study. This section includes the research design, data source, data collection, and data analysis, which will provide readers with an understanding of how this research was conducted.

1. Research Design

The design of this research is literary criticism, because the researcher analyse and interpret a literary work, namely the novella Claire Keegan's *Small Things Like These* (2021) . This study will employ a psychological approach, focusing on the application of Viktor Frankl (2006) Logotherapy to examine the main character's process of self-discovery. Then the researcher analyse the concept of Logotherapy, such as existential vacuum, existential frustration, will to meaning, and self-transcendence. These concepts are employed as the theoretical framework to examine the main character's journey toward self-discovery, positioning it as the outcome of his search for meaning.

2. Data Source

The data source of this research is the novella *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan. This novella was first published in 2021 by Faber & Faber. It has 7 chapters and 70 pages in the form of e-book. The researcher will focus on passages that reflect the main character, Bill Furlong's, inner life, moral decisions, reflections, and behaviours that indicate searching for meaning.

3. Data Collection

While conducting research for data collection, close reading becomes the main method adopted by the researcher. In order to narrow down the focus of the research to be more specific, the selection of data, especially narrative, monologue, and dialogue, is done with regard to certain theoretical criteria, which come from Frankl's Logotherapy. These criteria include:

1. Indicators of the Existential Vacuum: Textual evidence that explicitly or implicitly demonstrates Bill's sense of meaninglessness, including symptoms of boredom, Sunday neurosis, conformism and totalitarianism, as described in Frankl's Logotherapy.
2. Indicators of the Existential Frustration: Textual evidence showing Bill's growing awareness of meaninglessness, inner conflict, questioning of his life situation, or tension arising from the obstruction of his will to meaning.
3. Indicators of the Will to Meaning: Textual evidence showing Bill's psychological shift or actions that align with Frankl's three pathways to meaning (Creative, Experiential, and Attitudinal values).
4. Indicators of Self-Transcendence: Textual evidence capturing climactic moments where Bill exhibits 'self-forgetfulness' by prioritising the safety of another person over his own ego and social conformity, which ultimately marks his self-discovery.

4. Data Analysis

After the data is collected based on the defined indicators, the data analysis is systematically analysed using the following analytical steps:

1. **Categorisation of Data:** The textual data obtained from the selected sources are classified into two major groups based on the research questions: texts demonstrating the existential vacuum (RQ1) and texts reflecting existential frustration, the will to meaning, and self-transcendence as stages of self-discovery (RQ2).
2. **The Core Analysis:** The classified data are carefully evaluated through the use of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy:
 - For answering RQ1: The researcher examines Bill Furlong's experiences with existential vacuum, such as boredom, Sunday neurosis, conformism, and vulnerability to external authority (totalitarianism), within the context of the social setting in Ireland in 1985.
 - To answer RQ2: The researcher traces Bill Furlong's process of self-discovery through three interconnected stages: existential frustration, the awakening of the will to meaning, and acts of self-transcendence. The analysis examines how the tension associated with his realisation of the meaninglessness of life prompts him to find meaning and take responsibility for his moral actions.
3. **Drawing Conclusion:** Finally, the researcher synthesises the interpretations to provide a comprehensive conclusion regarding the main character's psychological transformation, proving the applicability of Logotherapy to the text.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the research based on the data analysis. The discussion is divided into two main sections. The first section analyses the manifestations of existential vacuum experienced by the main character. The second section explores his journey toward self-discovery through existential frustration, the awakening of the will to meaning, leading to self-transcendence. Through these stages, the analysis demonstrates how Bill Furlong transforms his experience of meaninglessness into a meaningful moral commitment.

A. Analysis of the Main Character's Existential Vacuum

This section focuses on examining the main character's existential vacuum experienced as portrayed in the story. The goal of the analysis is to determine how the character's condition of meaninglessness is manifested through his daily experiences, thoughts, and internal conflicts. By examining selected textual evidence, this section analysis this evidence to reveal how the absence of meaning shapes the character's psychological state and becomes the starting point of his existential struggle.

