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Faculty of Philosophy

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Laura Salo

Parental Bereavement in M. L. Stedman's *The Light Between Oceans*

Dimensions of Grief and Meaning Reconstruction

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Discipline:	English Studies
Author:	Laura Salo
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ABSTRACT

Lapsen kuolema on aina vanhemmille traumaattinen kokemus, mikä mullistaa heidän maailmankuvansa ja pakottaa heidät kohtaamaan muuttuneen arjen. Yksi surutyön keskeisistä haasteista on se, miten surijat rakentavat elämäänsä merkityksiä uudelleen. Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa käsiteltiin lapsen menettämistä M. L. Stedmanin romaanissa *The Light Between Oceans* kolmen päähenkilön, Isabel ja Tom Sherbournen sekä Hannah Roennfeldtin, näkökulmasta. Tutkielmassa hyödynnettiin kahta teoriaa, joista toinen keskittyi surukuvausten (engl. grief accounts) kuuteen ulottuvuuteen, ja toinen merkitysten uudelleenrakentamiseen. Merkityksiä rakennetaan pääasiallisesti kolmen konseptin kautta: miten kuolemaa käsitellään ja millaisia syitä sille pystytään löytämään, millaisia hyötyjä menetyksestä voi olla surijan omassa elämässä tai maailmankuvassa, ja miten surija rakentaa oman identiteettinsä ja sosiaalisen roolinsa uudelleen.

Surukuvausten ulottuvuudet auttoivat tunnistamaan romaanissa surun ja sen käsittelyn erityispiirteitä, joita verrattiin sen jälkeen merkitysten uudelleenrakentamisen konsepteihin. Henkilöiden kannalta positiivisiksi keinoiksi rakentaa merkityksiä uudelleen nousivat Jumalaan tai kohtaloon uskomisen, arkiaskareisiin uppoaminen, uusi mahdollisuus vanhemmuuteen, ja hyötyjen löytäminen menetyksestä huolimatta. Negatiivisia keinoja olivat taas kuoleman tai menetyksen takana olevien syiden ymmärtäminen syyllistämisen kautta, ja vaikeudet ilmaista omaa surua ja tulla ymmärretyksi siinä. Nämä vaikuttivat osaltaan siihen, ettei menetyksestä löydetty mitään rakentavaa tai hyvää asiaa oman itsen kannalta.

KEYWORDS: grief, literature, parental bereavement, meaning reconstruction, grief accounts

1 INTRODUCTION

Grief, noun.

1. Hardship, suffering; a kind, or cause, of hardship or suffering. [...]

7. Mental pain, distress, or sorrow. In mod. use in a more limited sense: deep or violent sorrow, caused by loss or trouble; a keen or bitter feeling of regret for something lost, remorse for something done, or sorrow for mishap to oneself or others. (OED 2017)

It is nearly impossible to avoid loss or grief during our lifetime. Grieving may be caused by the loss of a parent, a partner, a sibling, a child, other relatives or family members, and even close friends or pets. Grieving is a personal process, which indicates that we all grieve differently. This means that it is challenging or impossible to say what a ‘proper’ way of grieving that would apply to all humans, is. However, this view has not always been the prominent one in grief theories. Attitudes towards grieving and analysing it may have changed over time, but scholars seem to be able to agree on one thing: grieving is a “natural human reaction, since it is a universal feature of human existence irrespective of culture, although the form and intensity its expression takes varies considerably” (Archer 1998: 8). There are cultural differences in how people deal with grief, but nevertheless, it is an emotion acknowledged universally.

Grief studies usually distinguish between the terms ‘grief’ and ‘bereavement’, as well as a third one, ‘mourning’. Bereavement is usually defined as the situation in which one has lost a loved one. Grieving is the personal, intimate reaction to this loss, and mourning has more to do with how the bereaved displays their grief in a societal context. (Hibberd 2013: 671) Mourning brings us to another important aspect of grief: although it is a personal process and an individual reaction, grieving does not happen in isolation. It happens within a social context and it is often defined by the societal and cultural norms around us. Religious beliefs can also affect grieving since they usually also set expectations of ‘proper’ behaviour and rites in relation to (dealing with) death.

There is some debate on the idea of what grief essentially is. Is it an emotion, or rather a process? Peter Goldie (2011) develops the idea of grief as a process instead of an emotion from a philosophical point of view. To him, grieving is a process because it

consists of several parts – emotions, events and actions – that are best recognized as parts of the same entity when they are put together into a narrative form (Goldie 2011: 124). These individual parts, if separated from one another, cannot really define the process they describe. They need to be looked at and interpreted as an entity in order to define grieving (Goldie 2011: 124). This means that grief is not just one clear emotion, but rather a mixture of many. This does not exclude the fact that we perceive grief as grief because of certain characteristic features. All of these features, however, are not essential to our concept of grief, and as Goldie acknowledges, these features are also shaped by the experiences of an individual, and the culture they live in (Goldie 2011: 125–126).

Grief as a theme in literature goes back a long time. Writings dating back as far as the Old Testament and Greek mythologies deal with stories that describe what it is like to mourn, to lose someone close to us. One of the core elements in our desire to read – and write – is shared experiences, so it is no wonder that authors have dealt with this theme so frequently. Many easily consider poetry to be the best medium for describing themes of loss and grief, as examples of war-time poetry or the likes of Tennyson and Wordsworth spring to mind. Plays and prose also play a significant role in fictitious descriptions of loss, although they are easily cast aside by examples in poetry.

Narratives are an essential tool for sharing descriptions of grieving (Goldie 2011: 127). They are concerned with particular events and characters, yet they describe a larger set of events happening after one another, so that the idea of coherence in the two relies on how these events hold together in some way. Narratives take into account their characters' as well as their narrators' viewpoints. (Goldie 2011: 127–128) This way, narratives are able to reveal attitudes on both the internal and external level. Also, if grief is thought of as a process that is made up of different parts, narratives collect these parts together, rearranging them in an order that becomes a story of grieving.

The final point to consider is the importance of narratives of a grieving. Why is this theme so recurrent in literature? Why should we want to write about real or fictive experiences of grief, and why is there always an audience to this kind of literature? Our

constructions of selves as well as the world around us is heavily based on narratives: they help us to put things in order. They also give a voice, a platform to present things that may otherwise be inexplicable and ineffable. Grieving is one such topic. (Goldie 2011: 131) Narratives of grieving, or grief accounts, to borrow the term from Michael R. Dennis (2008), describe one experience or experiences of characters of what it is like to grieve. Writers can portray their bereaved characters as they seek and possibly achieve solace through certain activities, such as “adoption of tolerable perspectives; construction of meaning; verification of details, relationships, and losses; expression of emotions; and assumption of novel identities and social arrangements” (Dennis 2008: 828). We may not be able to draw clear-cut patterns that can link all fictive or non-fictive accounts, but we may still see patterns inside them, depicting how a specific character comes to experience, and possibly survive, grief. These experiences may give hope and support to others in grieving, and they may also reveal societal and cultural expectations on grief.

In M. L. Stedman’s novel *The Light Between Oceans* (2012), the central theme of grieving involves parental bereavement. The story describes the fates of two families, the Sherbournes (Isabel and Tom) and the Roennfeldts (Hannah), who tragically lose their children. Isabel and Tom suffer from miscarriages and a stillbirth, and Hannah loses her husband and child to the sea as they try to escape an angry mob. Both families try and survive the losses in their own way: Isabel and Tom take a child they find abandoned on an astray dinghy as their own, and Hannah never ceases to look for her missing husband and child in the hopes that they may have miraculously survived. *The Light Between Oceans* deals not only with parental bereavement, but more specifically disenfranchised loss, i.e. grieving that is not acknowledged by society. This topic will be discussed more in sub-chapter 1.3.

1.1 Aim and Material of Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to study the different dimensions of grief accounts and key aspects of meaning reconstruction as they are portrayed in *The Light Between Oceans*. I

am interested in seeing how three characters in the novel, Isabel and Tom Sherbourne, and Hannah Roennfeldt, try to make sense of their lives after experiencing a loss and how this is – if it is – accomplished. Keeping in mind Michael R. Dennis's definition of grief accounts as well as bereavement theories on meaning reconstruction after loss, my research questions are as follows:

1. How are the dimensions of grief accounts visible in *The Light Between Oceans* (hereafter *TLBO* in references)?
2. How is meaning reconstruction conveyed through the help of the examples from dimensions of grief accounts?
3. How do Isabel, Tom, and Hannah try to reconstruct meaning after loss, and is this achieved?

My starting point is that by using the help of dimensions of grief accounts, meaning reconstruction in *The Light Between Oceans* can be tracked on a specific level. Dimensions of grief accounts can help reveal important patterns as well as common struggles for the characters as they try to survive and make sense of their loss.

I have chosen this novel as my primary material as the central themes in the story are grief, survival and guilt. The reason for choosing bereavement theories as the theoretical framework is that I am specifically interested in the processes of meaning reconstruction, and how these may help in dealing with grief. As child loss is a traumatic experience, trauma theories would have been another possibility for analysing this novel. However, I am not as much interested in looking at the traumatic nature of loss, rather the ways of dealing with it. I am incorporating the idea of grief narratives into my analysis because they correspond to the key aspects of meaning reconstruction. I believe that this is a combination that allows me to look at grieving in a work of fiction a little more thoroughly from my chosen point of view.

I will use the six dimensions of grief accounts (the restorative, affirmative, evaluative, interpretative, transformative and affective) as suggested by Michael R. Dennis, to identify passages and examples in *The Light Between Oceans* which are related to grief and bereavement. These examples are interpreted through the dimensions as well as the key aspects of meaning reconstruction: making sense after the loss, benefit finding after the loss, and identity change. As many of the dimensions of grief accounts are

overlapping, some events are relevant to not just one but a few of the dimensions at the same time. This also means that it would be somewhat challenging to analyse a passage in isolation, from the point of view of one dimension only: sometimes it is necessary to include a discussion relative to another dimension of the novel, essential to the main dimension in question.

1.2 *The Light Between Oceans*

The Light Between Oceans was published in 2012. It is the debut novel of Australian writer M. L. Stedman. Set mainly in the 1920s, the novel is centred around the fates of three people – Isabel and Tom Sherbourne, and Hannah Roennfeldt – who have lost their children. Their stories become intertwined when it is revealed that Tom and Isabel, who rescued a baby girl from an astray dinghy, have actually taken Hannah's daughter as their own. After this, the novel is a story of trying to do the right thing, even if it means bringing pain to the ones you love the most.

Tom Sherbourne arrives to Point Partageuse as a former soldier, wishing to leave behind the horrors of war and his own estranged youth. He takes up the position of a lighthouse keeper at Janus Rock, a small island off the coast of Australia. Before making his way to his new home, he meets Isabel Greysmark in Partageuse, a lively young woman whose character is in great contrast to his solemn nature. Isabel fills his thoughts, and the two begin a friendship through an exchange of letters. Gradually, they fall in love, and suddenly Tom finds that he is not alone on the island anymore, but sharing his life with a wife who soon begins to expect their first child.

The pregnancy ends in a miscarriage, leaving both Isabel and Tom heartbroken. When this is followed by another miscarriage and a traumatic stillbirth, the Sherbournes are left in a world where they have had to abandon their hopes of starting a family together. Two weeks after the stillbirth, they find an astray dinghy on the beach of Janus Rock. In the dinghy, they find the body of an unknown man, and a small baby girl, who had miraculously survived the current. Still recovering from her stillbirth, Isabel

immediately becomes fond of the child and wants to keep her. She feels that this baby is a gift from God as she arrived into their lives so soon after their previous loss. Tom is battling with his conscience, wanting to report the finding of the body and the baby, but Isabel's happiness stops him. The event goes unreported, and soon the baby starts growing on both Isabel and Tom. They decide to call her Lucy, and begin their lives as awe-struck parents.

When Tom and Isabel travel back to Partageuse for Lucy's christening, they come across a memorial set up for a missing husband and child. A grieving woman, Hannah Roennfeldt, has lost her husband Frank and daughter Grace to the sea, and to their horror the Sherbournes realise that Lucy is in fact Hannah's missing daughter. The finding makes Tom's battle with his conscience even more intense, but once again Isabel convinces him to drop his worries. She insists that they cannot do anything about keeping Lucy anymore; they have made their decision and it is too late to go back. However, to ease his mind Tom sends an anonymous letter to Hannah, telling her that her husband has died but her daughter still lives.

While in Janus Rock, the Sherbournes are able to continue their lives as usual. When they return to Partageuse, they accidentally meet Hannah. Tom is haunted by her appearance, seeing how much she suffers from her losses, but also because it is revealed that he in fact knows Hannah. He has saved her from an unfortunate encounter with a drunken man while on his way back to Australia. Now that the suffering has a familiar face, his guilt becomes too great for him to handle. He writes another letter to Hannah, this time enclosing a silver rattle that they found in the dinghy with Lucy, hoping it would bring her comfort. When Hannah receives the rattle, her father publishes a picture of it in the newspaper, hoping that this would give them more information about Grace's whereabouts. Bluey, Tom's friend, recognises the rattle from the picture and shares his findings with his mother. She forces him to speak to the police, which in turn leads them to Janus Rock.

The Sherbournes are brought to Partageuse and Lucy/Grace is returned to her birthmother. Tom, knowing how much he has hurt Isabel with his actions, tells her that

she should not tell the police about her share in the events. He will take the blame for deciding to keep Lucy and not reporting the finding of her and Frank's body. This does not offer Isabel any solace – instead, she wants to hurt Tom as much as she can, and she realises that she can do so by refusing to speak for him while the police try to question her. The case around Tom becomes more serious as he is blamed for killing Frank in order to keep Lucy/Grace. He is devastated, but tries to remain understanding towards Isabel. His loyalty to her does not waver, even though she wants nothing but pain to him. Blaming Tom keeps Isabel focused, because it means that she does not have to acknowledge any of the responsibility she, too, had in the events.

While the Sherbournes struggle with yet another loss, Hannah struggles to form a connection with Grace. The child is confused about her new surroundings, and wishes to be with the people she has thought of as her parents. She regresses, and because of this Hannah's sister decides to take her to see Isabel behind Hannah's back. When Hannah finds out about this, she is furious at her sister, swearing that Grace will never see Isabel again. Unfortunately, Grace hears this argument and decides to run away to find her parents. As she goes missing, Hannah's world collapses again. She is afraid that her problems with Grace are a sign from God that she is unfit to be a mother, and she promises that if Grace is found alive and well, she will return her to Isabel. As this wish is granted and Grace is brought back to her, she reaches out to Isabel, promising her that she will get Lucy/Grace if she speaks against Tom in court.

