

DÉBORA ALMEIDA DE OLIVEIRA

“HAUNTED BY HUMANS”:

THE UNCANNY NARRATOR IN MARKUS ZUSAK’S *THE BOOK THIEF*

PORTO ALEGRE

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“HAUNTED BY HUMANS”:

THE UNCANNY NARRATOR IN MARKUS ZUSAK’S *THE BOOK THIEF*

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In memory of my beloved father, who departed too soon.

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*Oh, Death, oh Death, oh Death,
Won't you spare me over till another year?
But what is this, that I can't see
with ice cold hands taking hold of me?*

*When God is gone and the Devil takes hold,
who will have mercy on your soul?
Oh, Death, oh Death, oh Death,
No wealth, no ruin, no silver, no gold
Nothing satisfies me but your soul*

*Oh, Death,
Well I am Death, none can excel,
I'll open the door to heaven or hell.
Oh, Death, oh Death,
my name is Death and the end is here...*

(Song "Oh, Death..." by Jen Titus)

RESUMO

O objetivo da tese é estudar o narrador do romance *A Menina que Roubava Livros*, publicado em 2005 pelo autor australiano Markus Zusak. A história enfoca Liesel Meminger, uma menina de nove anos adotada por um casal alemão que, não sendo entusiasta do regime Nazista, esconde um Judeu em seu porão durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial. A imagem da morte como narrador é a principal característica da obra de Zusak, que apresenta uma entidade coletora de almas que observa as experiências de Liesel e tece comentários sobre os seres humanos. A fim de analisar tal narrador, esta dissertação se apóia em estudos de Carl Gustav Jung, Gilbert Durand e, em certa medida, em Sigmund Freud. Também utiliza premissas teóricas do campo da narratologia, tendo Gérard Genette e Mieke Bal como principais vozes representativas. A dissertação está dividida em três capítulos. O capítulo 1 oferece um panorama acerca da construção da morte enquanto imagem arquetípica, enquanto personificação e enquanto narrador. Nesse capítulo, as perspectivas teóricas de Jung, Durand, Genette e Bal são prevalentes. O objetivo é entender como a morte é representada como ideia e como imagem. O capítulo 2 foca nas implicações da morte. Assim, analiso a morte de indivíduos, a pulsão de morte (que toma de assalto muitas das personagens), a morte em massa e a morte social como uma consequência direta da guerra. O objetivo desse capítulo é visualizar a morte como um tema. Para tanto, são aplicados alguns conceitos freudianos, como *pulsão de morte* e *melancolia*. O capítulo 3 oferece uma leitura narratológica do romance, ao relacionar a morte aos aspectos de focalização, tempo e espaço. O objetivo do último capítulo é analisar como a morte se posiciona enquanto observador dos fatos narrados. Na conclusão, apresento minhas considerações finais acerca da utilização desse peculiar narrador em *A Menina que Roubava Livros* e seu papel na construção do romance e na formulação do tom da narrativa.

Palavras-chave: Imaginário; Narratologia; Morte na literatura; Morte como narrador.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to study the narrator of the novel *The Book Thief*, published in 2005 by the Australian author Markus Zusak. The story centers upon Liesel Meminger, a nine-year old girl fostered by a German couple who are not enthusiasts of the Nazi regime and hide a Jewish man in their basement during World War II. The image of death as the narrator is the main feature in Zusak's novel, which presents a soul collecting entity who observes Liesel's experiences and makes comments about the human beings. In order to analyze such narrator, the dissertation relies on studies by Carl Gustav Jung and Gilbert Durand and, to some extent, to Sigmund Freud. The dissertation also borrows theoretical assumptions from the narratological field, having Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal as its main representatives. The dissertation is divided in three chapters. Chapter 1 offers an overview about the construction of death as an archetypal image, as a personification and as a narrator. In this chapter, the theoretical perspectives of Jung, Durand, Genette and Bal are prevalent. The objective here is to try to understand how death is represented as an idea and as an image. Chapter 2 focuses on the implications of death through the book. Hence, I analyze the death of individuals, the death drive (which assaults many of the characters), mass death and social death as a direct consequence of war. The objective of this chapter is to view death as a theme. In order to do that, some concepts from Freud, such as *death drive* and *melancholia*, are applied. Chapter 3 offers a narratological reading of the novel through the link of death to focalization, time and space. The objective in this last chapter is to analyze how death positions himself as an observer of the facts narrated. In the conclusion, I present my final considerations about the use of such peculiar narrator in *The Book Thief* and its role for the construction of the novel and the setting of the tone for the narrative.

Key words: Imaginary; Narratology; Death in literature; Death as narrator.

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INTRODUCTION

To the psyche death is just as important as birth and, like it, is an integral part of life.

