

The Authoring-Self and The Involving Narration: A Reading of Form in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to trace the aesthetics of the renowned Defamiliarization technique in Markus Zusak's novel *The Book Thief*. The plethora of the Formalist influence is to be conceived on various levels, beginning with the examination of the Janus-like relation between the reader and the unnatural narrator of Zusak's selection (Death) where the employment of the technique within the structure of the narrative voice personifies death and challenges the reader's traditional human-centered perspective. It results in blurring the reader's persona with that of Death, the narrator. The examination of the technique is further enhanced by the creation of what is contended as the "we" narration by the narrative voice in order to solidify its relation with the reader. Furthermore, viewing Zusak's text as a Bildungsroman novel would lead to another trace of the aforementioned technique for it signals out the metafictional impression of stressing on the power of words and the extent it reshapes the protagonist's life up to the point of enabling her to document her own story, which is traced as another form of defamiliarization technique embedded under the idea of being a self-theatricalising protagonist.

Key Words: Markus Zusak, Defamiliarization, "we" narration, self-theatricalising.

الشخصية ذاتية التأليف والسرد المشترك: قراءة شكلية في رواية سارقة الكتب لماركوس

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الملخص

ترمي هذه الدراسة الى تعقب جماليات اسلوب التغريب في رواية سارقة الكتب للكاتب ماركوس زوساك. وفرة تأثير الشكلائية الروسية يتم تصورها على عدة المستويات، بدءاً بفحص العلاقة مزدوجة الوجه ما بين القارئ والسارد الغير مألوف (الموت) والتي من خلالها يتم تجسيد استخدام الأسلوب المتبع في بناء شخصية الموت وتحدي قابلية أستيعاب القارئ التقليدية المبنية على منظوره الأنساني. لغرض ترسيخ الاسلوب بشكل أكبر يتم إنشاء مقاربة سردية تسمى سرد "نحن" لغرض تدوير الصوت السردى مع القارئ. بالإضافة الى ذلك، فإن النظر إلى نص زوساك باعتباره رواية تشكيلية من شأنه أن يؤدي إلى أثر آخر للتقنية المذكورة أعلاه بالأشارة إلى الانطباع الذاتي الانعكاس المتمثل في التركيز على قوة الكلمات ومدى قدرتها على إعادة تشكيل حياة بطلة الرواية إلى حد تمكينها من توثيق قصتها الخاصة، والذي يمكن تتبعه كشكل آخر من أشكال أسلوب التغريب المضمن في فكرة كون كاتب الرواية هو بطلها نفسه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ماركوس زوساك، التغريب، سردية "نحن"، الشخصية ذاتية التأليف.

1. Introduction

*The Book Thief*¹, by many critics, is considered to be Zusak's most successful novel for it provides for the readers the experience of indulging themselves within the social and psychological condition of German society during the Second World War and demonstrating that the actions of a single dictator doesn't necessarily represent the ideas of a whole nation. Though there are many characteristics that define the uniqueness of the novel, like the exploration of themes such as the

¹ Throughout this research, the novel would be referred to as *TBT*. In addition, the name of the novel is attributed to what the narrator calls Lissel by, which is a reputation that she gained because of her habit of stealing books, which in turn symbolises the idea that even in the darkest times of humanity, knowledge must be inherited from one generation to the other despite the way it is passed down.

importance of books and reading especially during times of conflict, yet the most distinctive one is presented by the journey that both the protagonist and the narrator undergo and the development occurring on their personalities and views of life. The story revolves around Lissel, who moves to live with her foster parents after the death² of her brother in the opening chapter of the novel and the departure of her mother. Throughout the story, the protagonist evolves from being an illiterate orphan in the small town of Molching into gaining an insight regarding the world which enables her to reflect her experiences of the world through writing her own book. Interestingly, the narrative is vocalised through Death, who also demonstrates a peculiar shift by departing from the common convention of being a merciless reaper of souls, instead taking on the role of a compassionate narrator that reflects upon his inability to change the circumstances of the world of the story.