This section examines how the existential vacuum is reflected in the main character's life through his patterns of thought, behaviour, and emotional response. The analysis focuses on how meaninglessness emerges gradually, beginning with repetitive routine, developing into boredom, and eventually leading to existential

questioning. Through selected textual evidence, this section demonstrates that the character's condition aligns with the concept of existential vacuum as proposed by Frankl.

1. Boredom

Existential vacuum, according to Frankl (2006), refers to a condition in which people feel empty because they have lost a sense of purpose and significance in their lives. This condition is generally characterised by boredom and a lack of inner fulfilment, especially when daily activities are no longer perceived as meaningful. In *Small Things Like These*, this condition can be seen in the early phase of Bill Furlong's life, particularly through his monotonous and repetitive routine as a coal and timber merchant. His existence focused on work and responsibilities without any meaningful engagement of the conscious mind. This is demonstrated in the following narration:

"Always it was the same, Furlong thought; always they carried mechanically on without pause... Even while he'd been creaming the butter and sugar, his mind was not so much upon the here and now... so much as on tomorrow and who owed what... and before tomorrow was coming to an end, he knew his mind would already be working in much the same way, yet again, over the day that was to follow." (p. 11).

The repetition described in this section illustrates a way of life that continues unceasingly without variation. The phrase "mechanically" implies that tasks are carried out as part of a routine, rather than as meaningful activities. In this context, Furlong's life illustrates a condition in which actions are performed out of necessity. As Frankl (2006) noted, this condition can be associated with existential emptiness, where an individual lives their life without actively engaging with meaning.

Furthermore, while he was at home with his family preparing for Christmas, Furlong is physically present but his mind was detached from the present moment “here and now”. This suggests that he is not existentially engaged with the meaning of the activity he is undertaking. This detachment suggests a lack of existential engagement, where his spirit was no longer involved in his movements. Therefore, this routine does not serve as a form of self-actualisation, but rather reflects the early symptoms of an existential vacuum.

This existential lethargy then developed into spiritual weariness or exhaustion due to a life cycle that felt too narrow. Furlong began to feel the burden of a pattern of existence spent merely moving from the workplace to bed, with no meaningful variation.

“Furlong admitted. ‘Where am I ever only away all day then home to the table and up to bed and gone again before they rise.’” (p. 16).

The data above describes an exhaustion that is not caused by physical burden, but by the repetition of a monotonous life pattern. His admission that he feels as though he merely comes and goes before his family rises represents a life that has lost its human essence and turned into a mere exhausting biological process. This can be understood as a manifestation of existential vacuum characterized by stagnation and repetitive routine, in which Furlong expresses feelings of being trapped in a cycle of stagnation. Routine takes presence at home, creating a sense of emptiness where personal meaning ought to reside.

2. Sunday Neurosis

Sense of existential emptiness becomes even more pronounced when the busy work routine pauses, especially on Sundays. When the weekly routine

demands subside, Furlong is faced with an inability to enjoy leisure time a phenomenon showing that his routine has served as a shield from his inner void.

*“What, now, was touching him on his Sunday evening? Again, he found himself thinking back to his time out at Wilson’s, and reasoned that **he’d just had to much time to dwell** and had turned sentimental...” (p. 14).*

*“A part of him **wished it was a Monday morning** that he could just put his head down and drive on out the roads and lose himself in the mechanics of the ordinary working week. Sundays could feel very threadbare, and raw. Why could he not relax and enjoy them like other men...?” (p. 49).*

“‘At least I’ve Sundays off.’ ‘You have them off but do you take them, is the question.’” (p. 16).