Carl Gustav Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*



On an unpretentious day, I came across a book entitled *The Book Thief* (in the Portuguese version) exposed in a newsstand. The title itself did not call my attention, much less the cover, which I considered simple at first sight. However, again, the opening line written in red on the back cover of the book hooked me: “When death tells you a story, you have to listen”.

I bought the book and after reading it in Portuguese I bought the original English version and started reading it again, this time paying closer attention to the narrator and his peculiar way to portray the world. It did not take too long for me to decide to write a dissertation about this book, for two reasons: because I think Zusak, an author at the starting point of his critical career, deserves to be academically studied; and because I felt that the analysis of Death as a narrator would prove an interesting endeavor. A brief research on the web shows that *The Book Thief* has been the subject of many papers and reviews, especially after the release of the homonymous movie adaptation in 2013. However, I believe most of them lack some deeper and qualified academic analysis. As a matter of fact, this is quite expected, since Markus Zusak is a rather recent Australian author who has published five books and whose sixth piece of work is still in the process of writing. Famous for aiming all his stories to a young adult audience, Zusak wrote a trilogy about the life of two teen brothers called *Underdogs*, namely *The Underdog* (1999), *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* (2000) and *When Dogs Cry*; published in the U.S. as *Getting the Girl* (2001). His fourth book, also having a teenage boy as the central character, is called *The Messenger*; published in the U.S. as *I Am the Messenger* (2002). However, the work that gave him international fame is *The Book Thief*

(2005), which is strongly influenced by the stories of the Holocaust the author used to listen to when he was a child in Australia. As once Markus Zusak highlighted in his given Printz Award Honor speech:

Growing up in Sydney, I had a slightly different childhood from most kids in my neighborhood, especially when it came to stories that were told at home. My mother is from Munich and my father from Vienna—and although they're Australian now, they brought a whole different world of stories with them. It was those stories that kept us glued to our kitchen chairs as we grew up. It was those stories that inspired *The Book Thief*. My brother, my two sisters, and I were always entranced as we saw cities of fire, people crouching in bomb shelters, and several close brushes with death. We heard about German teenagers giving bread to Jewish people being marched to concentration camps. We heard how the Jewish people were whipped for taking the bread. And we heard how the teenagers were whipped for *giving* them the bread. . . . I remember being stunned by the ugly world I was told about, but more so by the moments of beauty that existed there as well. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 16)

Thinking about the content and background that shapes *The Book Thief*, I consider it as a work within historical fiction, which, in Munslow words, is: “usually defined by its being imagined in the sense of being ‘made up’, even if it is based on real people, actual events and an actual time” (MUNSLOW, 2015, p. 31). *The Book Thief* focuses on the misery that ordinary and poor German people went through during the Nazi years. It tells the story of Liesel Meminger, a nine-year-old German girl who undergoes the experience of World War II. Zusak enlightens the simplicity of the story by using Death as the narrator. Having Death as a character who witnesses what Liesel goes through allows Zusak to play with the book’s narrative structure as Death goes back and forth in time and seems to be everywhere in the world, as if Death is, by the force of its own nature, an omniscient narrator.

Now I must explain how I intend to organize my thoughts about the book and come up with some valid hypotheses grounded on theoretical assumptions. The title *Haunted by Humans* is a direct reference to the concluding line of the book, when Death closes the narrative saying: *I am haunted by humans* (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 550). The subtitle *The Uncanny Narrator in Markus Zusak’s The Book Thief* borrows the expression *uncanny* from Freudian studies. Freud’s discussion of the uncanny (1919) lies in the origin of the German word *Unheimliche*, opposed to *Heimlich*, which means homely in the familiar sense. *Unheimliche*, translated as uncanny, is not exactly the opposite of homely. It is a word that describes a sense of estrangement within the home, the presence of something fearful and unknown which

would lie within the intimate. I use this expression because death is, at the same time, familiar; in the sense of something that is part of all beings alive, and, on the other hand, something strange and difficult to deal with in most western cultures.

Having a book narrated by Death through a complex narrative structure may cause the sensation of something unfamiliar. Although this will not be discussed further, I think the expression *uncanny* in the title translates feelings towards the narrator in *The Book Thief*. Finally, death is another term that deserves some attention. When death means the end of life it is referred to with a lowercase letter and when death means the narrator it is referred to with an uppercase letter.

The present study is composed in three chapters. Chapter 1 an analysis of *The Book Thief* concerning the construction of death as an archetype, as a personification and as a narrator. Each of these topics shape the three sections of this chapter. The first section contextualizes death and its recurring representations, which I see as relevant for the understanding of the novel's narrator's construction as an archetype. In doing so, I rely my perspective on theoretical assumptions of Carl Gustav Jung and Gilbert Durand, since both have discussed the meaning and implications of some concepts required for my analysis, such as *archetype*, *collective unconscious*, *image* and *symbol*. The same theoretical background is applied in the second chapter, where death is taken as a personification with his own attitude and feelings. The last section analyzes how death functions as a narrator and. For that, I rely on the field of narratology, following Gérard Genette's and Mieke Bal's premises, as they touch aspects concerning the movements of the narrative. Both theoretical fields are knitted to offer a broad view on the matter of death as a representation in *The Book Thief*.