The development of the plot throughout the text pours in the direction of the main character Lissel being indulged into the shifting tides of life, and at the same level, the humanised journey of Death and its relation to the human world. This thematic crux of development functions on two levels, the first is represented in her artistic development starting from learning the basics of language until ending up writing her own book, while the second is more related to the sensational development of death, as the narrator of the novel, and the sympathy it grows towards the living. Departing from the relation between Lissel and Death, it is proper to suggest that each of these levels, which are essential for the development of story, have an active variation of defamiliarization which is attributed according to their function. In other words, the poetics of the Russian Formalist school dissects the configuration of the text into a form-content nexus, accordingly, this research will investigate the traces

² For the sake of distinguishing between death in the sense of losing one's life and the name of Zusak's narrator, the latter is capitalised throughout this research.

of Defamiliarization technique, as propounded by Viktor Shklovsky in his Article *Art as Device* (1917), on the level of the form of the text which would be the retrospect of the narrator. In addition, it will examine the *becoming* of Lissel as the writer of her own fiction, which is enlisted as a retrospect to the process where the content defamiliarizes its text, in order to reframe the form–content nexus within the domain of the narrative discourse.

2. The Engaging Narration of Death

Death, as an idea, represents the fixed concept that penetrates the fabric of reality by being the most proven fact regardless of one's beliefs. Referring to José Saramago's *Death With Interruptions*³ (2005), it can be assumed that Death has left the realm of Saramago's novel in order to narrate Zusak's. Evidently, the function of Death in these particular works is in a state of contrast but shares one characteristic feature. The contrast is represented in the idea that Saramago used the absence of Death in order to establish a defamiliarized environment where he creates a nameless country which is cursed with the absence of Death, therefore absence is the hallmark that Saramago employs in his effort to create the defamiliarized setting of his novel. Furthermore, this trademark is part of Saramago's style in rendering most of his works in order to cultivate his philosophy of aesthetic creations that are built on the exploration of the impossible, as he states in an interview with Julian Evans in a documentary about his life entitled *Jose Saramago : A Life of Resistance* (2002). On the other hand, the framework of Zusak's quest of implying his narrative within the retroscope of Death initiates a double-layered endeavourment towards both the humanisation of Death

³ According to Jason Weiss (2009), in *Death with Interruptions* José Saramago “challenges mortality itself while playfully subverting the timeworn theme of eternal life ... offer[ing] a panoramic view of events, the various institutions of church, state, and commerce each acting to protect their interest” (Weiss).

by demonstrating its sympathetic approach to humans, and the dehumanisation of the reader considering that he is conceiving the text by using Death's eyes, which can create a sense of distance for their human-centred viewpoint. Hence, within the aforementioned branches of defamiliarization in Zusak's novel, the subdivision of Death's defamiliarized nature has two layers, the first being the defamiliarization of the reader's process of engagement with the text by seeing, feeling, and believing what the narrator believes, and the other would represent the narrator's defamiliarized experience for the world of the text and the implications built on that assumption.

The defamiliarization of the reader's experience departs from the point of configuring the novel within the division of Holocaust literature. Although Zusak admits, in his interview with Cindy Hudson, that he never intended to structure his work within this domain, yet the critical reception of the novel was widely regarding it as one of its contemporary representations. Aliona Yarova, in her article *Haunted by Humans: Inverting the Reality of the Holocaust in Markus Zusak's The Book Thief (2016)*, suggests that the work represents an invitation to the reader to explore scenes that are built within the reality of the German society during the war, whereas everything is rendered on realistic and actual historical events (54). Furthermore, what prevents the work from being regarded within the genre of historical realism is presented in the idea that the story is narrated from the perspective of an unrealistic narrator, making the text project the challenge of presenting the daily events of a society during the war which are vocalised through this unfamiliar narrator; "Death is the only unreal character in this otherwise realistic novel, and though he does not interact with real human characters, we see all the events through his eyes"(54). From the framework provided by Yarova where she exclaims that Zusak's novel represents a space where Death is a visitor to the "hellish realms of Nazi Germany to

discover the humanity of the humans who were dehumanised in the Holocaust" (54), the reader's speculation pours in the direction of the unique experience of Zusak's world where humans are ripped off their humanity and in a state of conflict represented throughout the narrative voice. The idea is further assured in the prologue of the novel where Death declares his optimistic vision regarding the whole idea of portraying the sensitivity of the manner of war and death to the reader: "it suffices to say that at some point in time, I will be standing over you, as genially as possible. Your soul will be in my arms" (*TBT* 2). The metafictionality of this quote represents a thread that binds the reader to a given fact, an experience which is yet to come at some point. The first challenge that the reader may encounter is the idea of experiencing the impossible, for death is a one time event in the life of a person, but in *TBT*, this experience is prolonged, exaggerated, and personified with human characteristics.