After her encounter with Hannah, Isabel is torn between the two loves of her life: Tom, whom she still feels has betrayed her, and Lucy, whom she has loved with a fierceness of a mother who has been granted another chance at parenthood. Isabel has had doubts about her revenge before, but the thought gains more power now. She is faced with two options: losing Tom, or losing Lucy. In the end, she is torn by her shame and grief and heads to the police station to confess her part in the events. When the truth is revealed and Isabel can no longer hold on to the grudge against Tom, her mind collapses and she is confined to a nursing home. Tom is sentenced to serve three months in prison, and once he is released, he guides his energy towards helping Isabel get better. Hannah finds it in herself to forgive them for what they have done to her and Grace, and as she finally

finds a way of reconnecting with her daughter, she sets out to rebuild their lives together.

As mentioned earlier in this Introduction, *The Light Between Oceans* is a story of grief, survival and guilt. The main three characters, Tom, Isabel and Hannah, have all lost something meaningful and they try to make sense of their lives after the loss. The biggest cause for grief in this book is the loss of a child. Tom and Isabel lose three of their babies and eventually Lucy; Hannah loses Grace. There are also other characters in the book who have lost children, for example Isabel's parents have lost their two sons in the war. Parental bereavement is at the core of the book, as it affects the characters' choices and actions throughout the novel.

There seems to be very few if any previous studies on this novel as it has not attracted academic interest: only one study concentrates on the aspect of ethics in *The Light Between Oceans*. Otherwise, the articles seem to be book reviews or film reviews (the novel was adapted into film in 2016, starring Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander), creating a lack in the field of previous studies to use as a starting point.

1.3 Background to Bereavement Theory

Criticism of previous grief studies is driven by a determined discarding of a certain set of assumptions. These assumptions, or myths as some scholars call them (for example, see Archer 1998), derive from the theories of Freud and have been further asserted by later scholars. Popular myths among previous grief studies include the beliefs that depression and distress are mandatory symptoms of grief, and that the absence of these indicate pathological or absent grieving. It has also been believed that grieving is a process which proceeds in stages or phases. (Archer 1998: 22) This view relied heavily on Freud's concept of melancholia and mourning, and was further emphasized by the theories of scholars such as John Bowlby (1980) and Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1970). Freud (243, 244) is also largely responsible for the views that successful grieving demands the 'letting go' of the deceased, cutting bonds completely, and that failure to

show specific symptoms of grief would indicate pathological grieving. All these views have been challenged during the past twenty years of research into bereavement and grieving, and this sub-chapter intends to go through some of the central developments, as well as the central ideas behind them.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's theory of the five stages of grief (1970) remained to be one of the most popular bereavement theories that shaped the way people looked at grieving. The theory is based on her studies of terminally ill patients, and how they react towards their impending death. The five stages, denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, follow one another and if the patient follows through each phase accordingly, they will eventually come to accept their death. Kübler-Ross has been criticised by other scholars for two main things: one, that her survey data consisted of patients who are dying and two, that she relies too much on the nature of grief as phased (Bonanno 2009; Hall 2014). As she examined people who are facing death in near future, their reactions to grief must be a little different than of those who deal with other kinds of losses (Bonanno 2009: 21). Kübler-Ross nearly completely ignores the patients' loved ones and how they react to the realisation of impending death. She also never considers the possibility that not all ill go through the stages in the same order, and that sometimes we go back and forth between them.

As criticism of theories concentrating on the phases or stages of grief became more visible, another approach to bereavement started to gain voice. One such theory was the trajectories of adjustment to grief by George Bonanno (2009). Central to this is the idea of resilience. Resilience simply refers to the human ability of coping with traumatic events and adjusting one's life around them. (Bonanno 2009) Resilient people have a number of ways at hand which help them cope better with loss. They have an ability to display both negative and positive emotions, a flexibility in behavioural patterns, they may find self-serving biases useful, and they have a less likely tendency to use avoidance or distraction as a means of coping. (Bonanno 2009) These characteristics are natural to all of us, but in relation to resilience, most people manage to use these as means of dealing with grief when they face losses in their lives.

Flexibility in behaviour refers to the ability of adapting yourself to different situations. It is common that this kind of behaviour in grieving is even referred to as inappropriate, as it usually does not follow the norms of behaviour for the bereaved to start coping with loss quickly, but this ability functions in order to help the bereaved to cope with the situation. It also reflects how resilient people manage to express emotion, both negative and positive. Sadness is probably the most prominent emotion among bereaved. It is through sadness that we may begin to deal with our grief (Bonanno 2009: 31). It may be that at times sadness feels as if it were never-ending, but as difficult as it may feel to move beyond sadness at times, resilient people do not remain preoccupied with feeling sad. It is a part of their grief but it does not become overwhelming as also other emotions intervene, such as happiness. Smiling genuinely in times of deep grief is not an unnatural reaction, but rather an implication that the bereaved is coping. (Bonanno 2009: 36–37) It is this mixture of emotions that helps the bereaved cope with their loss and slowly rebuild their daily lives back to what could be considered normal.

Self-serving biases have been considered nothing but harmful in past research, but as Bonanno points out, they can prove valuable if the bereaved can use them to strengthen their own coping. A self-serving bias may be as simple as trying to see the best in things, no matter how awful they are. Studies have shown that some bereaved people have managed even to feel relief after their loved one's death, believing it to be the best for both the deceased and themselves, for example by granting an end to a prolonged, painful existence. (Bonanno 2009: 80–81) This is also important when considering meaning reconstruction in grief, as it reflects benefit finding after loss (see 2.2).

An important aspect of resilience is that grief comes and goes in waves. This is also what makes grieving tolerable; the knowledge that no emotion or emotional reaction is meant to be permanent. The feelings pass and change into something else instead of being relentless (Bonanno 2009: 40). The bereaved may experience both very good and very bad days, and it is only a natural reaction. Other theories also emphasize this idea of oscillation in grief, rather than being a process with strict stages. One example is the dual process model of grief by Stroebe and Schut (1999). They claim that grief is a “process of oscillation between two contrasting modes of functioning” (Stroebe & Schut

1999, quoted in Hall 2014: 9). The focus of coping changes between these two modes, from dealing with the emotions linked to loss, and then to adjusting to the loss externally (for example, the changed role in life) (Hall 2014: 9). Grieving may differ from one moment to another, and from one bereaved person to another.

According to Hall (2014), Freud thought that holding on to the deceased person, through memories, possessions, or even pretending they were still around for conversations and giving advice, was a harmful thing to do as it would hinder the healing process of the bereaved. However, later research has shown that many bereaved people actually experience a strong, perceptible connection with their deceased loved ones, and that such experiences can be comforting. This connection can be something like an enduring bond, as if the person were still alive and communicating from an alternative reality. Bereavement theory calls this phenomenon continuing bonds, and its positive effects have been taken into account more thoroughly.

Positive memories of the lost loved one help us maintain a positive continuous bonding. Bereaved people may idealize the mental image of the deceased, but it also helps them to cope with the loss. Grieving is a constant reminder that they have lost this person and what they meant while they were still alive (Bonanno 2009: 69). It is the memories that matter, no matter how accurate or truthful they are. What the bereaved decides to do with them is what determines how fruitful these memories may be in regards to dealing with loss (Bonanno 2009: 71). The memories may reinforce our positive image of the dead, bringing us feelings of joy and even comfort among our grief. It is also possible that the memories work in an opposite way, reinforcing our fears.

There are several factors which may cause the grief to become complicated. It is possible that the grief becomes disenfranchised, e.g. not recognized, and therefore the bereaved may experience difficulties in coping with the loss. It is normal that grief can be intense, but if it continues to be so for a long time, it can turn into complicated or prolonged grief.

Disenfranchised grief refers to the kind of grief that cannot, for one reason or another, be publicly mourned or openly acknowledged (Hall 2014: 9). It may have something to do with how the death has occurred (illnesses such as AIDS), the relationship between the dead and the bereaved (a mistress), and the age of the bereaved (children) (Hall 2014: 9). This is important in relation to the norms of society, how the bereaved are supposed to behave and for whom they are allowed to grieve. Disenfranchised grief also includes parents who have suffered the loss of their child, through miscarriages, stillbirths, abortions or SIDS (the sudden infant death syndrome). It is easily thought that since they have only known the child very briefly, or not at all, the death should not be grieved as openly as the death of a child who has lived longer. This results in a lack of social support for the parents that would normally be available, making it more difficult to deal with the death of the child.

When a person is suffering from prolonged grief, they can become too preoccupied with yearning the lost loved one. The good memories may be blocked from them because of the intensity of the grief (Bonanno 2009: 73). Their memories may become distorted in time, and instead of focusing on positive traits and events, they may pick up more negative factors. This in turn complicates how they can use continuous bonding; instead of getting something positive out of it, it may only further intensify their grief. It is also possible that they become focused on the fears they had when the dead were still alive. If they were scared that their spouse was cheating on them, they may become too occupied with this thought, envisioning the suspected affair. (Bonanno 2009: 100–101)

Bereavement studies have shown that the nature of grief is complicated and manifold, and that it is quite impossible to create one model that would fit all bereaved people. However, these theories help in creating a background for grief workers, from which they can apply different approaches to different situations.

The structure of the rest of my thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 will introduce the central ideas of my theoretical framework. 2.1 will be a short overview on the concept of parental bereavement. In 2.2 I will introduce the idea of meaning reconstruction and its key aspects, and this discussion mainly relies on the research conducted by Robert A.

Neimeyer. In 2.3 I will discuss the six dimensions of grief accounts and how to identify them. This sub-chapter is based on article published by Michael R. Dennis. Chapter 3, which is the analysis part, will look at given passages in *The Light Between Oceans* from the point of view of the dimensions of grief accounts. With the help of these dimensions, parental bereavement and the process of meaning reconstruction for each chosen character, Isabel, Tom, and Hannah, will be discussed.

2 BEREAVEMENT, MEANING RECONSTRUCTION AND GRIEF ACCOUNTS

As research into grief and bereavement has increased during the past circa thirty years, scholars have started to pay close attention to the specific processual nature of grief: as many other human emotions and psychological processes, grief does not work neatly in phases and stages. The theories that concentrate on the nature of grief as staged or phased ignore its complexity and diversity. The five stages of grief, as well as other theories so dependent on the idea of grief working in stages, easily create a rigid norm for coping or behaving: as such, they raise suspicion about people who do not fit into these strict notions. (Bonanno 2009: 22) There seems to be a humane need to categorise many things, but as people grieve differently, the criticism of theories such as this rises exactly from dissatisfaction with strict categorisation.

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss some aspects of parental bereavement, including child loss through miscarriage and stillbirth. After this, I will discuss meaning reconstruction in more depth, introducing the key aspects of making sense of the loss, finding benefits after the loss, and identity change. As a last point, I will be looking at the dimensions of grief accounts.

2.1 Parental Bereavement

It is widely agreed that parental grief is one of the most intense and overwhelming forms of grief (Davies 2004, O'Leary & Warland 2013). We live in a society that assumes that parents should not outlive their children, and if this happens, their world order becomes shattered. Losing a child is a traumatic experience that not only affects the parents but the whole family system (Riches & Dawson 1998). As a child is no longer present, every family member must find a new role and order of life to cope with the loss. This process may continue for the rest of their lives, individually as well as together as a family unit (Cacciatore, DeFrain & Jones: 2008: 440). The fact that this kind of bereavement challenges every family member, and that adjusting to the loss and

changed roles may take a lifetime, showcases just how intense and overwhelming it can be to try to cope with the loss of a child.

The intensity of parental bereavement is also linked to circumstances surrounding the loss of a child, including its unexpectedness. (Wijngaards-de Meij, Stroebe, Stroebe, Schut & Van Den Bout 2008; Raphael 1994, quoted in Riches & Dawson 1998: 130) Parents already have their life order challenged by the loss, but the reasons behind the child's death can also add to their distress. In their research, Wijngaards-de Meij et al. (2008) refer to the circumstances of death, such as the cause and location of death, as unchangeable factors. The unexpectedness of the death is an unchangeable factor. The death may occur before the parents have had a proper chance to get to know their child (miscarriage, stillbirth, sudden infant death syndrome or SIDS), or it may be caused by an illness or an accident at a later point. Accidents, miscarriages, stillbirths and SIDS cannot really be expected, but an illness may take place during a longer time span. Changeable factors on the other hand include making decisions about the funeral and saying goodbye to the deceased (before, at the time, or after the death). These factors together affect the way in which parents process their grief, but they are culturally bound. (Wijngaards-de Meij et al. 2008: 248) What might work for parents in a Western culture (the Wijngaards-de Meij et al. study was carried out in the Netherlands), might not be applicable to parents from a different cultural setting.

Studies in parental bereavement have for many years concentrated on the death of a child after pregnancy, and, pregnancy loss has not always been recognized as a grief-producing phenomenon (O'Leary & Warland 2013: 325). When the loss of a child happens before or during the birth, it has been thought that the parents cannot grieve it as intensely as they have not been able to form a real connection with the child. (Blood & Cacciatore 2014: 224) Stillbirth, especially, has not been considered a 'real' loss (Cacciatore, DeFrain & Jones 2008: 443). When there has been a lack in social and cultural support, parents and other family members have struggled even more in finding answers to questions about why this has happened to their family. In recent years, pregnancy loss has gained more recognition in grief studies.

Research has shown that parents can benefit from continuing bonds and maintaining a connection with their dead children, whether it is achieved through sharing both oral and written stories, or keeping a sense of the child alive through linking objects (Davies 2004: 509–510; Blood & Cacciatore 2014: 226). Parents can keep a sense of their child alive through sharing memories about them, to other bereaved parents as well as to anyone willing to listen. This way, they can make their child's life a little more meaningful even when they are no longer present (Davies 2004: 510; Riches & Dawson 1998: 134). A group of other bereaved parents may be a better audience, because the parents may feel that it is impossible to find enough understanding in their immediate group of friends, colleagues and family (Davies 2004: 510; Riches & Dawson 1998: 134). Social support is a way of legitimising their grieving, as well as bringing acknowledgement about the loss of a child.

Linking objects can be any object that used to belong to the child, for example clothes, toys and drawings. They can also be photographs, which help retain a parental identity even when the child has died (Riches & Dawson 1998). Linking objects may serve as proof of the child's existence. They may also help the parents to construct the meaning of their loss, because especially photographs also portray significant places in which memories with the child were made. These places can be revisited in person and in memory, to reinforce certain memories of the child. Linking objects and photographs may help the parents to talk about and present their loss to others. (Riches & Dawson 1998: 127–128) The purpose of grieving is, partly, for the parent to reorganize the meaning of the life of their dead child. The memories become something they can live with. (Riches & Dawson 1998: 127)

It is widely agreed in grief studies that it is rather important for the bereaved parents to be able to see or hold their dead child, as well as get support from their partner and other immediate family. O'Leary and Warland (2013) studied elderly bereaved couples and surviving siblings of children who had died in pregnancy loss (only in some cases the bereaved couples and surviving siblings were from the same family). The aim of the study was to see how the elderly couples found means to survive pregnancy loss at a time when it was not properly recognised. The study highlights the following key

aspects: the elderly couples were denied the right to see and/or hold the dead baby, they were given no social right to grieve, and were forced to put the loss behind them (O'Leary & Warland 2013: 337). These resulted in a prolonged and intensified grieving that gathered no understanding or recognition from people surrounding the parents. In some cases, the bereaved parent's grief resurfaced when their spouse died (O'Leary & Warland 2013: 335). The study emphasises how important support, from the spouse and immediate family as well as from society, is in dealing with pregnancy loss. The bereaved parents were eager for closure, and some achieved this with visits to gravesites for the first time since the loss of their child (O'Leary & Warland: 335).