Chapter 2 analyses the implications of death and war in people's lives in *The Book Thief*. I work on the premise that, although I present my reading through a Jungian perspective, that does not prevent me from employing Freud's concepts when they prove relevant. I consider that, as Jung and Durand are important in the discussion of archetypes and images, Freud is also important in the considerations about human drives, melancholia, suicide and violence. Having said that, I propose a discussion about the death of individuals, death drive and mass death that go throughout the book. I also touch social death and its impact on the characters of *The Book Thief*.

Chapter 3 analyses three narratological devices employed to express perception: focalization, temporal dimension and spatial dimension. Chapter 4, returning to the concepts offered by Genette and Bal, connects death with focalization, time and space. The intention here is to understand how the narrator focalizes the events and why he decides to pick up

specific events to be developed, provoking an impact on the reader's reception of the story, and provoking considerations on how such a thing like death may (or may not) be located in time and space.

By offering my personal view of death in *The Book Thief* and its multiple representations, I do not intend to exhaust this subject. I wish to carry a serious study on the matter of death in this specific novel as a way to contribute both to the critical fortune of the author and to the studies of imaginary and narratology, as these theoretical lines are my main support for the analysis carried out. Also, I hope this dissertation may be useful to future researches who aim at analyzing either the book or the theme of death as a recurring element in literature.

1 DEATH AS REPRESENTATION

We need the coldness of death to see clearly. Life wants to live and to die, to begin and to end.

Carl Gustav Jung, *The Red Rose*



The idea of death has been a secular, complex concern of humanity long debated and it still remains one of the central issues in modern society, after all, “We have no reliable information about death as an experience, and this emphasizes death’s nature as a secret and mysterious event” (HAKOLA & KIVISTÖ, 2014, p. 07). Therefore, this “secret nature” exercises a vital impact upon our understanding of death and our reaction to it. Consequently, there is a wide range of interpretations and representations of this subject, and the objective of this section is to introduce some concepts that will enhance the reading of *The Book Thief* concerning the matter of death.

However, the conceptualization required for the analysis of death in Markus Zusak’s work goes beyond its symbolic meaning. I also venture into the field of narratology to analyze structural aspects related to the representation of death as a character located in time and space and whose point of view deeply sets the tone for the narrative. The anthropomorphizing death as an entity that speaks, feels and takes sides on the course of the events narrated opens space for a narratological approach that proves fit to discuss the narrating techniques employed by death. Hence, in the sub section *death as narrator*, I use the assumptions formulated by Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal. In spite of the differences between these authors concerning some specific terms and concepts, their theoretical affinity allows a valid insight into the narrator’s story-telling devices.

1.1 Death as an archetypal image

The seed of the concept of archetype dates back to Plato, who planted the germ of what modern psychology would come to define as an archetype. According to the Greek philosopher, *ideas* – mental forms in a pure state which embody the fundamental characteristics of things – are imprinted in every soul when they are born into this world. Centuries later, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung advanced this concept but, due to some divergences of thinking, these authors followed different theoretical and conceptual paths. In *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, Jung explains that the mind's unconscious holds many layers. The contents of the unconscious mind are called *archetypes* or *primordial images*. When the archetypes migrate to the consciousness and become elaborated, assuming shape and form, they become *archetypal images*.

There is a wide range of archetypal images of death. One of the oldest ones is the image of Mot, a monstrous God-like personification which has its roots in the ancient West Semitic mythology. While the Bible considers death the result of the original sin, in ancient Canaan death is represented as a God. Traditionally, Mot is the favorite among the seventy sons born from the union between supreme God El (the heaven) and his wife Asherah (the abyss). Mot, also known as Mavet in the Hebrew tradition, is the God of death and the underworld; he is the Lord of every natural force that opposes life, such as desert dryness, infertility and sterility. He rules the dark and deep place beneath the earth in the company of an army granted by his father, fighting an eternal battle against Baal; God of all elements that represent life. Through this imaginary, the old Canaanite civilization explained the seasonal phenomena of rain and drought which impact the harvest of various crops. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Mot's archetypal image is shaped as a monster who devours his victims with a giant-like mouth:

Mot [is] very different from the beneficent Gods. His monstrous Jaws and voracious appetite are his chief characteristics, and he is often described as "swallowing" his victims whole [...] his mouth is described as stretching "one lip to the earth, the other lip to the heavens, his tongue to the stars". As a cosmic enemy of both the human and the divine, Mot bears as many demonic qualities as he does godly, [...] Mot does not benefit anyone, but rather only poses a threat. (ORLIN, 2016, p. 616)