The profoundness of Zusak's selection of the narrative voice to narrate his story itself can be regarded as a projection for the concept of Defamiliarization by viewing Death not as an intrusive element that occupies the role of the narrative voice, but rather as a product crystallised by its textual setting, by exclaiming "I am a result" (5). Reflecting on this idea, Erin Gipson denotes, in the introductory chapter of his thesis *A Close Encounter with Death: Narration in Markus Zusak's The Book Thief* (2017), that the nature of the narrator is "crucially not omniscient; rather, he merely performs omniscience to mask his humanlike limitations"(1). The purpose of camouflaging the narrator behind such consumption establishes for its credibility as a typical narrative voice and, at the same rate, facilitates the reader's suspension of disbelief in conceptualising its untraditional nature: "death recruits the reader's trust through his humanlike engaging narration, which builds the credibility of his performance of omniscience"(Gipson 1).

While structuring Death as the narrator undergoes the process of aesthetic rendering in projecting it as an unfamiliar voice of conveying the events, a stress upon the concept that the human perception of Zusak's narrative voice must be modified in terms of what fits its defamiliarized nature, thus allowing the structural poetics of Death to escape the limitations of Shklovsky's "habitual perception." Gipson reaffirms this claim by stating "unnatural narrators should not be measured by standards of human consciousness" (3). The gap created by this conception in understanding the true essence of the narrative voice is contradictory in nature, for on one hand there's Zusak's attempt to personify his narrator with human characteristics in order to establish the aforementioned credibility. At the same time, this conception camouflages the unorthodox nature of the narrative voice and its irrelevance as a projector of the narrative discourse. Hence, Gipson suggests what can be configured as a spectrum-like nature for configuring the nature of Zusak's Death by arguing "we need to account for unnatural narrators with strategically anthropomorphized narration"(3).

The ghostly nature of Death that excludes any possibility for him to engage with other characters also serves as an ironic metaphor that reveals a sense of marginalisation or the exclusion of the narrator from interfering in the realm of the story. Death, who cannot directly incorporate its sympathy with characters as it exclaims "that is not allowed"(7), establishes a bond with the reader by addressing him directly in order to captivate his sympathetic approach embedded within the postmodernist metafictionality. Gipson denotes that "Death employs the confiding, persuasive interventions of engaging narration because... strict laws forbid Death from speaking to humans while they live"(8). Departing from this engagement, Death prevents any possibility for the reader to alienate himself from the text's emotional appealance (Gipson

10) which is a very crucial characteristic in the process of its humanisation. The narrator anticipates every situational outcome and gradually builds its way towards familiarising (habitualising the reader with his unfamiliar nature as Death being the narrative voice) itself throughout eliminating the hesitation in the mindset of the reader which is resulted by the idea of its unnaturality. Death exclaims "which in turn brings me to the subject I am telling you about tonight, or today, or whatever the hour and color" (9), which indicates that the narrator is willing to comply with whichever sort of mind frame or perspective that the reader is rendering during his engagement with the story.

Dwelling upon the idea of direct engagement with the reader, it must be clarified that in some cases in Zusak's novel, this approach reflects the metafictionality that Gipson names "postmodernist playfulness" (Gipson 12). The narrator makes sure that the continuation or discontinuation of the reader's sympathy and engagement is preserved by presenting bold written comments on separate occasions while reading the work. These comments function not only as textual checkpoints, but also as a sort of interruptions that remind the reader of the fictionality of the work, though it is based on historical events that happened in the actual world:

SOME OTHER SMALL FACTS

Sometimes I arrive too early.

I rush,

and some people cling longer

to life than expected. (6)

Throughout these comments, Death also presents various aspects regarding the text as it gives some background description regarding characters, observations, or thoughtfully rendered opinions in the form of a critique for human nature. Gipson further demonstrates the function of these comments by stating "these bolded and centred blocks of text,

with separate titles marked with asterisks and all caps disrupt Death's narration of Lissel's story to catch the reader's attention, and therefore alert the reader of Death's direct address" (12).