Of course, there are also specific complications in parental bereavement, especially pregnancy loss. These include tensions in the relationship between the parents, and a danger of the mother's compromised self-esteem. Essentially, there is a sense of having lost something that cannot be replaced, especially if the bereaved parents have lost their only child. (Davies 2004: 509; Cacciatore et al. 2008: 441) Also, as discussed before, a lack of social support especially in cases of disenfranchised grief may lead to the parents feeling as if they have no chance of expressing their sorrow to others, and that their grieving is worthless.

The relationship between the parents can be challenged by pregnancy loss. For some, intimacy or closeness with the partner creates comfort and solace, but for some, merely the thought of physical interaction creates distress. They may even feel like that their partners cannot understand them. It is also common for the mothers to blame themselves for the pregnancy loss and to feel ashamed by their 'failure' of bringing a healthy, living baby into the world. This emotional burden may add to the distress they feel over intimacy. (Cacciatore et al. 2008: 451–452)

Maternal self-esteem may become complicated after the death of a child. Many women face motherhood with a set of expectations and meanings attached to the idea of becoming a mother. The role is so significant that if it is taken away, it might affect the mother's self-esteem and sense of worth at the same time. (Wonch Hill, Cacciatore, Shreffler & Pritchard 2016: 1) It also bears significance whether the parents are dealing

with pregnancy loss or child death at a later stage. If the death happens following a miscarriage or a stillbirth, the mother's self-esteem is affected because the baby and the mother have been inseparable during the pregnancy, and the loss comes at a vulnerable stage. If child death occurs later, the parents may feel that they have failed their protective role, as they are supposed to look after their child and make sure they survive life. (Wonch Hill et al. 2016: 2) One explanation to why maternal self-esteem is compromised by child loss is that women often rank being a mother very high. They see it as an important task or role in life, and look forward to fulfilling it. If their sense of self and self-worth is centralised around this valued role, losing it may cause them to face an identity crisis. (Wonch Hill et al. 2016: 2) The loss promotes feelings of failure. However, if the family has other surviving children, it may protect the mother's self-esteem and self-worth. (Wonch Hill et al. 2016: 3)

As a summary of this sub-chapter, parental bereavement is a form of intense grieving, and adjusting to it may take up a whole lifetime. Circumstances surrounding the death of a child, including the unexpectedness and cause of the death, can add to the parents' distress. Disenfranchised grief which includes child loss in miscarriage and stillbirth, is a particularly challenging topic, because it is possible that the parents do not receive enough support from each other, other immediate family members, or the society. Research has shown that it is important for the bereaved parents to be able to see and/or hold their child after death, but also that continuing bonds and linking objects serve as an important tool for coming to terms with their changed family dynamics.

2.2 Meaning Reconstruction

When we are dealing with losses, we must reconstruct a world of meaning which has been disrupted by them. The world of meaning concerns all levels of our lives: our social identities, habitual daily lives, and our personal and collective cosmologies in the sense that grief may challenge our belief systems. (Neimeyer, Klass & Dennis 2014: 486) This emphasizes that even though the experience of grief is personal, we do not grieve in isolation. The stories of grieving are shared socially. The societal norms

around us may affect this, as they define how we should express our grief and how the community may recognize it.

Communication holds an important role in coping with grief, as was already mentioned in the Introduction. Not only does it make it possible to make our grief visible and to share our experiences, it helps us to reconstruct meaning into our lives. There is a variety of discourses of grief, spoken, written, or both, which focus on the aspect of finding meaning beyond loss. (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 490) Such discourses include grief accounts, which will be discussed in more depth in sub-chapter 2.3.

One way of looking at meaning making is categorising it into two alternatives: searching for comprehensibility or significance, and assimilation versus accommodation (Park 2010: 260). Searching for comprehensibility concerns aspects of causality, such as trying to make sense of what has happened and why. Searching for significance, simply, emphasizes how we place value on what has happened, at the time of the loss of a loved one and after it; whether we can find a meaning in the outcome of the loss. In assimilation we try to make situational meanings meet with global ones, whereas accommodation works the other way round. Scholars do not agree on which practice is more common or beneficial. Some believe that assimilation is a more common practice, because it is relatively rare that an individual will begin to change their global beliefs. Others believe that accommodation is actually a more effective practice of meaning making, especially when an individual faces particularly distressing life events. (Park 2010: 260) Whichever is more common or useful, the goal remains the same: regaining a sense of meaning into our lives.

Gillies and Neimeyer (2006) distinguish three key aspects in meaning reconstruction after loss. These are making sense of the loss, finding benefits in the loss, and identity change. With the help of these processes, the bereaved can review, reassess and rebuild meaning constructions they had prior to the loss (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 54). This way, they can view the world and themselves in a new way, which may help to deal with the distress and disorientation caused by the loss, but only if they manage to incorporate these renewed structures into their belief systems and daily lives.

One form of making sense is being able to give a reason or cause to the death (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 44). This could involve understanding or trying to understand the reasons behind a suicide, or accepting a fatal illness. People who manage to do this appear less distressed in studies examining bereaved people when compared to ones who fail to make sense of the death. (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 44) It has also appeared to be helpful if the bereaved engage in activities in which they try to “undo” the death somehow, thinking of ways in which the death could have been avoided. (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 44–45) This reflects a need of control in our lives, but this way of thinking can become harmful if it is applied to unaccountable or accidental deaths, because as there are no natural explanations, it becomes increasingly difficult to make sense of the death.

Another form of making sense is trying to find answers to why the death has occurred on a larger sense. This involves worldviews that maintain control in our lives, and it is common that the bereaved try to find answers to such questions as to why the death has occurred and why in their lives. It is common that people turn to religious faith in order to find answers to these questions. (Gillies and Neimeyer 2006: 45; Neimeyer et al. 2014: 491) The bereaved may find solace in accepting that the matter is out of their hands, and the thought of it being a part of God’s plan may decrease their distress.

Benefit finding refers to activities in which the bereaved finds a positive value or significance in the death in accordance to their own lives. This could include personal growth and changed outlook on social relationships, which are also vital to the process of identity change. (Gillies and Neimeyer 2006: 46, 48) The bereaved may also find something positive in the outcome of the loss (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 491). If the deceased has been an organ donor, for example, they can feel that at least the death has not been in vain, someone else’s life has been saved instead. This way, losses may gain a positive significance, not only to the bereaved but also in a larger context. However, benefit finding does not usually occur at the time or right after the loss, but may take several years for the bereaved to acknowledge (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 37). Benefit finding may be a separate aspect in Gillies and Neimeyer’s theory, but some theories

keep the two concepts together as they are very similar to one another in the sense that they aim at making the loss more acceptable or something that is easier to live with (Hibberd 2013: 678).

Perhaps the most important part of meaning making after loss is the ability to recognize your new or changed role in life, as well as the changed life conditions (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 492). Accepting this may be difficult, but it is essential for the bereaved if they want to keep on living 'normal' lives. When meaning in our lives is reconstructed, the process necessarily involves reconstructing ourselves (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 37). Identity change is often looked at as a realization of having a meaning or a purpose in life, which in turn works as a catalyst for a change in the bereaved person's distress (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 48).

Losses disrupt coherence in our sense of self, including what Neimeyer calls a self-narrative. This is the life story in which the deceased held a central role. (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 43) When this self-narrative becomes threatened, we must find means of adapting to it, and this is where meaning reconstruction becomes vital. One must find a way of assimilating life after loss to the life they had before it, so that they can preserve a sense of continuity in identity as well as purpose in life (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006: 43).

Although not specifically mentioned as an aspect of meaning reconstruction, another important concept to consider is the transformed relationship with the deceased (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 492). Even though they are not physically present anymore, this does not mean that their presence will completely disappear, or that it should not be sought in any way. The whole attempt to make meaning might be the very thing that keeps the deceased as a part of our lives, because the bereaved may retain habits they had with the deceased while they were still alive, not wanting to break them. This could include actions such as making conversation with the deceased while taking a walk or facing an important decision in life (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 492).

The Western cultures may heavily rely on individualism and the importance of ‘I’ at the centre of everything; our concepts and practices of mourning are regulated by society, culture, and spiritual beliefs. This can be called the “dominant narrative of grief” (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 493) which tells us how we should behave and feel in our mourning. This dominant narrative of grief may even be in contradiction with our personal belief system, or what we perceive as the appropriate way of acting or feeling in a given situation, in this context mourning (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 493). If the bereaved does not conform to this dominant narrative and to the cultural, societal, and religious norms, their grieving may be considered abnormal or even wrong by others.

The effects of society’s depiction of normative mourning can be seen most clearly in how emotions should be expressed, and how the relationship or bond with the deceased should be maintained. Cultural expectations on how emotions should be expressed may concern how much emotion is appropriate to express: we have expectations on what is considered too excessive or lacking in emotion when it comes to grieving. These expectations also seem to involve gender roles, which are arguably similar across different cultures: women are expected to grieve more publicly than men. (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 493–494) However, there are examples of cultural expectations of grief where women and men do not express sorrow or other negative emotions at all, or they do so to a very small extent (Bonanno 2009).

Society also policies how the relationship with the deceased should be maintained. This can be seen in religious practices that tell us how the dead should be treated, and how one can keep on interacting with them (Neimeyer et al. 2014: 494). As mentioned above, there are many ways of continuing bonds with the deceased, and not all of them are defined through society or culture or religion; but the ones that are defined through these, are usually the ones we use as a norm for a proper way of mourning.

Purpose in life and life significance are not mentioned in Gillies and Neimeyer’s theory, but Rachel Hibberd (2013) draws an important connection between them and meaning reconstruction. She points out that studies have shown that bereaved parents may feel that their lives have no purpose after the loss of a child, especially if it has been their

only one or if they have lost multiple children (Hibberd 2013: 679). Life significance, on the other hand, may be perceived as an outcome of making sense of the loss, but according to Hibberd, this can lead to ignoring the bereaved who feel they have no need to make sense of their loss. Similarly, ignoring life significance as a process of its own does help in understanding why some bereaved may successfully complete the key aspects of meaning reconstruction, but still fail to consider their lives meaningful. (Hibberd 2013: 680) Adding life significance to the key aspects of meaning reconstruction, proposed by Gillies and Neimeyer (2006), gives an opportunity to look at making sense of loss from the point of view of what should happen next, and what still matters to the bereaved. This can also be linked to what was briefly discussed about maternal self-esteem in the previous sub-chapter: if the purpose and significance in life was linked to taking care of your child, life might suddenly become meaningless.

In conclusion, reconstructing our lives after loss is not merely a personal activity and experience, it is an experience also dictated by society, culture, and even religious practices. We can try and find meaning through trying to understand what has happened, and by trying to place value on the loss. This positive value may concern the deceased, who is now free of all suffering, or an organ receiver, if the deceased happened to be an organ donor, or the bereaved themselves, if the loss gives them release from the burden of illness and continuous care. The bereaved may find continuing bonds with the deceased beneficial in meaning making, because it means that they do not need to cut all ties to their habits before the loss. Finally, all of these practices and options are to some extent dictated and regulated by the world around us. If we do not grieve according to the dominant narrative of grief, it is possible that we are judged by society.

2.3 Grief Accounts

The term ‘grief account’ is defined by Michael R. Dennis (2008: 802) as “written and published tales of fiction or non-fiction that prominently feature grief, its meanings, and its inevitable mystery”. Grief accounts as a term describe a phenomenon in

contemporary literature, focused on survivors of grief and bereavement. They deal with the struggles of the bereaved to “accept, understand, assimilate, overcome, manage, or cope with grief” but equally important are “the perceptions, messages, strategies, and activities used toward these purposes” (Dennis 2008: 802). So, a grief account is not merely a description of what it is like to grieve, but it also takes into consideration its different aspects and the emotional turmoil linked to it. It is, according to this definition, an account of how to (eventually) survive grief.

Dennis’s article relies on how other scholars, for example A. W. Frank, have studied death and dying in literature, especially from the point of view of narratology. Frank (1995) distinguishes between two types of narrative types when people talk about their illnesses: the restitution narrative in which chronological order is visible, and the chaos narrative. In the restitution narrative, the speaker is or can be in control of the illness and therefore can claim responsibility over their lives. In the chaos narrative, no one seems to be in control. Very little makes sense, and it may be that there are no improvements in the speaker’s condition, adding to their hopelessness. Frank’s final narrative type is quest, in which the illness is faced head first. It is accepted as it is, and the speaker is trying to make the most out of their lives regardless of it. The illness becomes a journey that can mean personal growth at best. (Frank 1995) As such, Frank’s narrative types reminds us of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s stages of grief.

According to Dennis, there are six important narrative dimensions to grief accounts: the restorative, evaluative, interpretative, affirmative, affective, and transformative dimension. The first, the restorative dimension, includes the portrayals of activities meant to lessen the pain of grief or solve the difficulties of it (Dennis 2008: 808). These may be anything that helps the bereaved return to their normal life; it could be social activities with friends and family; taking care of everyday chores as usual. These actions may work as a distraction. The restorative dimension may also include descriptions of what the bereaved are doing with the belongings of those who they have lost, whether it is through organ donations, donating things or clothing, or speaking to communities about something that could have prevented the death of their loved one. (Dennis 2008: 810)

The second dimension of grief accounts is the evaluative dimension. It is a common feature in which survivors evaluate and assess their situations, as well as the events that led to their losses (Dennis 2008: 811). These may include the bereaved interpreting events that have happened both prior and after their losses as signs of after-life or simply the deceased's presence in their lives even now. It may also be that the bereaved take their loss as a motivation to live their life to the full, or find in it aspects that may even broaden or enrich their lives. (Dennis 2008: 812) Having to suddenly come to terms with death may give the bereaved a push to evaluate not only their lives but also the lives of the deceased differently. It may give them a new meaning in life which in turns helps them process their loss and move on.

The interpretive dimension refers to making sense of a loss by working it through, for example by identifying a causality of events, and even assigning blame, to enhance emotional recovery (Dennis 2008: 814). This is to fight the chaotic nature of death and trauma, to try and make sense of what has happened. The bereaved need to somehow understand why this has happened, even when it means that they can simply pinpoint their blame towards someone else. It is easy to start dwelling in guilt, but if the bereaved assign blame where necessary, it may help them to come to terms with the events. They might assign blame towards themselves also, if that is the only way in which they can create sense into the death.