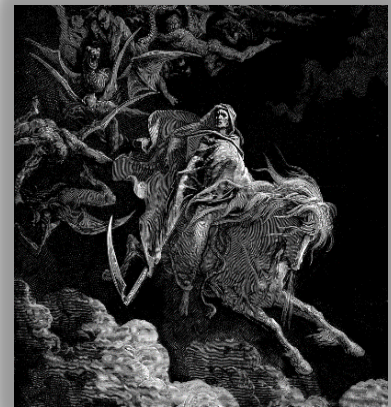
Not all archetypal images of death are so terrifying as Mot. The mythological Greek figure of Thanatos (Mors for the Romans) is depicted as a youth carrying an upside-down

torch that symbolizes the end of physical life. He is the son of the Goddess Nyx (Night) and twin brother of Hypnos (Sleep). There are some variations of this depiction and, sometimes, the torch is replaced by a butterfly or a wreath. Even Thanatos personification varies, and he is also portrayed as a handsome winged-man or a winged-child. Differently from Mot, Thanatos does not rule the lower world. In Greek mythology, this role belong to Hades, Lord of the dead, and Thanatos only fulfills his task of taking the departing souls to the afterlife. If such archetypal images represent natural and non-violent death, there is another image that represents the violent ones.

The Keres (Tenebrae for the Romans) are Thanatos' sisters, scaring flying beings with sharp teeth that prey on the sick and wounded people. They are depicted as harpies, demons or women with fangs, usually dressed in bloody ripped clothes. They fly over war camps and cities devastated by diseases, and they are associated to all elements associated to non-natural deaths, such as madness, agony, famine and hate. Sometimes, they are said to be among the creatures that flew out of Pandora's box to plague mankind.

If Thanatos and The Keres are the two main archetypal images of death in Ancient Greece, we can say that the Christian tradition also has two main archetypal images, which are named The Pale Horseman and The Grim Reaper. The Last Book of the New Testament of the Bible (Revelation of Jesus Christ to John Patmos) tells the story of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, which are described as Pestilence, War, Famine and Death. According to the story, God has a scroll sealed with seven seals, and the first fours seals lock each one of the four riders of the apocalypse. When they are broken, each of the riders come out riding a white, black, red and pale horse. The mission of the Horsemen is to bring about the Judgement Day. Death, the last Horseman, is described in the Bible in the following way:

When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth. (Revelation 6:7-8)



The Pale Horseman, also known as The Angel of Death, is not described in the Bible holding any weapon.

However, in visual arts, he is frequently portrayed with elements related to death, like a sword or a scythe. In this sense, it is common to take the pictures for the Grim Reaper, confusion easily understood due to the similitude between these archetypal images. The Grim Reaper is another famous archetypal image, maybe one of the most well known image in the modern western world. From the fourteenth century on, when wars and plagues were devastating Europe, the archetypal image of the Grim Reaper found reinforcement. He is depicted as a skeleton who wears a black robe and holds a scythe to cut the last ties between the soul and the body. He is supposed to take the souls to the afterlife and, as he is not the Lord of the underworld. Sometimes, The Grim Reaper may be tricked or bribed by cunning people who, in some way or another, avoid death's visit by hiding, scaping or cheating.

Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* offers an interesting representation of death which uses The Grim Reaper image as an antithesis. Death, in *The Book Thief*, does not look like The Grim Reaper. The narrator clearly states that his image does not find any correspondece in The Grim Reaper's traditional image. At the end of Chapter one (the book is composed by ten chapters, a prologue and an epilogue), Death describes Liesel's new school and her difficulties in reading and writing, which becomes a reason for bullying. Going off on a tangent, the narrator makes a paralel between the nun and The Grim Reaper, making fun of how people associate such image to him.

Somewhere at the start of November, there were some progress tests at school. One of them was for reading. Every child was made to stand at the front of the room and read from a passage the teacher gave them. It was a frosty morning but bright with sun. Children scrunched their eyes. A halo surrounded the grim reaper nun, Sister Maria. (By the way—I like this human idea of the grim reaper. I like the scythe. It amuses me.) (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 75)

Death, as the narrator of the story, reveals a lot of his personality through his opinions about the world, about his job and about himself. However, he does not offer much about his image for the reader to rely on. During the first five chapters, Death gives information only on his personal and subjective traits; and just on chapter six he provides the reader an anti-archetypal image:

A SMALL PIECE OF TRUTH
I do not carry a sickle or scythe.
I only wear a hooded black robe when it's cold.
And I don't have those skull-like

facial features you seem to enjoy
 pinning on me from a distance. You
 want to know what I truly look like?
 I'll help you out. Find yourself
 a mirror while I continue.
 (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 307)

I risk saying that Zusak tries to subvert one of the most famous archetypes in the modern Western society by showing his narrator as a reflection in the mirror, which leads to infinite image interpretations. Another hint that offers a wide range of open image-making interpretations is the line where Death introduces himself: “Where are my manners? I could introduce myself properly, but it’s not really necessary. You will know me well enough and soon enough, depending on a diverse range of variables...” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 04).