The cluster of data above highlights Furlong’s feelings on Sundays when he is not working. His inability to relax and his desire to “lose himself in the mechanics” once again are specific manifestations of *Sunday neurosis*. In line with Frankl’s ideas, this type of depression affects individuals who realize the emptiness of their lives when the weekly bustle comes to an end. The phrase “to much time to dwell” indicates his attempt to suppress his emotions, as his inner self has been overshadowed by mechanical routines and conformity. For Furlong, without the distraction of work, Sundays feel “threadbare and raw” because he is forced to confront the void within himself.

Moreover, Furlong’s incapacity to enjoy leisure time is validated by his wife, Eileen, who wonders whether he genuinely “takes” his time off. This demonstrates that, despite being physically free on Sundays, Furlong’s mind remains restless. His desire to return to Monday morning indicates that his work routine serves as a distraction from his inner emptiness rather than as a source of meaning. When this distraction is removed, the emptiness becomes tangible, driving him to seek solace in the “robot-like” mechanics of his job.

3. Conformism and Totalitarianism

This crisis of meaning ultimately leads to the eroded Furlong's sense of independence, transforming him from a self-sufficient individual into a passive figure simply conforming to social expectations. This loss of identity is clearly illustrated in his reflection as he stands outside the coal shed.

"...he had to ask himself if he had not turned into a man consigned to doorways, for did he not spend the best part of his life standing outside... He was a man who did what was expected, who went where he was told to go, without a word of his own." (p. 34).

The metaphor "consigned to doorways" represented the idea that Furlong self has been stripped away. The description that he "did what was expected" demonstrates that the lack of intrinsic meaning has robbed him of his independence. Furlong perceives himself simply one of the few people who has nothing more than an observer's role to play, always being pushed around from place to place by external factors. This internalized passivity reflects a state where the individual is no longer guided by an inner compass of meaning but is instead submerged in social expectations. Furlong's admission that he acts "without a word of his own" explains his growing susceptibility to external authority, as his inner void has left him without the strength to assert his own identity.

The result of this inability to act eventually becomes a moral failing for Furlong when he encounters the injustices of the monastery. Although he has a moral reaction, his hollow inner self prevents him from acting on it, and he instead adopts a compliant attitude to defend himself.

"The urge to say something about the girl grew but fell away, and in the end he simply wrote out the receipt she asked for, and handed it over... he was a man who knew his place, who knew the weight of the town and the power of the Church." (p. 25).

Furlong's inability to put his thoughts into words is the most severe outcome of the existential vacuum inside him, which is conformity. According to

Frankl (2006), if a person does not have a personal meaning in life, they are likely to copy the behaviour of other people or follow the demands of authority. It is evident from the fact that Furlong let his voice “fade away” and accepted his place in life.

By proposing the bill while influenced by “the power of the Church,” Furlong has shown his readiness to preserve his reputation and status rather than follow his conscience. This observation is consistent with the claim made by Frankl that people who live through an existential vacuum are susceptible to the pressures of a collective or authoritative power (totalitarianism), which makes sense since they no longer have any personal goal to help them act (2006, p. 95). The fact that Furlong remains silent in light of such injustice from the monastery becomes the last evidence of how much he has been affected by the existential vacuum.

Based on the analysis above, Bill Furlong’s existential vacuum is mirrored in his feelings of boredom, Sunday neurosis, and compliance to the social and institutional demands around him. Although he looks to be living a steady and respectable life, his daily routine lacks a deeper feeling of purpose and personal involvement. As a result, he gets disengaged from meaningful contemplation and unconsciously follows the values imposed by his surroundings. These conditions exemplify Frankl’s concept of existential vacuum, in which a lack of purpose gradually erodes a person’s sense of direction and real self.

B. Bill Furlong’s Journey of Self-Discovery

The process of self-discovery in Logotherapy does not occur instantly. According to Frankl (2006), individuals often begin this journey when they become

aware of the emptiness or dissatisfaction in their lives. This awareness may develop into existential frustration, which creates inner tension and motivates the search for meaning. In *Small Things Like These*, Bill Furlong's self-discovery unfolds through a gradual process involving existential frustration, the awakening of the will to meaning, and acts of self-transcendence that ultimately lead him to a more authentic understanding of himself.