The affirmative dimension refers to several things. One, it means simply providing material facts about the deceased as a real, living person before their demise. These facts may be about their behaviour or appearances, but they are often such details that can only be known by the bereaved, which validates their relationship. Second, it can be a proclamation of the continuation of the relationship with the deceased. The continuation can be constructed within memories of things the deceased used to like, so that when the bereaved has these things they can be connected; but it is also possible that the relationship is built in the existence of grief (Dennis 2008: 821) Finally, it can also legitimize the death of a loved one and the need to grieve them. (Dennis 2008: 817–818) Linked to the affirmative dimension is the tendency to sometimes idealize the

deceased. It may be details linked to our lives with them or something just specifically about their personalities, but it is common to forget their faults and flaws, and instead concentrate on the good (Dennis 2008: 819).

Grieving involves a number of different emotions, sometimes rather powerful and even violent in nature. The affective dimension is when language is used by survivors of grief or writers of grief accounts to describe these emotions, often in an excruciating way. It is argued that emotional disclosure can be a purifying experience, therefore supporting the grieving process, and also the meaning making process after loss. (Dennis 2008: 821) The affective dimension is basically when the grief and all the different emotions linked to it are given a voice, no matter how raw it is.

In the transformative dimension of grief accounts, a major aspect of loss and grieving, change, is usually incorporated through the different roles, identities and relationships of the survivors' (Dennis 2008: 824). For example, when a parent loses a child they suddenly stop being parents and become something else, especially if the dead child is their only one. It is not an easy process for the survivors to become accustomed to their new role in life; they might succumb to numbness in the beginning because they feel disoriented in their new everyday lives (Dennis 2008: 825). These changes in roles and possibly even in the relationships with other people create anxiety in the bereaved (Dennis 2008: 826). It is a challenge also to their identities to become accustomed to the new way of life, including routines and daily exchanges with other people. This may arise from their inability to come to terms with their new life situation (they may not think, for example, that they should be widows because they are too young), but also from the feeling of not meeting up with others' expectation of how they should be in their new role. (Dennis 2008: 827) In the most positive outcome of this dimension, the bereaved realise they must move forward with their lives as a changed person. Unfortunately, this is not self-evident to everyone, and some bereaved people face complications as they struggle to make sense of their changed lives and roles.

As the examples from Dennis (2008) prove, a work of fiction describing grieving may or may not include all of these dimensions of grief accounts. The timespan of a novel

may stretch itself over a shorter or longer period during which the character(s) may experience all the above-mentioned emotions and thought processes at different stages of the story. This, in my opinion, also supports the view of grief as being something fluctuant, rather than a clearly defined process in which certain stages follow one another neatly. It is also worth noting how in many cases the dimensions are overlapping. An activity that helps to lessen the pain of loss may be essentially on the restorative dimension, but it may influence the transformative dimension as well, if the activity is vital in the thought process of adjusting to the changed self.

Dimensions of grief accounts can help in looking at how the nature of grief is demonstrated in a work of fiction. It does not need to be taken as a method of verification of how truthfully a novel describes grieving; grief is always personal and individual, and I believe that unless a work of fiction has been written specifically as a grief account it should bear no significance. Rather, the dimensions of grief accounts create a set against which aspects of works of fiction can be looked at, as in the case of this thesis.

3 PARENTAL BEREAVEMENT IN *THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS*

She knew that if a wife lost a husband, there was a whole new word to describe who she was: she was now a *widow*. A husband became a *widower*. But if a parent lost a child, there was no special label for their grief. They were still just a mother and a father, even if they no longer had a son or a daughter. That seemed odd. (*TLBO* 123)

This chapter concentrates on the three characters – Isabel, Tom and Hannah – in *The Light Between Oceans* and how they display meaning reconstruction after the loss of a child. Meaning reconstruction is considered on the different dimensions of grief accounts: the restorative, affirmative, evaluative, interpretative, transformative, and affective. These dimensions are a key to identifying passages of *The Light Between Oceans* which portray activities, thoughts and feelings relevant to meaning reconstruction, before developing the idea into more generic patterns and depictions.

3.1 Restorative Dimension

The restorative dimension of grief accounts refers to the various kinds of activities that help the bereaved to deal with the loss. These actions are aimed at lessening the pain, or working as a distraction from the loss. In *The Light Between Oceans*, these are mainly everyday chores. Even if a baby's life has been lost, the lives of the parents must move on as usual. "A life had come and gone and nature had not paused a second for it. The machine of time and space grinds on, and people are fed through it like grist through the mill." (*TLBO* 90) This is not without its complications, but there are instances where it is shown that Isabel and Tom are able to use chores or other activities to make it through, or rather distract themselves from the loss of their children.

For Tom, the most helpful way to overcome his grief is to concentrate on his duties at the lighthouse. He places great value on his tasks, and sees them as the core of his everyday life at Janus Rock. As a lightkeeper, he holds an important status. He must maintain the order of the light station.

A lightkeeper accounts for things. Every article in the light station is listed, stored, maintained, inspected. No item escapes official scrutiny. [...] No matter how remote their lives, like moths in a glass case, the lightkeepers are pinned down, scrutinized, powerless to escape. You can't trust the Lights to just anyone. (*TLBO* 87–88)

To Tom, this role is a way of distracting himself from the pain. He came to the Lights after the War, in order to escape the horrors he encountered in Europe. When their babies die, the tasks at the lighthouse are ever more a way of retaining order and rules in his life. The logbook, an item where a lighthouse keeper tracks down everything that happens at the light station, is a way of accomplishing this. The logbook fights against the chaos which Tom feels is inflicted by his experiences at the war, but it also reinforces Tom's beliefs of rules and their usefulness:

When he thinks back to the chaos, the years of manipulating facts, or the impossibility of knowing, let alone describing, what the bloody hell was going on while explosions shattered the ground all around him, he enjoys the luxury of stating a simple truth. (*TLBO* 88)

You could kill a bloke with rules, Tom knew that. And yet sometimes they were what stood between man and savagery, between man and monsters. (*TLBO* 104)

The discovery of the abandoned dinghy with Frank's body and baby Lucy is in striking contrast with Tom's desire to find order in chaos. In order to keep Lucy, he cannot make an entry about the discovery in the log book. This is one of the first conflicts of Tom's conscience in the book. His tasks as a lightkeeper have helped him overcome a great deal of pain, but to help Isabel, he must act against what he thinks is the right way. He must partly abandon his duties, which haunts him throughout the rest of the novel. To Tom, rules and tasks are what make him human and something that can help keep a man on the right track.

There is also a rift between Isabel and Tom when he tries to keep up with his duties as a lighthouse keeper even in the midst of loss. She cannot understand why he places so much value on these tasks, and finds it as an indication of not caring enough.

“How can you be so hard-hearted? All you care about is your rules and your ships and your bloody light.” These were accusations Tom had heard before, when, wild with grief after her miscarriages, Isabel had let loose her rage against the only person there – the man who continued to do his duty, who comforted her as best he could, but kept his own grieving to himself. (*TLBO* 98–99)

This further shows how the tasks as a lighthouse keeper help Tom find solace in grief. He is not showing his pain to Isabel, but instead, tries to comfort her to his best abilities. He hides his sorrow and utilises it while taking care of his duties. Tom cannot be a father to a child they have lost, but he can be a loving husband and a dutiful lighthouse keeper. The time he spends alone, taking care of the lighthouse, is also the time when he has an opportunity to reflect on things, on his loss and the decision to keep Lucy. These tasks keep Tom sane.

In Isabel’s case, the tasks to lessen the pain are related to chores (for example, looking after the house and gardening), reinforcing a love of playing the piano, and finally taking care of Lucy after the loss of her own children. As she and Tom are confined to a small island, she has no choice but to return to household work, but after the first miscarriage, the piano becomes her greatest distraction and source of joy. The chores feel like an impossible task:

Isabel wandered into the lounge room, observing the dust, the crack in the plaster near the window frame, the frayed edge of the dark blue rug. The hearth needed sweeping, and the lining of the curtains had begun to shred from constant exposure to extremes of weather. Simply to think of fixing any of it took more energy than she could muster. Only weeks ago she had been so full of expectation and vigor. Now the room felt like a coffin, and her life stopped at its edges. (*TLBO* 75)

A decrepit piano in their house has been abandoned for years, but Tom surprises Isabel by arranging a piano tuner to come and fix it. The piano, once in working order, becomes an item that helps Isabel distract herself. It becomes an immediate boost of her mood:

Isabel sat at the keyboard, and played the A flat major scale in contrary motion. “Well, that’s a sight better than before!” she said. She broke into the beginnings of a Handel aria and was wandering off into memory when someone cleared his throat. [...]

“I haven’t played them for years. But – oh, I just love them!” [...]

That night as he checked the mantle, Tom was serenaded by Bach, the orderly notes climbing the stairs of the lighthouse and ringing around the lantern room, flittering between the prisms. (*TLBO* 79–80)

Before this, Isabel has been suffocating in her pain, as shown in the earlier quote. The piano gives her something to do, a way of returning to happier memories, and it pushes her forward.

After the last pregnancy loss (stillbirth), it is indicated that although Isabel is initially struck with grief, she is able to do her chores because she sees them as her duty:

She stood there with sheets in her hands: chores didn’t stop, just as the light didn’t stop. Having made the bed and folded her nightgown under the pillow, she headed up to the cliff, to sit by the graves a while. (*TLBO* 85)

While Tom takes care of the light, Isabel’s responsibilities lie with the cottage. Again, her chores are a distraction, but she also returns to the graves of their children afterwards. The pain is at the back of her mind. Even visiting the graves seems to give her solace, but rituals linked to funerals and mourning are discussed in more depth in 3.2. At this point, it will only be mentioned as an example of an action that can also help lessen the pain.

Another indication of using chores as a distraction from pain comes after the loss of Lucy:

For hours at a time, Isabel put Tom from her mind: as she helped her mother around the house; as she looked at the paintings Violet had kept, done by Lucy during her brief visits back; as she felt ever more deeply the grief of losing her child. Then thoughts of Tom would creep back and she pictured the letter Ralph had delivered, banished to the drawer. (*TLBO* 295)

What is interesting here is that Isabel uses another pain, the loss of Lucy, to distract her from the pain of having lost Tom and from having to deal with his betrayal. But as with dealing with the loss of a child, the distraction is only momentary. The chores and tasks, however distracting they can be, are not a permanent help. They only guide her thoughts away from the painful matters for a while, before she returns to her grief.

The most important part of the restorative dimension in *The Light Between Oceans* is when Isabel and Tom find Lucy. Although not a restorative task or activity in itself, the arrival of the baby gives them, specifically Isabel, an opportunity to act as parents and to move on from the pain of having lost their own children. There are several indications of Lucy sparking a longing in both Isabel and Tom at the time of her arrival:

Back in the cottage, Isabel's belly quickened at the very sight of the baby – her arms knew instinctively how to hold the child and calm her, soothe her. As she scooped warm water over the infant, she registered the freshness of her skin, taut and soft and without a wrinkle. [...] The moment seemed to merge into one with another bathing, another face – a single act that had merely been interrupted. (*TLBO* 86)

As she blinked at him, and looked right into his eyes, Tom was suddenly aware of an almost physical ache. She was giving him a glimpse of a world he would now surely never know. (*TLBO* 94)

Isabel remembered the fresh agony of the arrival of the milk, making her breasts heavy and sore with no baby to suckle – it had seemed a particularly cruel mechanism of nature. Now, this infant was seeking desperately for her milk, or perhaps just for comfort, now that immediate starvation had been swayed off. She paused for a moment, her thoughts swirling with the crying and the longing and the loss. (*TLBO* 95)

Lucy reminds them of what could have been if their babies had survived, but it also gives them an additional opportunity to mourn the previous losses. As they become more accustomed to having Lucy around, the thoughts are no longer a mixture of longing and love, especially for Isabel. For Tom, however, balancing between the two is much more difficult than it is to Isabel. Here, the restorative dimension also overlaps with the transformative dimension. As Isabel and Tom are given another chance to act

as parents, they need to become accustomed to the change in their lives and roles. For more discussion on this topic, see 3.5.

The arrival of Lucy guides Isabel back to fulfilling her duties as a mother, and it also gives her more motivation to look after the house and its surroundings. “Isabel worked hard. The vegetable patch thrived; the cottage was kept clean. She washed and patched Tom’s clothes, and cooked the things he liked. Lucy grew. The light turned. Time passed.” (*TLBO* 112) Lucy is what sets her back in the course of everyday life and makes it possible for her to find happiness again. Lucy is, in a sense, the key catalyst in Isabel’s surviving of parental bereavement. This is something that also explains why later on in the novel she reacts so passionately to losing Lucy to Hannah. Before this happens, Isabel is only concentrating on how Lucy is the answer to her deepest prayers.

So Isabel floats further and further into her world of divine benevolence, where prayers are answered, where babies arrive by the will of God and the working of currents. “Tom, I wonder how we can be so lucky?” she muses. She watches in awe as her blessed daughter grows and thrives. (*TLBO* 110)

She almost immediately begins to think of Lucy as her own daughter, given to her as a will of God. Following the development of the child gives her joy and again distracts her from thinking about the previous losses, children she will never see growing up.

Hannah is a little more complex on the restorative dimension, because it could be argued that the daily routine she follows is not a distraction in the positive sense, but rather it hinders her from accepting that her husband and daughter might be dead. However, as it is a routine that she follows and which makes it possible to her to continue with her life, it is an indication of an activity that can lessen the pain she is going through.

First, she would call the police station, sometimes giving no more than a questioning look, to which the constable, Harry Garstone, would reply with a silent shake of the head. As she walked out, his colleague Constable Lynch might comment, “Poor woman. Fancy ending up like that...” and he too would shake his head, and carry on with his paperwork. Each day she would walk to a different part of the beach in search of a sign, a clue – bits of driftwood, a

fragment of metal from a rowlock. [...] On her way back she would call at the church and sit silently in the last pew, near the statue of St. Jude. [...] Here, somehow Frank and Grace still existed, for as long as she sat in the shadows. When she could avoid it no longer, she would return home, opening the letterbox only once she felt strong enough to face the disappointment of its emptiness. (*TLBO* 139–140)

In Hannah's case, it is clear that her approach to the loss of Frank and Grace is not something the society in Point Partageuse approve of. They pity her for what she is going through, but also wish that she find it in herself to move on. Hannah, however, has not given up on the hope that she could find a sign that would indicate that Frank and Grace have survived. She relentlessly returns to the police station to ask if there are any news; she visits the beach in hope of signs; she turns to God. The last part of the quotation, "[w]hen she could avoid it no longer, she would return home, opening the letterbox only once she felt strong enough to face the disappointment of its emptiness" shows that although these actions help her keep her hopes alive, she knows that nothing new awaits at home. Although she is refusing to accept what society would consider the reality (Frank and Grace have died), she still acknowledges that getting vindication to her hopes is a fleeting chance.