It is visible that the narrative tries to subvert the famous archetypal image, yet, it still holds some of the archetype’s traits. First, in the beginning of the narrative (p. 05), the narrator makes use of a specific pronoun – he – to refer to himself in a conversation with his imaginary audience. Death complains about how much he is overloaded with work and how much he would like to have a break. He asks: “Still, it’s possible that you might be asking, why does he even need a vacation? What does he need distraction *from*?” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 05). As The Grim Reaper is normally referred to as a male figure, although he is not human, it can be said that Death, in *The Book Thief*, keeps the Reaper’s traditional archetypal male image. Obviously, there are male and female images of death throughout history, however, *The Book Thief* constructs (or deconstructs) the narrator taking the reaper’s image as the cornerstone. That is why I focus only on the male archetypal image, and do not discuss other possibilities of representations here.

Another point that deserves some attention is the thought of cheating death, which has been explored in way too many works. Characters which claim having cheated death or characters which state they have the power to do so is an idea long developed in art and literature. Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Pardoner’s Tale* (from *The Canterbury Tales*) is an instance of how stories about cheating death become popular, reinforcing the archetypal image of such possibility, even if the characters fail in the attempt. Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Masque of the Red Death* also shows strategies to evade death that, in the end, just serve to lead the characters straight to it. In *The Book Thief*, Death is not literally cheated, since none of the characters interact with death as a regular character, unless they have already passed away. No one goes in search of death trying to overpower him or, in the opposite sense, no one tries to escape fate by eluding him. Only Max, when he was a teenager, gets angry with death as if it were a person. The narrator observes:

Of course, at thirteen, he [Max] was a little excessive in his harshness. He had not looked something like *me* in the face. Not yet. [...] “When death captures me,” the boy vowed, “he will feel my fist on his face.” Personally, I quite like that. Such stupid gallantry. Yes. I like that a lot. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 189)

Therefore, the narrator feels he has been cheated only when Liesel’s foster father, Hans Hubermann, is able to survive two world wars, which goes against all odds. Although Hans is not a professional soldier, he manages to avoid death in a luck strike. When the narrator describes Hans, he observes: “He had already cheated me in one world war but would later be put into another (as a perverse kind of reward), where he would somehow manage to avoid me again” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 33). Later on, Death returns to the same point:

That was the first time Hans Hubermann escaped me. The Great War. A second escape was still to come, in 1943, in Essen. Two wars for two escapes. Once young, once middle-aged. Not many men are lucky enough to cheat me twice. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 178)

At first sight, maybe it is possible to think that Liesel also cheats death, but a more attentive analysis demonstrates that she was actually seen by the narrator three times. Death introduces his story about Liesel by saying: “I saw the book thief three times” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 05). Death met Liesel when her brother died, when a pilot died and when her town was destroyed by the bombs. In this light, Liesel could have cheated (or just avoided) death in the last situation, as she made her escape from death by staying in the basement when the bombs fell. Still, Death does not mention any feeling about being avoided by Liesel.

Finally, *The Book Thief* reinforces the archetypal image of death as a cold experience. Death is normally related to cold, perhaps because “Some of the most striking moments of existence, some of the most dramatic ones, that is those where the action is, according to the Greek root of the word drama, those are the ones in which the frost rules” (FRANCOT, 2009, p. 88). People die of cold. A body without life is cold. Some of the Greek descriptions of the underworld show ice and fire in the realm of Hades. Innumerable poets and writers have used cold as a symbol of death in their literary works. In short, death and cold are bound up in many situations. The first death apparition in *The Book Thief* is strongly related to cold, as he comes for Liesel’s brother in a winter day full of snow and the boy, probably, dies of cold. Besides, in another moment, when Rudy and his family die sleeping at home, during an air raid, the narrator confesses: “He lay in bed with one of his sisters. [...] they died fast and they were warm. [...] And I’m not too great at that sort of comforting thing, especially when my

hands are cold and the bed is warm. [...] He does something to me [...] He makes me cry” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 531). Here, Death assumes that his hands are cold, and the link between cold and death is reinforced when he remembers his way through the concentration camps.