1. Existential Frustration through Noö-Dynamics

The manifestations of existential vacuum discussed in the previous section do not represent the end of Furlong's psychological condition. As his awareness of the emptiness and passivity in his life gradually increases, he begins to experience existential frustration. According to Frankl (2006), existential frustration emerges when the individual's will to meaning is obstructed, creating inner tension and dissatisfaction with one's current existence. In Furlong's case, this frustration becomes the turning point that awakens his search for a more authentic and meaningful life.

The result of this process was the realisation of an underlying stagnation in his life. Even though he is financially secure and lives a happy family life, Furlong knows there is a disparity between what he has accomplished physically and personally.

"What was it all for? ... falling asleep before waking in the dark to meet a version of the same thing, yet again. Might things never change...?" (p. 19)

The data above brings out the stage at which Bill Furlong goes through the process of existential questioning. The question "What was it all for?" brings out the point that Furlong was starting to question the basic worth of all the efforts that

he had put into all his past work. In terms of Logotherapy, this is a situation whereby there is a clash between the will to meaning and the actual life, which is believed to be a life cycle that lasts forever. Furlong was able to observe that his daily activities were boring and devoid of any meaning, thus making him feel unsatisfied. Frankl (2006) asserts that the resultant uncertainty of the individual leads to existential anxiety, which causes a breakdown of the value orientation of the person.

“Lately, he had begun to wonder what mattered... He was touching forty but didn’t feel himself to be getting anywhere... and could not but sometimes wonder what the days were for.” (page 19).

The realisation brought forth thoughts on age and stagnation. The man had a very stable life and stable relationships within his family, but at the same time, he felt that he was “going nowhere.” This viewpoint is in line with what Frankl (2006) said regarding the need for an equilibrium between the person’s current state and future objectives. Furlong understands the inconsistency of being old while stagnating regarding meaning. He is not sure about where he will be going with his life and does not understand “what the days were for.” This indicates that the man is suffering from an existential frustration.

The final phase of Furlong’s internal transformation process involves the restoration of noö-dynamics. Frankl (2006) stresses that mental well-being does not require a state of equilibrium or the absence of tension, but rather a healthy tension between one's true self and one's ideal self. For Furlong, this phase involves a reassessment of social risks in order to preserve one’s psychological integrity.

“Furlong watched the girl being taken away and soon understood that this woman wanted him gone – but there urge to go was being replaced now by a type of contrariness to stay on, and to hold his ground... He sat on, encouraged by this queer, new power. He was, after all, a man amongst women here” (p. 41)

“When the consecration was over and it came time to go up and receive Communion, Furlong stayed contrarily where he was, with his back against the wall.” (p. 47)

The data indicates Furlong’s transition from a passive state to the activation of noö-dynamics, wherein the tension between fear and responsibility whilst at the convent granted him a “queer, new power”. This power provided the necessary motivation to reject conformity.

The exercise of free will, as demonstrated by Furlong's decision to remain in his seat during Holy Communion, is a clear manifestation of his moral autonomy. By declining to take part in a communal religious practice that disregarded injustice, Furlong symbolically distanced himself from a social structure that ignored the suffering of the church girls. This pivotal internal decision would subsequently inform the significant acts of self-transcendence he would undertake.

2. The Will to Meaning

a. Discovery through Experiential Values

According to Frankl (2006), experiential values involve finding meaning in what we receive from the world, such as through the appreciation of beauty, culture, or the experience of love toward another human being. For Furlong, this discovery follows a progressive trajectory from private attachment to a broader moral responsibility.