The incarnation of Death's relation as a narrator to the reader in the form of engaging narration creates a sort of infusion between the faces of the janus, in which Gipson suggests that such sort of engagement also "breaks the natural barrier of distrust between [it]self and his reader" (13). The poetics of this infusion further closes the gap between the reader and the text by incarnating the reader's perception within the text in the form of Death's perspective. By closing this gap, Death is now not only a critical agency that observes the horrors of the story's setting placed in WW2; but also a representation for the reader's embeddedness within the realm of the story as it exclaims "we both had it easy till now, my friend, don't you think?" (99). Furthermore, Gipson reflects that the purpose of Death adjoining with the reader by the use of the "we" pronoun is a reference to the disjunction between the two sides which are only brought together to undergo the tragedy of the narrative "in this use of 'we,' Death refers to himself and readers as separate beings joined together by a shared event" (13). The incarnation of the "we" narration establishes the convention of Death being the agency of the human moral sense placed within the narrative texture as well as the shift of roles between the narrator and the reader in order to convey the fact that humans are the genesis of Death both in the actual sense of the idea in the times of war, and the rhetorical sense where Death's desire to narrate is triggered by the reader while engaging with the text. The limitations of the narrator's ability in interacting with characters to change their fate serves as a projection for the reader's incapability to do anything but read: therefore, both ends are trapped in the helpless standpoint of judging, which Gipson explains as a reminder that "the

image of death is nothing more than a projection of human consciousness" (14).

3. The Self–Authoring Protagonist

After projecting the narrator–reader aspect in formulating the defamiliarized nature of perceiving Death, it is appropriate to shed the light on another trace of the technique in the text in relation to the poetics of the narrative structure. The application of the notion's poetics is established through conceiving the *TBT* as a Bildungsroman⁴ novel. This research suggests that the theme of "becoming", a hallmark for this genre of fiction, is traced in Zusak's novel on the level of the protagonist (Lissel) as the creator of her world and her transformation into becoming the orchestrator of her own reality. The comprehension of Lissel's defamiliarized configuration in the text and its relation to the metafictional projection of the narrator can be established by viewing Zusak's approach in rendering his text as a reversed trajectory in comparison with Lawrence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentlemen* (originally published in 1759), whereas Sterne ontologizes his narrator (Tristram) as the voice of the narrative even before he was born, an event yet to happen in the later stages of the story after the passing of more than three hundred pages. This idea of presenting the narrating agency serves to present what Shklovsky refers to as "lay[ing] bare the device" (147) in his article *The Novel as Parody: Sterne's Tristram Shandy* (1929), where the device of the narrative voice signified as being unborn is unconcealed directly in front of the

⁴ According to Lily Lindon (2023), the fashion of writing Bildungsroman fiction is presented by creating "a novel that follows a protagonist 'growing up' in some way – not just in age, but psychologically or morally." which is centered on the idea of the journey of changing and what can it add for the character in comparison with where he or she started. The word "Bildungsroman" is a combination of two Latin words, bildung which means (education) and roman which is translated as (novel). Novels which are written in this endeavour are also referred to as Coming-of-Age by critics (Lindon).

reader from the beginning of the novel. Shklovsky exclaims, in reference to Sterne, that "it was typical of him to lay bare the device. The aesthetic form is presented without any motivation whatsoever, simply as it is" (147). Zusak implies the same "bareness" of the narrative voice by introducing the unnatural agency of his narrator, Death, in a similar approach to Sterne's technique. More precisely, Zusak's narrator can be configured as a retroscope which is ontologically set to be created at the end of the narrative discourse, once Lissel finishes writing her story.

As stated previously, the retroscopic nature of narrative voice is ontologically rooted at the very end of the work, which is proposed by Zusak in part 10 of the novel, entitled *Ilsa Hermann's Little Black Book* (384). After the passage of the entire narrative, the reader discovers that in this particular chapter that Lissel writes the story of her life in the basement of the house where she resides, discussing the various incidents which she went through, and the book which she wrote is entitled with the same name of the novel. Here, the reader is projected to the philosophical notion that it is Lissel who documented her life events. The becoming of Lissel as the writer of her own fiction is what C.W Bigsby, in his book *Modern American Theatre 1945–2000* (Published in 2000), names The Theatricalising–Self which is a very similar idea to Lissel's case. Bigsby's modality of providing the explanation of this notion is built upon the character of Blanche Dubois in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) where he suggests that the play "is pre–eminently aware of its own constitutive conventions; that is to say it is concerned, in the Russian formalist Viktor Schlovsky's terms, with the generation of plot from story ... It defamiliarises the real by dramatising the extent to which, and the manner in which, that reality is constituted. Blanche is self–consciously her own playwright"(4).