3.2 Affirmative Dimension

The affirmative dimension can refer to legitimising the need to grieve, continuing bonds with the deceased and affirming that the deceased once existed. In *The Light Between Oceans*, rituals and commemorative articles, such as funerals and memorials, are linked to this dimension as they are a way of legitimising someone's need to grieve. The idea of disenfranchised grief is also visible in this dimension, because it affects who is allowed to grieve and what.

Tom and Isabel, from the very first miscarriage, are determined to somehow commemorate their dead children. They start setting up wooden crosses and planting a rosemary bush to indicate each loss.

Tom hammered the small cross he had made from some driftwood, until it was secure in the ground. At his wife's request he had carved, "31 May 1922. Remembered Always."

He took the shovel and dug a hole for the rosemary bush she had moved from the herb garden. He could feel nausea rising in him as a spark of memory arced between the hammering of the cross and digging of the hole. His palms sweated, though the task required little physical effort. (*TLBO* 76–77)

To Tom, the ritual brings back awful memories from the war time. To Isabel, the crosses and the bushes become a place where she spends time and reflects on the losses.

She tended the new one with great care, wondering whether the fledgling rosemary would take. She pulled a few weeds from around the two older crosses, now finely crystallised with years of salt, the rosemary growing doggedly despite the gales. (*TLBO* 85)

The rosemary grows when the babies cannot grow, and Isabel places her care where she can.

However, a big complication to Isabel is that she feels ashamed of her miscarriages and stillbirth. She feels that she has failed her duties as a mother, as a wife, and as a daughter. This undermines her need to legitimise her grieving in the eyes of others. In the island, the grief is present, but she wants to narrow it down to herself and Tom instead of reporting it to everyone mainland.

"What's the point in a doctor? The baby's gone." Her gaze wandered. "How hopeless am I?" she muttered. "Other women have babies as easily as falling off a log." (*TLBO* 74)

"Izz, love, there is time for all that. You're what matters most right now. I'll go and signal. Get a boat sent out."

"No!" Her voice was fierce. "No! I don't want anyone else here. I don't want anyone else to know. Not yet." (*TLBO* 91)

"Not yet, Tom. I'll tell you when I'm ready," Isabel had insisted the following day, as she lay in bed.

"But your mum and dad – they'll want to know. They're expecting you home on the next boat. They're expecting their first grandchild."

Isabel had looked at him, helpless. "Exactly! They're expecting their first grandchild, and I've lost him."

“They’ll be worried for you, Izz.” [...]

“Tom, I just can’t.” A tear dropped on her nightgown. “At least they’ll have a few more happy weeks...” (*TLBO* 93)

“She hated this – the fact that your dirty washing had to be everybody else’s business. She hated the fact that Ralph and Bluey had to know. They’d probably spent the whole trip out discussing her most private shame and Lord knows what else. That Tom could ship the doctor out against her explicit wishes felt like a betrayal.” (*TLBO* 78)

Part of Isabel’s shame is linked to her fear of causing her parents additional pain. “Her job, she decided, was not to cause her parents any more bother or concern. She was the consolation prize – what they had instead of sons.” (*TLBO* 123) Isabel’s brothers have died during the war, and she becomes focused on not disappointing her parents. As she considers that she has failed her reproductive role, she not only disappoints herself but also fears that she will do the same to her parents. This further emphasises that even though she grieves the losses of her children, she is not allowing herself a proper chance for it.

Isabel’s need to legitimise her grieving is more visible after she loses Lucy to Hannah. She is confused about what has happened, and at the same time, starts to wish that she could have given her children a proper funeral.

Isabel spoke aloud the thought that had occurred to her, perhaps to understand it better. “There’s never been a funeral...”

“What do you mean?” asked Violet. Isabel was not making much sense, these days.

“Everyone I’ve lost – they’ve just been ripped away – into nothing. Maybe a funeral would have made it – I don’t know – made a difference. With Hugh there’s a photo of the grave in England. Alfie’s just a name on that memorial. My first three babies – three, Mum – never had so much as a hymn sung for them. And now...” her voice broke into tears, “Lucy...”

Violet had been glad she’d never given her sons a funeral: a funeral was proof. A funeral meant admitting that your boys were absolutely dead. And buried. It was a betrayal. No funeral meant that one day they might waltz into the kitchen and ask what was for dinner and laugh with her about that silly mistake which had led her to believe for a moment – imagine that! – that they’d gone forever. She considered her words carefully. “Sweetheart, Lucy’s not dead.” Isabel seemed to shrug off the comment, and her mother frowned. (*TLBO* 263)

Violet cannot understand why Isabel is so keen to have funerals. To her, they are the final legitimisation that someone has died, and with her sons, she wishes to keep it that way. Isabel is clearly seeing things from a different point of view. She feels that a funeral would give her a chance to accept the losses better, to turn them into a proper reality.

This also shows how Isabel compares the loss of Lucy to losing her children. Lucy may still live, but she is gone from Isabel's life. This is another example of disenfranchised grief in Isabel's case, because although she mourns the loss deeply, she had taken somebody else's child as her own, and so she has little right to mourn the loss of Lucy. Violet, however, understands what Isabel is going through:

Once a child gets into your heart, there's no right or wrong about it. She'd known women give birth to children fathered by husbands they detested, or worse, men who'd forced themselves on them. And the woman had loved the child fiercely, all the while hating the brute who'd sired it. There's no defending yourself from love for a baby, Violet knew too well. (*TLBO* 263)

She may not understand why Isabel longs for the funerals, but she understands why she has done what she has done. But the society around them finds it difficult to know how to react: "No one was sure how to treat this mourning that wasn't for a death. Some crossed the street to avoid them." (*TLBO* 272) Isabel is in a challenging situation where she has not wanted to demonstrate her mourning on the previous losses, but her latest loss has become a very public business.

Legitimising a need to grieve is also visible when Isabel suffers from her miscarriage. The whole scene, exemplified below, is focused on the importance of rituals while dealing with the dead child. Isabel wants to care for him before the burial, just like she would have if he had survived the birth.

After a while, Tom said, "What shall we do? With the – with him?"
Isabel looked at the cold creature in her arms. "Light the chip heater."
Tom glanced at her.
"Light it, please."

Still confused, but wary of upsetting her, Tom rose to his feet and went to light the water heater. When he returned, she said, “Fill the laundry tub. When the water’s warm.”

“If you want a bath I’ll carry you, Izz.”

“Not for me. I have to wash him. Then in the linen cupboard, there are the good sheets – the ones I embroidered. Will you bring one?” (*TLBO* 91)

She dipped it in the water, and gently, gently, with the cloth covering her fingertip, began to stroke the face, smoothing away the watery blood that covered the translucent skin. [...] She squeezed it and began again, watching closely, perhaps hoping that the eyes might flicker, or the minuscule fingers twitch. (*TLBO* 91–92)

Transfixed by ritual, Isabel continued to dab away at the body, the umbilical cord still attached to the afterbirth on the floor. She hardly raised her head as Tom draped a blanket over her shoulders. He came back with a bucket and a cloth, and on his hands and knees, started to sponge up the blood and the mess. Isabel lowered the body into the bath to wash it, taking care not to submerge the face. She dried it with the towel, and wrapped it in a fresh one, still with the placenta, so that it was bound up like a papoose. (*TLBO* 92)

Contact with the dead child was already mentioned as an important activity for bereaved parents, in order for them to deal with their loss. Tom, bewildered at first, is unsure of what should be done, but Isabel guides the ritual of cleaning up her baby and wrapping him in cloth. Another loss, and this time a stillbirth which means that they have an actual body to bury, changes the nature of grief as well. A proper funeral can be arranged, but only with Isabel and Tom present. Once again, she does not want anyone in Partageuse informed about what has happened, turning this loss even more into a disenfranchised grief by herself.

For Hannah, the first example of legitimising the need to grieve is more of an involuntary action. Her father, despite her hopes that Frank and Grace have not died, has convinced her that setting up a memorial for Frank and Grace is something that she needs to do. At another point during a party where she accidentally meets the Sherbournes, her sister apologises to her dream-like behaviour which is set in motion after seeing Lucy. People around her, including her family, want Hannah to grieve her losses, but she cannot fully proceed to do so as she refuses to believe her loved ones are dead.

”Poor Hannah never recovered,” sighed Hilda. “Her father only persuaded her to put up the memorial a few months ago.” She paused as she pulled her gloves up. “Funny how lives turn out, isn’t it? Born to more money than you can shake a stick at; went all the way to Sidney University to get a degree in something or other; married the love of her life – and now you see her sometimes, wandering about, like she’s got no home to go to.” (TLBO 131)

“It may seem like a strange question, but do ships ever rescue people far out to sea? Have you ever heard of boats being picked up? Survivors taken to the other side of the world, perhaps? I was just wondering whether you’d ever come across stories...” [...]

She was about to leave when Lucy gave a sleepy “Ta-ta” and a wave. Hannah tried to smile. “Ta-ta,” she replied. Through tears she said, “You have a very lovely daughter. Excuse me,” and hurried to the door.

“So sorry about that,” Gwen said. “Hannah had a terrible tragedy a few years ago. Family lost at sea – her husband, and a daughter who would have been about your girl’s age by now. She’s always asking that sort of thing. Seeing little ones sets her off.” (TLBO 192–193)

The pain and the desperate hope are always present with Hannah. Despite the effort of setting up the memorial, she is still continuing her daily ritual of walking around the town, comforting herself before she returns to her empty home. This implicates that the unwanted legitimisation of the need to grieve is not beneficial for the bereaved person, if it is not in accordance to their wishes and beliefs.

It is only after Tom writes to Hannah that she allows herself to start grieving for her dead husband. Up until now, she has believed that both Frank and Grace have survived. Tom is so struck by his guilt that he decides to reach out to Hannah anonymously, to offer her some solace through the knowledge that at least her daughter is safe.

Don’t fret for her. The baby is safe. Loved and well cared for, and always will be. Your husband is at peace in God’s hands. I hope this brings you comfort. Pray for me. (TLBO 141)

“Your husband is at peace in God’s hands.” Hannah Roennfeldt runs over the phrase again and again on the day of the mysterious letter. Grace is alive, but Frank is dead. She wants to be able to believe the one and not the other. Frank. Franz. She recalls the gentle man whose life was turned upside down so many times along the curious path which somehow led him to her. (TLBO 147)

The letter brings Hannah comfort in the sense that now she knows some of her wishes have come true. The letter also confirms one of her greatest fears, that one of those she loved so dearly have died. As she reads through the letter, she remembers her past with Frank, and how the two of them tried to fight the prejudices of the town people and her family. More specifically, it gives her a chance to reflect on the events that led to Frank and Grace setting off on the dinghy in the first place, the event that is not discussed by the people of Point Partageuse.

“Your husband is at peace in God’s hands.” Because of the letter, Hannah goes through both a mourning and a renewal. God has taken her husband, but has saved her daughter. She weeps not just with sorrow, but with shame, at her memories of that day. (*TLBO* 155)

The town draws a veil over certain events. This is a small community, where everyone knows that sometimes the contract to forget is as important as any promise to remember. Children can grow up having no knowledge of the indiscretion of their father in his youth, or of the illegitimate sibling who lives fifty miles away and bears another man’s name. History is that which is agreed upon by mutual consent. (*TLBO* 155)

So for Hannah Roennfeldt, her memory of losing Frank is one she has learned she can share with no one. “Raking over coals – what’s the good of that?” people would say, anxious to return to their civilized picture of life in Partageuse. But Hannah remembers. (*TLBO* 156)

The fact that the reality behind Frank and Grace’s escape, a mob chasing after them on Anzac Day, cannot be shared by Hannah with anyone, again shows an example of disenfranchised grief. The memories of that day are deep within Hannah’s mind, but she receives no comfort, no understanding from others. The town would rather forget about what happened that day and how they treated the Roennfeldts and their small child. After receiving Tom’s letter, she goes through the painful memories and begins to acknowledge that she has, indeed, lost her husband because of those events. The letter legitimises her need to grieve Frank after losing him two years earlier, and at the same time it gives her hope of finding her daughter again.

3.3 Evaluative Dimension

The main part of the evaluative dimension is when the bereaved manage to find a positive reappraisal of life after loss. It can lead to finding motivation to live their own life to the full, or to evaluate their lives against a new perspective. Similarly to the aspect of benefit finding, the evaluative dimension is not visible right after the bereaved have faced loss. It may follow months, even years later, but nevertheless it holds an important part for the bereaved to be able to move on. Most events in *The Light Between Oceans* are describing the initial feelings of shock and grief at the time the loss. Because of this, the evaluative dimension is not as visible as the other dimensions of grief accounts, but there are instances of it in the novel. It becomes most visible with Tom and Hannah, who both reflect on their losses and what they can gain from them.

Hannah has been very conscientious in her life, allowing others to determine things for her after losing Frank and Grace. She has agreed to it without complaining or thinking twice about it, but the aftermath of Grace being returned to her finally gives her the courage to claim her own destiny. She is not to be pushed around anymore – she feels more confident in expressing her feelings, whether they are negative or positive. An example of this occurs when Sergeant Knuckey tries to convince her to speak up for the Sherbournes, so that their sentence would not be so harsh.

Hannah's face reddened again, and without warning she jumped to her feet. Words that had been building up for weeks, for years, words Hannah didn't know were there, burst from her. "I'm sick of this! I'm sick of being pushed around, of having my life ruined by the whims of other people. You have no idea what it's like to be in my position, Sergeant Knuckey! How dare you come into my house and make such a suggestion? How *bloody* dare you!"

"I didn't mean to –"

"Let me finish! I've had enough, do you understand me?" Hannah was shouting now. "No one is ever going to tell me how to live my life again! First it's my father telling me who I can marry, then it's the whole bloody town turning on Frank like a mob of savages. Then Gwen tries to convince me to give Grace back to Isabel Greysmark, and I *agree*—I actually agree! [...] How dare you presume to tell me, to even suggest to me, that I should, yet again, put someone else first!" (*TLBO* 321)

Hannah is putting herself first for a change. She is driven by her anger, but also her determination. She wishes to have control of her own life and not take someone else into consideration.

The main lesson Hannah takes from everything she has gone through, however, is forgiveness. A conversation she had with Frank springs to her mind on the subject:

As she sank to her knees on the grass and sobbed, the memory of a conversation with Frank floated into her awareness. "But how? How can you just get over these things, darling?" she had asked him. "You've had so much strife but you're always happy. How do you do it?"

"I choose to," he said. "I can leave myself to rot in the past, spend my time hating people for what happened, like my father did, or I can forgive and forget."