“Now, Furlong was disinclined to dwell on the past; his attention was fixed on providing for his girls, who were black-haired like Eileen and fairy complexioned. Already, they were showing promise in the schools.” (p. 5)

*“Sometimes Furlong, seeing the girls going through the small things which needed to be done – genuflecting in the chapel or thanking a shop-keeper for the change - felt a **deep, private joy** that these children were his own.” (p. 5-6)*

The data above demonstrates Furlong's attachment to his children. Seeing his children grow up well is a source of pride and inner happiness for him. This illustrates how Furlong's moral consciousness began to develop. In Logotherapy, love is regarded as the best way to truly understand another human being (2006). This love for his children then enabled Furlong to understand the value of life for others outside his family circle, which would later become one of his motivations for doing good.

However, this joy was not merely a feeling of happiness. It rapidly developed into a sense of vulnerability.

"He imagined his girls getting big and growing up, going out into that world of men. Already he'd seen men's eyes following his girls." (p. 7)

As Furlong "imagined" the uncertain future of his daughters in a harsh "world of men," his quiet happiness is replaced by existential anxiety. This is significant since it represents the point when he finally begins to wake up from a world that had become too predictable and mechanical. He realizes just how vulnerable the individuals he cares about are, and it creates a healthy conflict that lies at the heart of his being. Using the notion put forth by Frankl that it is possible for humans to create meaning in their own lives, the responsibility of being a father, which Furlong begins to feel following a phase of introspection, creates constant internal conflict.

"'I'd no call to say that to you, Bill,' Eileen cooled. 'But if we just mind what we have here and stay on the right side of people and soldier on, none of ours will ever have to endure the likes of what them girls go through. Those were put in there because they hadn't a soul in this world to care for them. All their people did was leave them wild and then, when they got into trouble, they turned their backs. It's only people with no children that can afford to be careless.

'But what if it was one of ours?' Furlong said." (p. 27)

This vulnerability then extends into empathy for others. By posing the question, “But what if it was one of ours?”, Furlong effectively conveys the emotions he feels for his own daughters, projecting them onto the girl in the convent. He now views injustice not as an external reality, but as a possibility that could befall his own family. By placing his own children in the position of the victim, Furlong broke through his existential void and recognised the girl’s humanity as equal to that of his own daughters.

Furthermore, Furlong’s realisation was reinforced by a reflection on his past life. He came to understand that his current comfortable life was inseparable from the kindness of others in the past.

“Isn't it a good job Mrs Wilson didn't share your ideas?' ... 'Where would my mother have gone? Where would I be now?'" (p. 27)

*“And if this was truth, hadn't it been an **act of daily grace**, on Ned's part... Why were the things that were closest so often the hardest to see?" (p. 59)*

The data above demonstrate that Furlong’s process of enlightenment was also reinforced by reflections on his own origins. He came to understand that his current comfortable lifestyle was not solely the result of his own hard work, but also a gift stemming from the “acts of daily grace” of others, such as Ned and Mrs. Wilson. This realisation introduced the concept of responsibility, which Frankl (2006) regarded as the essence of human existence. Within the framework of Logotherapy, such an experience provides the foundation for the emergence of a desire to seek meaning. Furlong recognised that, given the protection and kindness he had received in the past, he was now in a position to assist the girl at the convent. His past experiences provided him with a solid foundation for demonstrating

empathy towards others. His decision to find meaning was his way of continuing the kindness he had received long ago.

b. The Emergence of Will to Meaning

Frankl (2006) defines the conscience as the “organ of meaning” of the human soul, a capacity that enables individuals to detect the unique meaning hidden within every situation. For Furlong, the activation of this organ marks a significant shift away from indifference, and the beginning of an evaluation of his moral stance amidst a conformist society. This transition is not straightforward, and Furlong experiences an inner conflict, torn between following his old habit of remaining silent and the increasingly urgent demands of his conscience.