Bigsby suggests that the attempt of creating self-dramatised characters (especially in Williams' case) is framed within a failure to adapt with their reality, and this conception will lead these characters to create or establish a modified version of their reality. This modified version, similar to Zusak's Lissel, is rendered throughout artistic expressions. Nevertheless, the artistic expression is somehow created by a trace of mental instability or a trauma which would become the retrospect of self-dramatisation. Bigsby states "in one direction such a failure of adjustment may generate neurosis and psychosis; in another, art. And if his characters are indeed pulled towards mental instability they also tend to be artists, literal and symbolic." (33). The by-product attempt of a character to aestheticize its reality, as Bigsby suggests, is triggered by the transition while going through a harsh experience which is manufactured, in origin, by that reality itself: Blanche's "marriage to a homosexual husband had in effect been a logical extension of her desire to aestheticise experience is itself evidence of that neurotic recoil from the real" (43). The traumatic experiences that Lissel had, like the death of her brother on the train while they were both heading to meet their new foster parents which took place in front of her, is similar to what Bigsby contends above for the characters that aestheticize their experience of the world as a result of a traumatising effect. The incident is described by the narrator as a sort of awakened dream-like nature "with one eye open, one still in a dream, the book thief –also known as Lissel Meminger– could see without question that her younger brother, Werner, was now sideways and dead" (11).

The half dream\half awake state of Lissel at the moment of her brother's death establishes her questioning of the catastrophic reality which she is indulged in. Her partial dream, which is attending a speech by Hitler, functions as the safe haven which she would resort to in order to escape her brother's death at that moment "it would be better for a

complete dream, I think, but I really have no control over that" (11). Furthermore, the description that Death provides for collecting her brother's soul is softened up to the point that it seems to be written to appeal to the mentality of a little girl. Death exclaims "the boy's spirit was soft and cold, like ice cream" (11). Such configuration indicates Lissel's resistance in being the product of her reality. And by being the writer of her own fiction, she rejects her propounded role in being the victim of the cruel reality which she found herself stuck in. Furthermore, and throughout her imagination, she remodifies her reality. This rejection of the enforced reality is a common feature that Bigsby diagnoses in the theatrical artistic formulations of Tennessee Williams. He comments that: "[his] characters resist being incorporated into other people's plots. They distrust alike the casual implications and the temporal logic of narratives which can have only one conclusion for them" (42).

The protagonist in *TBT*, through writing her story, is "aware that something has ended and that it can only be recovered at the level of story" (Bigsby 32), which further forces the idea that her re-creation to be seen as an attempt of aestheticising her tragic experience where she lost everything. Bigsby contends that self-theatricalising characters are products of not relating to the reality of their existence, and the desire to reshape that existence is parallel to their situation which prohibits them from changing anything. Lissel's helplessness in changing what she endured while being in Himmel street, the compassion she felt to everyone who surrounded her and yet she couldn't save, is all presented in the situation of the narrator who stands as the bare witness who cannot do anything but narrate, which, in turn, is its primordial task as the narrator, the purpose of its creation "The irony which governs the lives of [the] protagonists, whose needs are so patently at odds with their situation, is less a social fact than a metaphysical reality. His

characters, too, give birth astride the grave and try to make sense of their abandonment” (Bigsby 38).

According to his previously cited interview with Cindy Hudson, Zusak, when asked about the conception of his novel as a continuation to the creed of Holocaust literature, demonstrates that what he had in mind while composing the work is to shed the light on the ordinary life of the German society during the second World War, by stating:

One of my mum’s stories was about something that happened when she was six. She heard a noise that sounded like cattle being herded down the street. It was people being herded to a concentration camp. There was an old man who couldn’t keep up, and a boy gave him a piece of bread. They were both whipped, one for giving the bread, one for taking it. When you see a soldier chase a boy down and beat him to the ground for being kind to somebody, when you see that when you’re six, what could you possibly make of that? (qtd. in Hudson).

Keeping this in mind, Zusak establishes an enclosed dystopian setting where the entire nation either praises the political agenda of the Nazi regime or get executed. The dichotomy that Zusak creates between the restrictions of the government which are forced on people and how these people behave under the misconducts of the regime elaborate the idea that even during the time of crisis, war, and cruelty, there are some people who still have kindness in their hearts and try as much as possible to help each other, which, in turn, would lead to Lissel's attempt to beautify her dystopian environment in her recreation by shedding the light on such mannerisms of the society through the narrative voice. After Lissel and Rudy steal some bread from another kid in Molching, they have a brief conversation about it, which ends with the narrator reflecting on the nature of humanity “In years to come, [Rudy] would be a giver of bread, not a stealer—proof again of the contradictory human being. So much good, so much evil. Just add water.” (*TBT* 117).