I’ll never for

get the first day in Auschwitz, the first time in Mauthausen. [...] Smoky sky in those places. The smell like a stove, but still so cold. [...] I shiver when I remember — as I try to de-realize it. I blow warm air into my hands, to heat them up. But it’s hard to keep them warm when the souls still shiver. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 349)

Death, as an archetypal image, may hold either a negative or positive connotation. It may be asserted that the Christian symbology that pervades *The Book Thief* conceives death as an enemy that calls for repression, in a clear allusion to the negative connotation of death. I came across a definition which, in my opinion, summarizes the traditional symbology of The Grim Reaper in Christian western societies:

In art and mythology, ...the most compelling image of death is provided by the Reaper—the hooded skeleton bearing the huge curved scythe. The Reaper is ugly and menacing [...] Two aspects of the Reaper are especially noteworthy. He is mysterious. This is illustrated by the fact that the Reaper’s face is often hidden in the shadows of his hood. Death is taken to be weird or uncanny [...] Death is also taken to be evil. This is illustrated by the Reaper’s malevolent glare. A visit from the Reaper is to be feared beyond comparison. (FELDMAN, 1992, p. 03)

Although there is the negative connotation of death in *The Book Thief*, such as the departing of young children and innocent victims of the war, the notion of evil cannot be applied to the narrator of novel. He carries the positive connotation of a desirable friend who comes to set us free from extreme agony. It is true he has the cold hands of the traditional archetypal image but, as a symbol; he is warm and holds the power to heal the departed souls. When Liesel’s brother dies, for example, death grants the boy the opportunity to be saved from suffering. The words “melt”, “warm up” and “heal”, used to describe the boy’s *post mortem* state, contrast with the words “cold” and “ice cream”, used to define his soul before death’s arrival. In short, Death is meant to help, even if the survivors do not understand and accept it.

[...] I knelt down and extracted his soul, holding it limply in my swollen arms. He warmed up soon after, but when I picked him up originally, the boy’s spirit was soft

and cold, like ice cream. He started melting in my arms. Then warming up completely. Healing. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 21)

The positive meaning of death is noticeable throughout the narrative, which shows other examples of how much people may wish for death as a symbol of freedom from the torments of life. When Death is taking his rounds around Earth, he complains that wars increase the amount of souls he needs to collect and the number of survivors who call him. As he is busy, he tries not to pay attention to the ones who pursue him.

You might argue that I make the rounds no matter what year it is, but sometimes the human race likes to crank things up a little. They increase the production of bodies and their escaping souls. A few bombs usually do the trick. Or some gas chambers, or the chitchat of faraway guns. If none of that finishes proceedings, it at least strips people of their living arrangements, and I witness the homeless everywhere. They often come after me as I wander through the streets of molested cities. They beg me to take them with me, not realizing I'm too busy as it is. "Your time will come," I convince them, and I try not to look back. At times, I wish I could say something like, "Don't you see I've already got enough on my plate?" but I never do. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 308)

Apparently, Death is a contradiction in *The Book Thief*, as he is presented as something to be fought against and, at the same time, as something to be wished for. However, this is exactly what Durand sees as the essential power of the symbol, which is to "surmount natural contradictions and bind together irreconcilable elements, social partitions and segregated periods of history. It becomes obvious, then, that the motivating categories of symbols are to be sought in the elementary behavior of the human psyche" (DURAND, 1969, p. 39). Therefore, the kind of death in *The book Thief* determines the negative or positive symbolic meaning the narrator will hold. As a matter of fact, most of the deaths in the novel imply the narrator is the savior of those tormented souls. In this way, Death stands for a reconciliation with life as life goes away.

Having said all that, it becomes clear that Death moves along antithetical lines, which bring to mind Durand's diurnal order of the image. In the work *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* (1999), Gilbert Durand classifies the structures of the imaginary and discerns them between the diurnal and nocturnal order. The diurnal order is based on antithesis and dichotomies, namely "being and not being [...] presence and absence [...] order and disorder" (DURAND, p. 66).

Death, in *The Book Thief*, fits such dichotomies. Obviously, the first one allows two interpretations. As a symbol, death may be good or bad; depending on the cause and on the

victims. As it will be better shown during the development of this dissertation, *The Book Thief* shows some deaths which are symbolically good, as they naturally happen to sick people (like Max's grandfather) or to aging people (like the old lady Liesel). On the other hand, there is a great deal of bad deaths, like the deaths of young children, teenagers, civilians and, of course, the Jewish population. The "being and not being" dichotomy proposed by Durand may be also applied to Death as being and not being human.