“But as soon as the thought came to him, he knew the thought itself was privileged and wondered why he hadn’t given the sweets and other things he’d been gifted at some of the houses to the less well-off he had met in others.” (p. 54)

“What most tormented him was not so much how she’d been left in the coal shed or the stance of the Mother Superior, the worst was how the girl had been handled while he was present and how he’d allowed that and had not asked about her baby the one thing she had asked him to do and how he had taken the money and left her there at the table with nothing before her and the breast milk leaking under the little cardigan and staining her blouse, and how he’d gone on, like a hypocrite, to Mass.” (p. 52)

The data illustrates a growing sense of moral awareness, beginning with Furlong’s critical reflection on his socio-economic “privileged”. By questioning why he did not share the items given to him by others with those less well-off, Furlong signalled that his conscience was beginning to detect the wider injustices around him. This awareness reached its peak when he reflected on his failure to act in defence of Sarah and his decision to accept a token of goodwill from the convent. Furthermore, his admission of being a “hypocrite” marked an awareness of the discrepancy between the values he held and his moral actions in the real world.

In accordance with Frankl’s framework (2006), this sense of guilt should not be considered a pathological condition. Rather, it is a corrective mechanism

indicating that Furlong's will to find meaning has been reawakened. This painful honesty transforms past failures into an ethical obligation in the present. Furlong no longer seeks escape in routine; instead, he uses this moral tension as the energy to break free from the blind obedience he previously lived by and prepares to choose a more authentic path in life.

3. Self-Transcendence: Finding Meaning through Others

Frankl (2006) states that the true essence of human existence lies in self-transcendence, that is, the individual's ability to go beyond their own self-interest to serve a higher purpose or to love others. The meaning of life is not found within an isolated inner world, but in the external world through concrete action (doing a deed). For Furlong, this transcendence is realised when he finally disregards the social risks he had previously adhered to in order to save Sarah.

a. The Act of Self-Transcendence

The culmination of Furlong's transformation was his decision to return to the monastery and bring Sarah out. This action was clear evidence that he had transcended the instinct for self-preservation in the name of moral responsibility.

"...he slid the bolt across and called her name and gave his own... everything was just as he'd feared although the girl, this time, took his coat and seemed gladly to lean on him as he led her out. 'You'll come home with me now, Sarah.'" (p. 62)

"...he felt his self-preservation and courage battling against each other... Several times, already, his mind had gone on ahead, and met him there, and had concluded that the priest's already knew." (p. 63)

"...Furlong met people he had known and dealt with for the greater part of his life... Not one person they met addressed Sarah or asked where he was taking her. Feeling little or no obligation to say very much or to explain, Furlong... carried on." (p. 63)

The data above illustrates a highly physical moment of self-transcendence. Furlong's act of giving his jacket to Sarah in the midst of a snowstorm symbolises

the sacrifice of personal comfort for the sake of another's safety. In accordance with Frankl's framework (2006), self-transcendence occurs when an individual shifts their focus from their own circumstances to the well-being of others.

The inner struggle between "self-preservation" and "courage" demonstrates that Furlong's action was not an impulsive decision, but a difficult, conscious choice. He was fully aware that "the priests already knew" and that the people around him chose to avoid him or act awkwardly. By continuing on his way without feeling the need to explain or defend himself to those he met, Furlong proved that he had let go of his dependence on social conformity. He had shifted from being a passive bystander to an active moral agent, whose actions were driven entirely by compassion, not by a desire for public acceptance.

b. Self-Discovery as a Consequence of Self-Transcendence

Frankl (2006) emphasised that happiness cannot be pursued directly. Instead, it emerges as a by-product of finding meaning. As Furlong's perspective shifted from self-preservation to a dedication to others, he found himself experiencing a profound sense of fulfilment, one that was previously uncharted.