Furthermore, Lissel expresses, to Mrs. Hermann the library owner where she used to go to read, her rebellious intentions against her enforced reality by exclaiming through a written note "As you can see, I have been in your library again and I have ruined one of your books. I was just so angry and afraid and I wanted to kill the words" (383). This desire of "kill[ing] the words" expresses Lissel's search for an expressive form that detaches her from the misfortunes of her reality. In parallel, Bigsby's interpretation to the revolting spirit of theatricalising self characters adheres the idea of reshaping or reframing their reality in accordance with their imagination, simply because they "find themselves similarly trapped in the suffocating constraints of a small back room, in an asylum, real or metaphorical, or, as one of his characters remarks, inside their own skins, for life" (36).

Lissel's metaphorical asylum is incarnated in the setting of the story which takes place in Himmel street located in a fictional town named Molching (based on the real German town, Olching). Lissel represents an intrusive force to the environment of Himmel street, for she is brought to the place in order to live with her new foster parents, Hans and Rosa Hubermann. Her recognition of the place, which is done throughout the clarifications presented by her friend Rudy as exemplified in the chapter entitled *The Kiss*: "On the way to school, he tried to point out certain landmarks in the town, or at least, he managed to slip it all in, somewhere between telling his younger siblings to shut their faces and the older ones telling him to shut his" (33). In addition, there are some descriptions that reflect the political situation presented throughout some sort of coded symbolism. The reason for coating the political echoes of the work under the cape of symbolism adheres to Lissel's perception of her reality as well as the narrator's omniscient knowledge. The narrator, vocalising a story Lissel received as a present in Christmas, elaborates:

[Hitler's] first plan of attack was to plant the words in as many areas of his homeland as possible. He planted them day and night, and cultivated them. He watched them grow, until eventually, great forests of words had risen throughout Germany.... It was a nation of farmed thoughts. WHILE THE words were growing, our young Führer also planted seeds to create symbols, and these, too, were well on their way to full bloom. Now the time had come. The Führer was ready. (327).

The embeddedness of coded symbolism within the margins of the story serves to enhance the defamiliarization effect by involving the reader in a process of decoding metaphorical presentations that situates him within the event being narrated.

The construction of Death's relationship to Lissel is rendered upon the factuality of their eventual meeting which is hinted at the early stages of the story "Yes, often, I am reminded of her, and in one of my vast array of pockets, I have kept her story to retell. It is one of the small legion I carry, each one extraordinary in its own right. Each one an attempt to prove to me that you, and your human existence, are worth it." (10), this event of retelling Lissel's story stated at the beginning of the novel represents the threshold where the narrator dwells upon directing the narrative towards the reader, an event that would set the novel on the trajectory of tracing the protagonist's life and would eventually lead to the narration of the story to Lissel, the writer of the story being told. It has been stated by the narrator that Lissel is an "expert in being left behind" (3), and this ability of escaping can be comprehended as her desire to subjectify and dominate her reality by remoulding it throughout rendering the narrative according to her imagination, which is opposed by the existence of the neutralising, cohabitate force of death in the realm of the book. The tension between the two factions is won by Lissel due to her ability to keep postponing the result of the encounter

with Death, and at the same time, the purpose of reshaping her reality symbolises a means of survival for her.

4. Conclusion

Through inculcating postmodern stylistics within the structure of *The Book Thief*, Zusak is able to use language as a social, cultural and ethical protest. The unfamiliar method of narration, which is mainly presented through self-reflexivity, enables the narrator to approach the margins of his fictional existence with the involvement of altered perception of the reader in order to enhance this protest. The narrator, being unable to change anything in the realm of the story other than sympathise and function as a narratological asset, mirrors the situation of the reader and authenticates his presence within the latter's perception. Furthermore, the protagonist's ability to transform from an illiterate orphan to the writer of her own story stresses on the significance of the aforementioned protest and the power of books and literature during times of crisis. This reflects the conception of Lissel's inability to change her experience of the world, thus she seeks to aestheticize\ reshape it in accordance to what she perceives of it, a world filled with Death.

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