If Death is analyzed as a narrator, it is clear he is not human, as he is not a living being. He is some kind of supernatural entity which escapes human's full understanding, but, at the same time, Death is too similar to human beings, aggregating many human traits, such as moral pain (he suffers), curiosity (he wants to know Liesel) and perplexity (humans are so good and so bad). Besides all that, he is still able to use sarcasm. He may not be a human, but he certainly behaves like one. Also, Death is able to breath, which is an exclusive characteristic of living beings. The narrator makes reference to his breathing when he describes his presence in Liesel's brother burial: "I clearly remember that my breath was loud that day. I'm surprised the guards didn't notice me as they walked by" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 08). Later in the narrative, when he is considering humans and their peculiarities, Death asks: "How do you tell if something's alive? You check for breathing" (p. 38). Even if one claims that this is a metaphorical reference, and not the act of breathing itself, there is another moment when Death shows he is really breathing: "I blow warm air into my hands, to heat them up" (p. 350). Ferber, in his work *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, defines the act of breathing in symbolic terms: "Breath is life, and those who draw breath are those who are alive [...] This equation is really metonymy rather than metaphor, since breath is essential to life" (FERBER, 1999, p. 36).

The second dichotomy, "presence and absence" may be understood as the omniscient capacity of death. When someone is alive, death may happen out of a sudden, which indicates that it is present at all times (maybe this explains the archetypal image of death lurking the living ones). On the other hand, being alive means the absence of death. It is not a surprise that this antithesis highlight death as one of the great mysteries of human philosophy. Finally, the "order and disorder" regime explains itself. Death may bring order, as it is the natural end of people's lives. Nobody lives forever, and every attempt to reach this status (in vampire fiction, in sci-fi fiction or horror fiction) has proved the cause of dramatic results. Nonetheless, death also brings disorder. People dying at war, especially children and civilians, invert the natural order of death, since nobody expects dying at war or in violent contexts.

1.2 Death as personification

Death is a unique character, functioning as an archetype, thus, he is not a human being fictional representation. He says what he is not, and, through indirect and direct indications in the text, he provides some insight into what he wants his audience to believe he is. In this light, it is interesting to analyze how the narrator recognizes himself and how he wishes to be recognized.

The narrative of *The Book Thief* starts with Death already within some kind of interaction, as he presents himself through a monologue and frequently addresses a *you* form. In such interaction, even if it is not possible to distinguish death's listener/reader, it is clear that the narrator constructs an image by depicting himself in a specific manner. Chapter one, entitled *Death and Chocolate*, shows the beginning of the narrative, when Death makes his entrance:

First the colors. Then the humans. That's usually how I see things. Or at least, how I try.

***** HERE IS A SMALL FACT *****

You are going to die.

I am in all truthfulness attempting to be cheerful about this whole topic, though most people find themselves hindered in believing me, no matter my protestations. Please, trust me. I most definitely *can* be cheerful. I can be amiable. Agreeable. Affable. And that's only the A's. Just don't ask me to be nice. Nice has nothing to do with me.

***** REACTION TO THE AFOREMENTIONED FACT *****

Does this worry you?

I urge you—don't be afraid.

I'm nothing if not fair.

— Of course, an introduction. A beginning. Where are my manners? I could introduce myself properly, but it's not really necessary. You will know me well enough and soon enough, depending on a diverse range of variables. 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. A color will be perched on my shoulder. I will carry you gently away. At that moment, you will be lying there (I rarely find people standing up). You will be caked in your own body. There might be a discovery; a scream will dribble down the air. The only sound I'll hear after that will be my own breathing, and the sound of the smell, of my footsteps. The question is, what color will everything be at that moment when I come for you? What will the sky be saying? (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 04)

Important aspects may be apprehended from Death's introduction about himself. To begin with, he wants to create a bond between him and his audience, which, from now on, I

will call *narratee*, borrowing the term from Gerald Prince (1982), uses this expression to refer to the diegetic entity addressed to by the narrator. Aware of the fear he causes on humans, Death minimizes his impact by stating: “Don’t be afraid” and completes “I will be standing over you as genially as possible [...] I will carry you gently away” (p. 04) Aside the attempt to minimize the determinism and fatalism of death in people’s lives, the narrator tries to establish a link with his narratee by enumerating his qualities, such as cheerful, amiable, agreeable, affable and fair. Of course, it goes against the traditional archetype of The Grim Reaper, and the narrator is based on the Reaper’s deconstruction. I would risk saying that Death has a deep and strong concept about himself as being distinct from what human society expects from him. Of course, due to his supernatural nature, it is not possible to understand his *real self* (the one behind the mask), according to the Jungian thought, but; at least, it is possible to have a glimpse of the image he shows to the narratee. His effort to create an atmosphere of trust is reinforced later on. Death realizes he may have threatened the narratee and, again, speaks about his supposedly harmless nature:

***** A REASSURING ANNOUNCEMENT *****

Please, be calm, despite that previous threat.

I am all bluster—

I am not violent.

I am not malicious.

I am a result.