"...was there any point in being alive without helping one another? Was it possible to... an entire life, without once being brave enough to go against what was there and yet call yourself a Christian, and face yourself in the mirror?" (p. 64)

"How light and tall he almost felt... some fresh, new, unrecognisable joy in his heart... never once in his whole and unremarkable life had he known a happiness akin to this..." (p. 64)

"Already he could feel a world of trouble waiting for him... but the worst that could have happened was also already behind him: the thing not done, which he would have had to live with for the rest of his life." (p. 65)

Furlong's reflection on living without mutual support constitutes an intellectual affirmation of his discovery of meaning. His rhetorical question

regarding the courage to “face the mirror” indicates that moral integrity is now far more valuable to him than mere social security. This discovery of meaning brings an instant psychological effect in the form of a previously unrecognised joy. This phenomenon validates the Logotherapy theory that existential fulfilment arises precisely when a person forgets themselves for the sake of others.

The statement that “the thing not done” is the worst thing that can happen demonstrates that Furlong has fully recovered from his existential vacuum. He recognises that future suffering is nothing compared to the internal turmoil of ignoring his conscience. Despite a “world full of problems”, he is driven by a belief in the rightness of his actions. By bringing Sarah home, Furlong achieves self-transcendence and rediscovers his full humanity. The act of rescuing Sarah shows that Furlong’s self-understanding comes from caring for others rather than thinking deeply about himself. This fits with Logotherapy, which says that finding meaning comes from acting morally.

The analysis shows that Bill Furlong’s self-discovery is a gradual existential process. His dissatisfaction with a passive and conformist way of life leads to existential discomfort, causing an inner conflict that drives him to seek purpose. Through experienced values and conscience awakening, his drive to meaning gets renewed, guiding him toward deeper moral awareness. This process eventually leads to self-transcendence, in which Furlong decides to act in the best way for another person despite critical personal and social danger. As a result, his self-discovery occurs not through self-reflection alone, but through responsible action oriented toward others, in line with Frankl’s Logotherapy.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This chapter presents conclusion of this study and suggestions for further research. The analysis of how the main character's self-discovery influences his lifestyle and his strivings for a goal as reflected in the *Small Things Like These* leads to the conclusion. The researcher also includes suggestions for further researches.

A. Conclusion

Based on the analysis presented in previous chapter, this researcher arrives at two main conclusions regarding Bill Furlong's existential condition and transformation in Claire Keegan's *Small Things Like These*. The findings reveal that Furlong initially experienced a state of existential vacuum characterized by a mechanical routine, emotional detachment, and lack of meaningful involvement with his surroundings. His life was marked not by material hardship but by an absence of inner purpose, resulting in a condition in which he functioned within social expectations without critically reflecting on his moral attitude. This condition was manifested through boredom, Sunday neurosis, and conformity to social and institutional expectations.

This study found that Furlong's process of meaning-making developed progressively through several stages. Following his experience of existential vacuum, he began to experience existential frustration, marked by growing dissatisfaction with the repetitive nature of his life and persistent questioning of its meaning. This inner tension gradually restored his noö-dynamics and awakened his

will to meaning. The process was further strengthened through experiential values, particularly his emotional attachment to his family, empathy toward Sarah, and reflections on the kindness he had received from others. These experiences awakened his conscience and encouraged him to reassess his previous moral passivity. This process ultimately leads to self-transcendence, in which Furlong chose moral responsibility over social conformity despite the personal risks involved.

As a result, this study concludes that Furlong's self-discovery emerges through a process that begins with existential frustration, develops through the awakening of the will to meaning, and culminates in self-transcendence. In line with Frankl's Logotherapy, the findings indicate that existential emptiness is not a fixed condition, but one that can be transformed through responsible action directed toward others.

B. Suggestion

The analysis of *Small Things Like These* provides various avenues for future inquiry and thought. Although the researcher only examines the main character's self-discovery through Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, future researchers are recommended to investigate this book using New Historicism to explore how the fictional narrative interacts with and reconstructs the real-world historical trauma. In relation to current conversations about mental health and the issue of existential vacuum, in which people sense burnout and a lack of purpose, this study argues that recovering the will to meaning is critically important. Furthermore, future researchers may explore other concepts within Frankl's Logotherapy that were not

examined in this study, such as attitudinal values, creative values, or the role of suffering in the search for meaning.

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