"But it's not that easy."

He smiled that Frank smile. "Oh, but my treasure, it is so much less exhausting. You only have to forgive once. To resent, you have to do it all day, every day. You have to keep remembering all the bad things." (*TLBO* 323)

If Frank had not died, this is something Hannah would not need to process actively. However, she chooses to, and she also chooses to learn from it. She decides to forgive the Sherbournes for what they have done, keeping Grace away from her for years. She decides to concentrate on the positive outcome of their actions: Grace is alive and well. Hannah cannot forget what has happened, but she tries to forgive. This, along with the decision to claim her own destiny, leads her to be more confident with Grace, reinforcing the relationship between the two. Hannah is also able to forgive her father and her sister. A new life is beginning for her and Grace, and she does not look back.

In Tom's case, the evaluative dimension can be considered on more aspects than one. It can reflect the lessons and values he has taken after his experiences in the war, and after losing his children and Lucy. His experiences in the war set his moral compass and spark in him a desire to never hurt someone again. This feeling is further strengthened with the keeping of Lucy, although his thoughts of duty are challenged by the memory of Isabel reacting to their losses. Tom is haunted by the things he has experienced, but tries to turn it into something good.

For a moment, just a few feet of sand had separated Lucy from her true heritage – from Roennfeldt and generations of his family. Tom went cold at the realization that he may have killed relatives – it seemed almost likely – of this man who had created her. Suddenly, vivid and accusing, the faces of the enemy wakened from the tomb beneath memory to which he had confined them. (*TLBO* 178)

Tom turned to him, suddenly shaking. “Jesus Christ, I just want to do the right thing, Ralph! Tell me what the right fucking thing to do is! I – I just can’t stand this! I can’t do it any more.” He threw the bottle to the ground and it shattered on a rock, as his words dissolved into a sob. (*TLBO* 180)

This feeling is the reason why Tom reaches out to Hannah with his letters, and the silver rattle he and Isabel found with Lucy/Grace in the dinghy. The guilt he feels over his past and keeping Lucy puts him in a difficult position as he tries to balance between what is right in his mind, what is right for Isabel, for Lucy/Grace, and for Hannah. He is not able to decide what he should do right away.

Tom’s actions and decisions are mainly aimed at bringing himself at ease, but this is guided by his previous experiences. When he is taken to the police station in Point Partageuse, he is faced with the dilemma of his grief, relief, and guilt over what his actions have caused Isabel to go through:

He cannot reconcile the grief he feels at what he has done and the profound relief that runs through him. Two opposing physical forces, they create an inexplicable reaction overpowered by a third, stronger force – the knowledge of having deprived his wife of a child. As fresh and raw as being spiked on a meat hook, he feels loss; what Hannah Roennfeldt must have felt; what Isabel has felt so many times, and grips her again now. He begins to wonder how he could have inflicted such suffering. He begins to wonder what the bloody hell he has done.

He struggles to make sense of it – all this love, so bent out of shape, refracted, like light through the lens. (*TLBO* 225)

Tom realises that the relief he feels is for himself, but that Isabel is suffering much more because of the actions he has taken. So, when Isabel turns her hatred towards him and refuses to take his side of the story, he tries to be as understanding as possible. He does not want to discriminate her, as he has already caused her enough pain and trouble. Tom

still tries to do what he feels is right, even though he is afraid it will separate him from Isabel forever.

Years after all his struggle with his guilt, with his moral dilemma on keeping Lucy, Tom finally reaches a state of inner peace. He uses his strength to help Isabel accommodate to their new life; neither of them ever returns to Partageuse after he completes serving his sentence and she her time at the nursing home. Tom tries to give Isabel a good enough reason to keep on living their lives when she feels that there is none.

She turned away, and pulled some more honeysuckle from its vine.

“What are we going to do? How are we going to live? I can’t go on looking at myself every day and resenting you for what you did. Being ashamed of myself, too.”

“No, love, you can’t.”

“Everything’s ruined. Nothing can ever be put right.”

Tom rested a hand on hers. “We’ve put things right as well as we can. That’s all we can do. We have to live with things the way they are now.” (*TLBO* 332–333)

Tom sees that although he has served a sentence in prison and although Isabel is currently confined to a nursing home, they have done their best. Nothing can change the way things have been or turned out to be, but he and Isabel should move on and leave it behind. He directs his will to do the right thing into Isabel’s recovery, and when she dies of cancer, he is left to continue living his modest and quiet life in Hopetoun. When Lucy/Grace suddenly comes to visit him, for the first time in over twenty years, the memories flood his mind.

His arms still feel the tiny weight of Lucy’s baby, and the sensation unlocks the bodily memory of holding Lucy herself, and before that, the son he held in his arms so briefly. How different so many lives would have been if he had lived. He breathes the thought for a long while, then sighs. No point in thinking like that. Once you start down that road, there’s no end to it. He’s lived the life he’s lived. He’s loved the woman he’s loved. No one ever has or ever will travel quite the same path on this earth, and that’s all right by him. He still aches for Isabel: her smile, the feel of her skin. The tears he fought off in front of Lucy now trail down his face. (*TLBO* 342)

Tom still grieves his son and losing Lucy, but he has seen the benefits of moving on. He no longer has any regrets over what has happened or how he and Isabel have lived their lives. He is happy for their experiences, as they have taught him to appreciate the things he has even more.

3.4 Interpretative Dimension

The interpretative dimension refers to reasserting causality to your own life, trying to find a meaning behind loss and assigning blame when necessary. In *The Light Between Oceans*, the last one of the three is the most visible one, as blame becomes a powerful tool in trying to understand loss. Reflections on God and fate are also included, as a higher power takes the responsibility out of a person's hands, giving death a meaning beyond our actions.

The underlying attitude towards (child) loss in *The Light Between Oceans* is that it is something that simply has to be endured. The events are mainly set in the 1920s when child death was far more common, and as the first World War had just ended, death has affected almost everyone in Partageuse.

Of course, the losing of children had always been a thing that had to be gone through. There had never been guarantee that conception would lead to a live birth, or that birth would lead to a life of any great length. Nature allowed only the fit and the lucky to share this paradise-in-the-making. [...] Like the wheat fields where more grain is sown than can ripen, God seemed to sprinkle extra children about, and harvest them according to some indecipherable, divine calendar. (*TLBO* 17–18)

A life had come and gone and nature had not paused a second for it. The machine of time and space grinds on, and people are fed through it like grist through the mill. (*TLBO* 90)

Child death seems to be perceived as a normal thing that could happen in any family. The reasons behind such a loss are not to be thought about in great detail; it is up to the decisions of God who gets to have children in the first place, and which of those

children survive. Life does not stop for the others even if it stops for the one who dies. People are not supposed to pause and think about it, because that is the natural cause of life. Everyone dies at some point.

The change in this perspective is caused by the war. Suddenly it is not only babies and infants that can die; death can also affect the young men of Partageuse.

As full of holes as a Swiss cheese the place was, without the men. Not that there had been conscription. No one had forced them to go and fight. [...] For a long time, people wore the bewildered expression of players in a game where the rules were suddenly changed. They tried to take comfort from the fact that the boys hadn't died in vain: they had been part of a magnificent struggle for right. And there were moments where they could believe that and swallow down the angry, desperate screech that wanted to scrape its way out of their gullets like a mother bird. (*TLBO* 18–19)

This is the moment when it is not so easy to find validation for these deaths. They are seen as part of something bigger and greater, a fight for what is right, but this thought does not serve as solace at all times. This is one of those things that also leads to the events of Anzac Day when the drunken mob decides to start chasing the Roennfeldt family. They are the scapegoats for the town's grievance: as a German, Frank is their hated enemy who killed their beloved boys.

In trying to understand her losses, Isabel has two people she blames for what has happened: herself and Tom. She starts out with blaming herself, but especially with the loss of Lucy her anger plummets towards Tom. She struggles in order to understand his grief, too, which reinforces the blame she puts on him. As the events unravel, Isabel finally turns to blaming herself again, struggling with the shame she feels at the same time.

“What's the point in a doctor? The baby's gone.” Her gaze wandered. “How hopeless am I?” she muttered. “Other women have babies as easily as falling off a log.” (*TLBO* 74)

“It's my fault, Tom. It must be.”

“That’s not true, Izz.” He drew her into his chest and kissed her hair over and over. “There’ll be another. One day when we’ve got five kids running around and getting under your feet, this’ll all feel like a dream.” (*TLBO* 74)

Given no explanation for her first miscarriage, the idea of somehow being responsible for the loss floods Isabel’s mind. Tom tries to comfort her, but she sees this as an indication of failure in motherhood. She cannot think why or how she is the one to blame for the miscarriage, but it is the first option that she chooses to foster. She still manifests this idea after the stillbirth, when Tom tries to signal the news to Partageuse.

“But your mum and dad – they’ll want to know. They’re expecting you home on the next boat. They’re expecting their first grandchild.”

Isabel had looked at him, helpless. “Exactly! They’re expecting their first grandchild, and I’ve lost him.”

“They’ll be worried for you, Izz.”

“Then why upset them? Please, Tom. It’s our business. My business. We don’t have to tell the whole world about it. Let them have their dream a bit longer. I’ll send a letter when the boat comes again in June.”

“But that’s weeks away!”

“Tom, I just can’t.” A tear dropped on her nightgown. “At least they’ll have a few more happy weeks...” (*TLBO* 93)

She is the one who has *lost* the baby, indicating that she is somehow responsible. She does not want to admit this to the world and would rather keep the loss as her and Tom’s secret for as long as possible.

When Isabel is not blaming herself, another target for her is Tom. They are alone on an island, with no one else available. As discussed earlier, she tries to find solace in Tom but fails as she feels that he is only focused on the lighthouse and its duties. This leads her to believe that Tom does not care about their dead children as he keeps his feelings mainly to himself.

Her face darkened. “How can you be so hard-hearted? All you care about is your rules and your ships and your bloody light.” These were accusations Tom had heard before, when, wild with grief after her miscarriages, Isabel had let loose her rage against the only person there – the man who continued to do his duty, who comforted her as best he could, but kept his own grieving to himself.

Once again, he sensed her close to a dangerous brink, perhaps closer this time than she had ever been. (*TLBO* 98–99)

He rushed to gather her into his arms. “Calm down, Izz.” But she broke free and ran again, half hobbling when the pain got too bad.

“Don’t tell me to calm down, you stupid, stupid man! It’s your fault. I hate this place! I hate you! I want my baby!” The light scythed a path far above, leaving her untouched by its beam.

“You didn’t want him! That’s why he died. He could tell you didn’t care!”

“Come on, Izz. Come back inside.”

“You don’t feel anything, Tom Sherbourne! I don’t know what you did with your heart but it’s not inside you, that’s for sure!” (*TLBO* 237–238)

Isabel tries to reason that Tom did not want the baby in the first place, and this is the reason behind the stillbirth.

Conversation between bereaved parents would be vital for them to give apt support to each other, but Isabel and Tom sometimes struggle with forming a connection. Even Tom feels as if he does not always understand Isabel’s pain, or that he does not know how to react to the tragic events they face:

“Shall I get you a cup of tea?” Tom asked, at a loss. He was a practical man: give him a sensitive instrument, and he could maintain it; something broken, and he could mend it, meditatively, efficiently. But confronted by his grieving wife, he felt useless. (*TLBO* 73)

“The men he had accompanied to the border of life would be mourned by a mother, but on the battlefield, the loved ones were far away and beyond imagining. To see a child torn away from his mother at the very moment of birth – torn away from the only woman in the world Tom cared about – was a more dreadful kind of pain. (*TLBO* 93)

He cannot bring himself to properly grasp Isabel’s intense grief, and feels helpless in trying to deal with her sorrow. The whole concept of a mother losing her child seems unnatural, even dreadful to Tom. He tries his best to offer comfort, but as mentioned in previous examples, he keeps his grieving even more personal and private than Isabel. Since the two fail to build trust in this aspect, it affects the way in which Isabel blames Tom for losing Lucy.

Even though they do not lose Lucy in the same way that they lose their own children, in death, Isabel still feels her loss as intensely. The feeling is intensified because she has already been through the process three times, and now she is facing it yet again. This time, however, Isabel does not have to try and look for irrational reasons behind the loss, she knows who has caused this pain. The culprit is the man she has loved:

To have lost her child. To have seen Lucy so terrified and distraught at being torn from the only people in the world she really knew: this was already unbearable. But to know it had happened because of her own husband – the man she adored, the man she'd given her whole life to – was simply impossible to grasp. He'd claimed to care for her, yet he'd done the thing guaranteed to destroy her. (*TLBO* 227)

The same impulse keeps returning; "I must ask Tom what to do." Then she feels sick, as she remembers this is all Tom's doing. [...] Gradually, some part of her concedes there is no escape, and fear gives way to anger. Why? Why could he not just leave things to be? Tom is supposed to protect his family, not rip it apart. [...] Her thoughts spiral into darkness – he has been planning this for two years. Who is this man who could lie to her, tear her baby away? She remembers the sight of Hannah Roennfeldt touching his arm, and wonders what really happened between them. She retches violently onto the grass. (*TLBO* 210)

She is flicking in and out of understanding, in and out of being, in that fluttering thoughts that came originally with the loss her first baby, and grew with the snatching away of two more, and now Lucy. And the Tom she loved, the Tom she married, has disappeared too in the fog of deceit – slipping away when she wasn't looking: running off with notes to another woman; plotting to take her daughter away. (*TLBO* 260)

She feels that Tom has betrayed her. He has known how much she has suffered and still has chosen to act without her knowledge, to reveal the truth of Lucy/Grace's survival to Hannah. Tom is not solely the reason why Lucy is taken away from them. After he returns the silver rattle to Hannah, her father publishes a picture of it in a newspaper, leading to Bluey recognising it as something he has seen with Lucy. Isabel is oblivious to the part he has played in the events. She only sees Tom as the one to blame, regardless of who else is involved. Even worse, she begins to suspect that Tom has been unfaithful to her with Hannah Roennfeldt, adding a layer to her pain. Her reasoning

switches between thoughts of scenes that have happened and scenes that she imagines could have happened – regardless of how truthful they are.

Placing the blame on Tom is a coping mechanism to Isabel. It gives her a way of distracting herself from self-blame, which works as long as her anger and feelings of betrayal drive her forward:

This focusing outward, on Tom, painful as it was, saved her from a more intolerable examination. Slowly, taking shape among the shadows of her mind, was an almost solid sensation: an urge to punish; the fury of a wild thing deprived of her young. Tomorrow, the police would question her. By the time the stars had faded in the wakening sky, she had convinced herself: Tom deserved to suffer for what he had done. And he himself had handed her the weapons. (*TLBO* 227)

Since Tom is behind the actions that cause her to lose Lucy, she wants to punish him in the cruellest possible way: by refusing to take his side and implying to the police that he has hurt her in other ways as well. Her determined silence implies that she has been the victim, and through portraying Tom as the true culprit, she seeks her revenge, and also copes with the sorrow of loss. She does not put blame on herself until at a later point, but when she finally does, the outcome is rather tragic.

Blaming Tom and using it as a way of understanding the loss of Lucy has given Isabel a reason to move on, to somehow distract herself from the core of her pain. Once this façade is gone, she feels empty and her mental wellbeing becomes compromised:

Isabel sits alone under the jacaranda. Her grief for Lucy is as strong as ever: a pain that has no location and no cure. Putting down the burden of the lie has meant giving up the freedom of the dream. The pain of her mother's face, the hurt in her father's eyes, Lucy's distress, the memory of Tom, handcuffed: she tries to fend off the army of images, and imagines what prison will be like. Finally, she has no more strength. No more fight in her. Her life is just fragments, that she will never be able to reunite. Her mind collapses under the weight of it, and her thoughts descend into a deep, black well, where shame and loss and fear begin to drown her. (*TLBO* 324)

Shame and self-blame consume Isabel. She has no other explanation to offer herself for the loss of Lucy, and so she turns towards herself. The old thoughts of bringing disappointment and shame to her parents are returned, but they return with a wave of other thoughts as well. She is haunted by the thought of Lucy, what her and Tom's choices have caused the child to endure. She has to learn how to live a new life with a new family, and is confused with her longing towards the Sherbournes, and after overcoming the initial rage, a curiosity towards Hannah's family. The mental burden – the guilt, the shame, and the self-blame – becomes too much for Isabel to bear.

Reliance on God and Fate helps the characters either to explain things that cannot rationally be explained otherwise, or to find solace in their moments of pain. After Tom and Isabel suffer their first miscarriage, Isabel seeks consolation in the *Book of Common Prayer* (TLBO 103), but after the two following birth losses, she is furious at God. She cannot understand why she has to live when her innocent children have been deprived of that chance.

“I can't bear it!” she screamed in a voice so loud and shrill that the goats started from their sleep and began to move with a jangle of bells in their paddock. “I can't bear it any more! God, why do you make me live when my children die? I'd be better off dead!” She stumbled toward the cliff. (TLBO 238)

As Isabel's bereavement is full of anger and lack explanations, she feels that she wants to die. As Tom tries to stop her, her anger becomes full-blown, and is directed not at God anymore, but rather at Tom. At this point, God is not giving her any reasons, he is someone whose motives and meanings she cannot grasp.

As Isabel and Tom find Lucy, the tone towards God changes. He no longer serves as a vessel of loss, but rather as someone who gives them another chance with a child after so much heartbreak. “That she could have arrived now, barely two weeks after... It was impossible to see it as mere chance.” (TLBO 86) God and fate become intertwined in their conversation as Isabel tries to convince Tom that they should not report the finding of Lucy to the people in Partageuse. Lucy is a gift from God. “So Isabel floats further

and further into her world of divine benevolence, where prayers are answered, where babies arrive by the will of God, and the working of currents.” (*TLBO* 110) They have an almost pious right to keep Lucy.

After ‘losing’ Lucy/Grace to Hannah, and falling apart from Tom, Isabel later visits a friend of theirs, Ralph, who uses God again as an explanation to why the events have turned out as they have. To Ralph, God is a reason why Isabel and Tom found Lucy in the first place and decided to keep her; but he also sees that they have now served their purpose as her caretakers, and God is urging them to let Lucy go.

“But what about Lucy? She’s my daughter, Ralph.” She searched for a way to explain. “Can you imagine asking Hilda to give away one of her children?”
 “This isn’t giving away. This is giving back, Isabel.”
 “But wasn’t Lucy given to us? Isn’t that what God was asking of us?”
 “Maybe He was asking you to look after her. And you did. And maybe now He’s asking you to let someone else do that.” (*TLBO* 310–311)

At this point, Isabel is struggling to decide what she wants to do with Tom and her initial thoughts of revenge. Her talk with Ralph, and later her encounter with Hannah, lead to her finally deciding on revealing her part in the events and claiming responsibility.

At another point in the novel, Isabel is also using God as a motivation to do something. This is when she is contemplating what to do with Lucy after they find out she is Hannah’s lost daughter. She sees this as a test from God, something she needs to endure with.

For the briefest of moments, Isabel pictured herself handing Hannah the child. She was the mother. She had the right. But she was hallucinating. No, she had thought about it so many times. There was no going back on her decision. Whatever God meant by this, Isabel had to stay with the plan, go along with His will. (*TLBO* 191)

God becomes a reason to her for not giving up on her daughter, even though she knows that Lucy is not rightfully hers. Isabel does not understand God’s motivation behind this

test, but she also decides not to care. She relies on the higher power and things being out of her hands, meaning she has no other responsibility than Lucy.

Relying on God or fate also serves as a solace to Hannah when she learns about Frank's death. It is a relief for her to think that God is in charge of Frank's death and Grace's survival. This both gives her hope and gives her a chance to mourn her husband, something she has not dared to do before. "“Your husband is at peace in God's hands.” Because of the letter, Hannah goes through both a mourning and a renewal. God has taken her husband, but has saved her daughter.” (TLBO 155) God and death are linked with peace, which allows Hannah to feel better about finally knowing that her husband has died.

God also serves as an explanation to why her relationship with Grace does not work smoothly. After Grace goes missing, and Hannah temporarily loses her again, she tries to reason why: “Exhausted, a thought came to her with a twisted clarity. Perhaps God didn't want Grace to be with her. Perhaps she was to blame for everything. She waited, and prayed. And she made a solemn pact with God.” (TLBO 305) Interestingly, Hannah also blames herself for the troubles that they have been going through. She is so desperate for Grace to be well and healthy, that as she prays for her return, she also makes a pact with God. With this, she promises to return Grace to Isabel if she is found safe.

3.5 Transformative Dimension

The transformative dimension includes changes in the bereaved's identity and social roles. Initial feelings of displacement are also in this category, because they push the bereaved towards accepting their new circumstances in life, caused by their experience of loss. The changes are happening gradually and they might require a lot of time and work from the bereaved, but as a result, they will have readjusted their selves to answer to the demands of the new life.

A changed notion of parenthood is the central part of the transformative dimension in *The Light Between Oceans*. What makes it a little different here is that although Isabel and Tom lose three of their children (i.e. stop being parents three times), they gain a daughter after this. Before the arrival of Lucy, they have had to abandon the idea of parenthood, but especially Isabel struggles with the physical symptoms she is still showing.

Isabel's lips were pale and her eyes downcast. She still placed her hand fondly on her stomach sometimes, before its flatness reminded her it was empty. And still, her blouses bore occasional patches from the last of the breast milk that had come in so abundantly in the first days, a feast for an absent guest. Then she would cry again, as though the news were fresh. (*TLBO* 85)

Isabel remembered the fresh agony of the arrival of the milk, making her breasts heavy and sore with no baby to suckle – it had seemed a particularly cruel mechanism of nature. Now, this infant was seeking desperately for her milk, or perhaps just for comfort, now that immediate starvation had been swayed off. She paused for a moment, her thoughts swirling with the crying and the longing and the loss. (*TLBO* 95)

Although the baby has died, Isabel's body still betrays her by producing milk. This pains her until the arrival Lucy, because her bodily reactions are only a reminder of what could have been but was cruelly taken away from her. Now her body can be utilised again in order to feed and bring comfort to an infant.

Isabel has been very excited about her pregnancies, preparing for the arrival of the babies meticulously. To her, the idea of motherhood is only natural: "It's nature, Tom. What's there to be afraid of?" (*TLBO* 66). She learns about babies from *The Australian Mother's Manual of Efficient Baby-Rearing*, because, as she points out to Tom, "I just want to do things right. It's not like I can pop next door and ask Mum, is it?" (*TLBO* 70) To Isabel, being a mother is a way things should be. She wants to be efficient, and she wants to be a perfect mother. When the pregnancies end in the loss of her children, she becomes heartbroken not only because of the loss, but also because she cannot live up to the expectations she has set for herself. Her self-esteem suffers. This is one of the things that she tries to deal with before the arrival of Lucy, because she needs to adjust herself to yet another loss, yet another missed chance of being a mother.

When they find Lucy, Isabel and Tom are faced with a new chance of parenthood. What was lost before is suddenly handed to them by the grace of God and Fate. To Isabel, the things she has learned about before flood back to her memory, guiding her steps with taking care of Lucy.

Back in the cottage, Isabel's belly quickened at the very sight of the baby – her arms knew instinctively how to hold the child and calm her, soothe her. As she scooped warm water over the infant, she registered the freshness of her skin, taut and soft and without a wrinkle. She kissed each of the tiny fingertips in turn, gently nibbling down the nails a fraction so the child would not scratch herself. She cupped the baby's head in the palm of her hand, and with the silk handkerchief she kept for best, dabbed away a fine crust of mucus from under her nostrils, and wiped the dried salt of tears from under her eyes. The moment seemed to merge into one with another bathing, another face – a single act that had merely been interrupted. (*TLBO* 86)

The simple fact was that, sure as graft will take and fuse on a rosebush, the root stock of Isabel's motherhood – her every drive and instinct, left raw and exposed by the recent stillbirth – had grafted seamlessly to the scion, the baby which needed mothering. Grief and distance bound the wound, perfecting the bond with a speed only nature could engineer. (*TLBO* 103)

Isabel's motherhood is indicated to be an integral part of her that was only waiting to be fulfilled, to be given a chance to thrive. With Lucy, she can fulfil this part of herself, and at the same time, Lucy becomes her 'saviour' in her mourning. Lucy distracts her from the loss of her own children, healing the fresh wounds. She is ready to welcome this new chance immediately, but Tom is the one who has more reservations about keeping Lucy. "As she blinked at him, and looked right into his eyes, Tom was suddenly aware of an almost physical ache. She was giving him a glimpse of a world he would now surely never know." (*TLBO* 94) To begin with, Lucy to him is just a snapshot of a lost chance of parenthood. It takes time before Lucy starts to grow on him and he allows himself to become attached to the child, but this attachment is constantly compromised or shadowed by his moral: whether it has been the right choice not to report the finding of Lucy, and later, whether it is right not to tell Hannah that Lucy is in fact Grace.

The loss of Lucy to Hannah means that Isabel needs to readjust to the idea of not being a mother, but also to the fact that the core of her happiness is gone.

She tried to recall that state of ecstatic anticipation, the sense that life, after all the grief and loss the war had brought, was about to bloom. But the feeling was lost: now it all seemed a mistake, a delusion. Her happiness on Janus was distant, unimaginable. (*TLBO* 226)

Since her return, Isabel found herself constantly on the lookout for Lucy – where had she got to? Was it time for bed? What would she give her for lunch? Then her brain would correct her, remind her how things were now, and she would go through the agony of loss all over again. (*TLBO* 241)

Isabel's memory is holding on to the routines of her daily life with Lucy. These memories also work as a distraction from the pain for a while, but when she remembers the truth, the pain returns. Constantly going back and forth confuses her, and means that the pain keeps her in its grasp. Her heart and mind know what Lucy should be doing at a given time, but it does not make adjusting to loss any easier.

Isabel not only has to deal with the notion of having lost yet another child, she has also isolated herself from Tom which means that she struggles finding her place as a wife. Her loyalty should be with him, but as she feels that he has betrayed her cruelly, she wants her revenge. The aspect of Isabel blaming Tom was already discussed in 3.4, but it is also an important aspect of her trying to readjust to her changed role. If she cannot love and trust Tom anymore, what is her place in life?

There's no one she can talk to. No one who will understand. What sense can her life make by itself, without the family she lived for? [...] The question harangue her as the moon languishes in the branches above: who is Tom, really? This man she thought she knew so well. How could he be capable of such betrayal? What has her life with him been? And who were the souls – that blending of her blood with his – who failed to find their way into being with her? A goblin thought jumps onto her shoulder: what's the point of tomorrow? (*TLBO* 260–261)

This passage indicates how lost Isabel feels. She does not know how to make sense of her life in this new position it has placed her: she does not know how to go on. She

reflects on the losses of her babies but also on Tom's betrayal. The feeling of giving up is present, as Isabel is not able to adjust to the situation. She is lost without her family, the one thing she feels she has lived for.

As Isabel finally makes her mind to stand by Tom and face the consequences of having kept Lucy as their own, she crumbles beneath her choice. Her life, centred around Lucy, still seems meaningless although she has chosen to do the morally right thing.

Her grief for Lucy is as strong as ever: a pain that has no location and no cure. Putting down the burden of the lie has meant giving up the freedom of the dream. The pain of her mother's face, the hurt in her father's eyes, Lucy's distress, the memory of Tom, handcuffed: she tries to fend off the army of images, and imagines what prison will be like. Finally, she has no more strength. No more fight in her. Her life is just fragments, that she will never be able to reunite. Her mind collapses under the weight of it, and her thoughts descend into a deep, black well, where shame and loss and fear begin to drown her. (*TLBO* 324)

The same passage that was used as an example to highlight her shame in 3.4, indicates how Isabel is not able to readjust to her life after Lucy. The pain and the shame are too intense. The initial feeling of displacement, not being able to make sense, is common in the process of identity change, and here it results in a withdrawal of spirits. With Tom's help, she is able to continue living her life, but her mind is constantly full of doubt and longing.

“And besides, what's left?”

“Left of what?”

“Left of anything. What's left of – our life?”

“There's no going back on the Lights, if that's what you mean.”

Isabel sighed sharply. “It's not what I mean, Tom.” She pulled a piece of honeysuckle from the old wall beside her, and examined it. As she shredded a leaf, then another, the fine pieces fell in a jagged mosaic on her skirt. “Losing Lucy – it's as if something has been amputated. Oh, I wish I could find the words to explain it.” (*TLBO* 331)

She turned away, and pulled some more honeysuckle from its vine. “What are we going to do? How are we going to live? I can't go on looking at you every day and resenting you for what you did. Being ashamed of myself, too.”

“No, love, you can't.”

“Everything’s ruined. Nothing can ever be put right.”

Tom rested a hand on hers. “We’ve put things right as well as we can. That’s all we can do. We have to live with things the way they are now.” (*TLBO* 332–333)

A part of Isabel has gone missing with Lucy, and although she is able to stay together with Tom, she never seems to properly move on from the loss of Lucy. Before she dies, she is worried that God has never forgiven her for what she has done. Her sense of self is still shadowed with shame and fear.

As mentioned earlier in this sub-chapter, Tom has more reservations about accepting Lucy as their new child and keeping her, yet he is mesmerised by the child. He too had been excited about having children with Isabel, but has learned to let go of the grief caused by the miscarriages and stillbirth. Lucy is a chance to him to act like a parent as well.

As she blinked at him, and looked right into his eyes, Tom was suddenly aware of an almost physical ache. She was giving him a glimpse of a world he would now surely never know. (*TLBO* 94)

Tom was absorbed by how the process performed itself. The very fact that the baby required nothing of him stirred a sense of reverence for something far beyond his comprehension. (*TLBO* 94–95)

Tom’s affection towards Lucy begins to grow steadily, although his mind is clouded with guilt and doubt. He is scared to let himself fall in love with a baby whom he knows they should not keep, but he cannot help himself.

In the week since her arrival, he had become accustomed to her gurgles, her silent, sleeping presence in her cot, which seemed to waft through the cottage like the smell of baking or flowers. It worried him that he could find himself listening out for her to wake in the morning, or going by reflex to pick her up when she started to cry. (*TLBO* 102)

Tom has his own routines with Lucy. She becomes a part of their life even if his conscience is in constant battle.

It astounds him that the tiny life of the girl means more to him than all the millennia before it. He struggles to make sense of his emotions – how he can feel both tenderness and unease when she kisses him goodnight, or presents a grazed knee for him to kiss better with the magic power only a parent has. [...] This child is healthy and happy and adored, in this little world beyond the reach of newspapers and gossip. Beyond the reach of reality. There are weeks at a time when Tom can almost rest in a story of a normal, happy family, as if it is some kind of opiate. (*TLBO* 164–165)

The happy family, happy parenthood, can only exist for him in the isolation of Janus Rock. In the mainland, the image of Hannah Roennfeldt and Lucy's true parentage awaits. Tom struggles with this dilemma, but tries to be as good a father to Lucy as he can be.

When the police arrive to take Lucy and the rest of the family mainland, Tom wants to protect Isabel to his best ability. He is willing to take the blame in order to save her from any additional suffering that a lawsuit would bring. However, he is surprised by her reaction, the intense anger that she feels towards him. He understands why she feels that he has betrayed her, but he is shocked to learn that she has not confirmed that Frank Roennfeldt was already dead when they found him. Nevertheless, he sticks to his own story, refusing to reveal her part in the events. When confronted by Ralph to tell the truth to the police, he still protects Isabel.

“People can only take so much, Ralph. Christ – I know that better than anyone. Izzy was just an ordinary, happy girl until she got tangled up with me. None of this would have happened if she hadn't come out to Janus. She thought it'd be paradise. She had no idea what she was in for. I should never have let her come out.” [...]

“It's tough enough on Izz being without Lucy. She'd never survive time in – Ralph, this is the only thing I can do for her. It's as close to making it up to her as I'll ever get.” (*TLBO* 265)

Tom blames himself for hurting Isabel, but the instinct to protect her is stronger. He is willing to suffer anything if it means that she does not have to go to prison. As estranged as Isabel is from Tom, his loyalty to her is unyielding. He wants to fulfil his duty as a loving, protective husband, even though he has been separated from Isabel.

When Tom and Isabel are finally reunited, his wish to protect her is still present. He tries to help her find meaning in her life, through which he can find a meaning in his own. Isabel never truly recovers, but Tom does his best in their relationship. He serves as her guiding light, a reassurance that things are alright despite what has happened. Isabel becomes the centre of his life and the focus of his energy. This is how Tom becomes to accept his changed role in life; not a parent to Lucy anymore, but an almost parent-like figure to Isabel. He never stops loving or supporting her, and being busy with her recovery gives him a reason to keep going. He finds his inner peace a great deal earlier than Isabel.

Hannah's process of transformation or readjusting to her changed role in life is very complex, as she has not accepted that her husband and daughter have died. She holds on to them in her memories and her hopes; although they are not physically present, they are mentally always there. This is proven in a striking way when Grace is finally returned to her. When she has been holding onto the memories, she has never acknowledged the fact that something has changed. Instead, she has believed that everything falls back into normal and when it does not, she is confused.

Hannah had handed Frank a tiny, dark-haired infant weighing twelve pounds, and Fate had handed back to her a frightened, willful blonde changeling who could stand on her own two feet, walk, and scream until her face was scarlet and her chin wet with tears and dribble. The confidence Hannah had gained in handling her baby in the first weeks of her life was swiftly eroded. The rhythms of intimacy, the unspoken understandings, which she had assumed she could just pick up again, were lost to her: the child no longer responded in a way she could predict. They were like two dancers whose steps were foreign to one another. (*TLBO* 248–249)

Hannah notices that she cannot understand her daughter. They have become strangers as Lucy/Grace is longing after the only family she has known, Isabel and Tom. The child is bewildered about being handed over to another woman, and Hannah feels this painfully.

Despite all her trouble, she continues to hope that something would still make Grace recognise her as her real mother, and that all of their trouble could be put behind.

Grace is her daughter. Something in the child's soul will surely remember, recognize her, eventually. She just needs to take things a day at a time, as her father says. Soon enough, the little girl will be hers again, will be the joy she was on the day she was born. (*TLBO* 259)

Yet Hannah is constantly disappointed in her efforts. She tries her best, but Grace cannot accept that she is now her mother, and the only mother she will know. Hannah is not able to answer to the needs of her child, and she feels disappointed, even betrayed.

The weeks following Grace's return were more harrowing for Hannah than the weeks following her loss, as she was faced with truths which, long pushed away, were now inescapable. Years really had passed. Frank really was dead. Part of her daughter's life had gone and could never be brought back. While Grace had been absent from Hannah's life, she had been present in someone else's. Her child had lived a life without her; without, she caught herself thinking, a moment's thought for her. With shame, she realized she felt betrayed. By a baby. (*TLBO* 261)

A blame is sparked in Hannah over this realisation. She blames the Sherbournes, but she also sees that there is some blame in her. She has been so desperate to be a mother again that when this hope becomes reality, she finds it hard to adjust when things are not going according to her plan. She wants to win Grace over, but realises that she is still too attached to Isabel and Tom.

Grace's disappearance leads Hannah to thinking that she is not fit to be a mother to this child, and she considers handing her over to Isabel. When the truth behind Isabel's part in the events is revealed, however, Hannah has to abandon this idea. She also seems to come to her senses. She realises that she needs to put herself and her child first, and try to make the most out of life that way. She becomes much more comfortable around Grace, and they start finding things that bring them together instead of separating them. Hannah finally has the chance to be the mother she has so long wished to be.

3.6 Affective Dimension

The last dimension of grief accounts to consider is the affective dimension, which refers to the voicing of grief and all the emotions linked to it. As such, the whole novel counts as the affective dimension, because it depicts the ups and downs of three bereaved parents, and how they try to make sense of the world. There are also differences between the three characters and how they voice their grief, and this aspect will be briefly addressed in this sub-chapter.

Isabel is by far the most vocal of the three characters when it comes to expressing her grief, but only when she can talk to Tom. As discussed before, Isabel is very private about her miscarriages and stillbirth. She does not wish to discuss or even reveal these experiences and the feelings related to them to other people, including her parents. If she expresses her feelings, they are addressed to Tom, including the moments when she puts the blame on him. Only when she loses Lucy as well does she become more keen on expressing her feelings also to others. At this point, the truth about all her pregnancies has been revealed, so grieving becomes much more public. She has also moved back to Partageuse to live with her parents while Tom awaits the trial, but her parents are worried about her silent moments. They believe that she tries to protect Tom when she refuses to speak. When she does speak, it is almost as if she tried to reason with herself out loud, as the example with the funerals indicates (see 3.2 for discussion).

Tom, on the contrary, is very private throughout the novel. He prefers reflecting the losses alone and does not address these issues with Isabel. He allows her to do the talking, to let out all the sorrow and pain, but he keeps his feelings to himself. He is very closed, but possibly thinks that he can save Isabel from additional pain if he lets her grieve in peace, and does not burden her with his own. Tom has also spent most of his life surviving on his own. He does not speak about his past, his parents, his experiences in the war; he isolates these from the life he lives with Isabel. This leaves her feeling left out, and also leads to her thinking that Tom is unfeeling and cold. She wishes that he would speak about his experiences more, and about the loss of their children. These two ways of expressing grief, to the only other person who is part of the

same loss, and privately musing on what has happened, creates a misunderstanding that develops into a rift between Isabel and Tom.

As mentioned in 3.2, Hannah cannot address the loss she has faced. The people of Partageuse want to forget what happened during Anzac Day, so Hannah is left with no one to talk to about her feelings. She is alone, and lacking physical or material confirmation of what has happened to Frank and Grace. She only has her memories, but it is not until Tom's letter that she actively thinks about what caused Frank and Grace to take off on the dinghy. Hannah is basically denied the affective dimension unless she turns to her memories.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to consider bereavement, especially parental bereavement, in *The Light Between Oceans* from the viewpoint of grief accounts and meaning reconstruction. Dimensions of grief accounts were chosen to help identify specific examples of parental bereavement. The dimensions included the restorative, affirmative, evaluative, interpretative, transformative, and affective dimension. The aspects of meaning reconstruction – making sense of the loss, finding benefits after the loss, and identity change – were chosen as a framework against which the dimensions of grief accounts could be used. The dimensions were used as a tool to identify examples, whereas the aspects of meaning reconstruction were used to better highlight and generalise how Isabel, Tom, and Hannah try to deal with their grief.

The restorative dimension revealed a tendency for Tom and Isabel to distract themselves from pain with different kinds of tasks and chores. Daily routines could also be seen as an example of the restorative dimension, because they are aimed at helping Hannah to continue with her life without any material proof of her family's death. For Isabel and Tom, the finding of Lucy serves as the biggest part of the restorative dimension, because it helps them fulfil their roles as parents and to lessen the pain of the previous pregnancy losses.

The affirmative dimension revealed a need to legitimise grieving through the commemoration of the dead. For Tom and Isabel, this is voluntary from the very first miscarriage through making crosses and planting rosemary bushes in the memory of their babies. After the stillbirth, Isabel goes through with a routine of cleaning up the little body as if he had been born alive. These actions give Tom and Isabel a chance to create a space where they could remember their children and locate their pain. It was also shown how this becomes complicated for Isabel, since her self-blame and feelings of shame make it nearly impossible for her to legitimise her grieving publicly. Hannah's lack of material proof of her family's fate means that she finds no solace from the memorial her father wanted to set up, further complicated by the fact that the people of Partageuse do not wish to address or acknowledge the events that led to Frank and

Grace's escape to the ocean. When Hannah receives a letter from Tom, confirming Frank's death, she is finally able to start processing her grief.

The evaluative dimension revealed that to Isabel, there is no proper chance to see a value in life after losing Lucy. She becomes disoriented, and struggles to find a meaning. Tom and Hannah both manage to find something positive in the aftermath of the events. Tom directs his energy into helping Isabel recover and enjoy life again. Hannah learns to reclaim a power over her life, and through this she is able to start rebuilding her relationship with Grace as well.

The interpretative dimension reflected how the characters were trying to find meanings behind and causality in the losses they encountered. This included assigning blame. On the level of society, child loss is accepted as a normal way of life at the time of the events (mainly 1920s). This general view is contrasted with the intense pain Isabel, Tom, and Hannah feel during their grieving. They, especially Tom and Isabel, cannot or sometimes even choose not to understand a reason behind their pregnancy losses. Isabel turns to blaming herself and Tom, as well as God. God also works as a solace when Lucy arrives into their lives, becoming a gift from God after all their pain. Hannah too turns to God when she tries to understand why her relationship with Grace is so changed after being reunited, and when she learns about Frank's death.

The transformative dimension indicated how the characters dealt with their changed identities and social roles. Isabel's ambition to become a mother is challenged by her pregnancy losses. She has started to give up on the idea of being a mother, even though her body still has not fully recovered from the stillbirth. When Lucy arrives, she is given another chance of embracing motherhood, and she takes this chance excitedly. As long as Lucy is around, she can fulfil this role. When Lucy is lost, so is the core of Isabel's happiness and identity, something she finds difficult to come to terms with. Lucy is also Tom's renewed chance at fatherhood, but although he becomes deeply attached to the child, this attachment is shadowed with his constant moral battle of having kept her. Hannah's process of trying to readjust to her changed role or identity is also complex as she, to begin with, does not acknowledge the loss of her child. When Grace is returned

to her, Hannah believes that everything will return to normal immediately, and is heartbroken when Lucy/Grace rejects her. She needs to rebuild the child's trust, but the process is so exhausting that she nearly gives up and returns Grace to Isabel. It is through the evaluative dimension that she finally learns to embrace her role as Grace's mother again.

Finally, the affective dimension briefly addressed how differently the three characters voice their grief. Isabel is the most vocal, even if Tom is mainly the only person to whom she wants to talk about her grief. Tom, on the other hand, is very closed and private in his grief, which leads Isabel to think that he does not care about losing their children. Hannah cannot voice her grief because of the circumstances that led to Frank's death. The society in Partageuse does not want to remember and so, Hannah is left with her own memories and recollections.

Meaning reconstruction worked in different ways for each character. Isabel tries to make sense of things by blaming Tom and herself, which finally leads to her mental breakdown. She finds nothing positive in the outcome of the events, requiring Tom's help to move forward after being released from the nursing home. Tom relies on private reflections and concentrating on his duties as a lighthouse keeper. When he can no longer be a father, he guides his energy toward Isabel and helping her to get better. He becomes an almost parentlike figure to her. Hannah needs the letter from Tom in order to start processing the loss of Frank. Before this, she has concentrated on keeping her hopes up, retaining a routine which allows her to keep the memory of her family alive. She has never received an apology from the people of Partageuse who were part of the angry mob driving Frank away with Grace, and this adds to her rage as she feels like others are trying to guide her towards giving Grace back to Isabel and speaking for Tom in court. She becomes furious, deciding to put herself and Grace before anyone else. Through memories of Frank, she is able to let go of her pain and anger towards the Sherbournes, reaching a state of forgiveness which also allows her to start rebuilding her life with her daughter.

So, in conclusion, the two central themes of meaning reconstruction in *The Light Between Oceans* are assigning blame and benefit finding. Tom and Hannah, who are able to find something positive after the losses, are the two characters who seem to survive their grief “successfully”, or in a way that allows them to continue with their lives. Hannah, of course, is reunited with her daughter which helps her to cope, but Tom needs to find a new meaning to life without children. Isabel, who succumbs to blaming both Tom and herself, cannot reconstruct meanings of the world and of her changed self in a satisfying way. As a result, she is not fully able to move forward from losing Lucy.

Grief accounts and meaning reconstruction are only one way of looking at bereavement. There are other theories and approaches available, and a viewpoint from trauma studies could also work with a novel like *The Light Between Oceans*, as parental bereavement is such an intense, traumatic event. I sought to provide an alternative viewpoint which would better highlight meaning making in bereavement. Other aspects could have been included. I did not address the possibility of there being differences in the grieving between parents according to their gender, but I believe that the examples chosen for the analysis prove that at least Tom and Isabel deal with their grief similarly up to a certain point, but very differently when it comes to matters like moving forward and vocalising their grief.

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