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 06)

On the other hand, it can be argued that Death, although trying to establish a friendly bond between him and the narratee, often highlights his superiority. Since the narratee is human, there are many moments in which Death clearly indicates the border that separates him from the beings he analyzes. Death often makes his non-human nature noteworthy by reminding his narratee that he is the human one. The narrator strongly asserts his supernatural origin in sentences like: “you’re a human – you should understand self-obsession” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 307), “I have kept her story to retell. [...] to prove to me that you, and your human existence, are worth it” (p. 15), “Of course, at thirteen, he was a little excessive in his harshness. He had not looked something like *me* in the face. Not yet” (p. 189), “Two wars for two escapes. Once young, once middle-aged. Not many men are lucky enough to cheat me twice” (p. 176), “The bombs were coming – and so was I” (p. 335), “As usual, I collected humans. (p. 338)”, “I can promise you that the world is a factory. The sun stirs it, the humans rule it. And I remain. I carry them away” (p. 543). At last, his memorable last word to end the

book: “I am haunted by humans” (p. 550). If the narrator highlights the humanity of the narratee to contrast with his own, just once he refers to himself when speaking about his feelings: “You see? Even death has a heart” (p. 242). Aside the references to the narratee and to himself, Death shows inevitability as one of his characteristics. Series of deadly events, like bombs and sickness, always lead to his presence in the scene.

The narrator of *The Book Thief* is the only one who provides definitions about himself, as no other character ever thinks or reflects about death. The first line of the book, he emphasizes his complex visual ability to capture colors while collecting souls. As he says, “First the colors. Then the humans” (p. 03). In an effort to be distracted from those who stay alive crying for those who passed away, Death visualizes different colors whenever a soul takes its leave. Nonetheless, the narrator does not limit these moments to simple descriptions of the colors nearby. He experiments the colors in a way humans are not supposed to do. In my research, I came across an article entitled *Death is a Synesthete* (2013) by doctor Kimberlee D’Ardenne, Ph.D. in Chemistry and Neuroscience. She explains Death’s ability to feel the colors in an objective and scientific way. Obviously, although her explanation is based on real people’s healthy conditions, she is not claiming that Death is sick. Therefore, I consider her analogy relevant for the understanding of Death as personification:

Zusak personifies Death and also makes him/her a synesthete. Synesthetes experience the world differently. A sound is not just heard; it might be seen as a color. [...] Death notices the color of the sky when people die but does not see it as a color. Color is tasted. [...] Synesthesia is a brain condition where the physical senses overlap. [...] In the synesthetic brain, there is atypical communication between sensory areas. [...] Atypical connectivity patterns among sensory systems translates into synesthetes tasting sounds or feeling tactile sensations when viewing colors. (D’ARDENNE, 2013, Internet.)

In the following passage, it is noticeable how Death relates to colors in a synesthetic way, mixing the visual perception of colors to taste (when referring to flavors) and to hearing (when referring to intonation). As a matter of fact, the narrator makes the color imagery his prominent fixation, frequently alluding to them according to his peculiar manner of experimenting the world.

Personally, I like a chocolate-colored sky. Dark, dark chocolate. People say it suits me. I do, however, try to enjoy every color I see—the whole spectrum. A billion or so flavors, none of them quite the same, and a sky to slowly suck on. It takes the edge off the stress. It helps me relax.

*** A SMALL THEORY ***

People observe the colors of a day only at its beginnings and

ends, but to me it's quite clear that a day merges through a multitude of shades and intonations, with each passing moment. [...]

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 04)

The narrator's colorful obsession is the most striking characteristic of Death as a personification. He is connected to colors in such a strong way for two reasons: first, his perception, as explained before, differs from the human one. Second, it is more than just a distraction, it is a necessity. He needs to pay attention to something that keeps his mind off the humans who survive, "the leftovers" (p. 04). When Death takes someone away, he feels a great discomfort by noticing the behavior of those who stay.

As I've been alluding to, my one saving grace is distraction. It keeps me sane. It helps me cope, considering the length of time I've been performing this job. [...] The trouble is, who could ever replace me? [...] The answer, of course, is nobody, which has prompted me to make a conscious, deliberate decision—to make distraction my vacation. [...] I vacation in increments. In colors. [...] you might be asking [...] What does he need distraction *from*? [...] It's the leftover humans. The survivors. They're the ones I can't stand to look at, although on many occasions I still fail. I deliberately seek out the colors to keep my mind off them, but now and then, I witness the ones who are left behind, crumbling among the jigsaw puzzle of realization, despair, and surprise. They have punctured hearts. They have beaten lungs. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 05)

The previous quote shows that Death has existed even before the beginning of the human race. Considering that, Death has witnessed the most important incidents in History. Therefore, he is supposed to be a fair judge, someone who inspires reliability and trust. Buckland confirms this thought: "What is unique is Death's omniscient witness not only to the Holocaust but also to the procession of previous atrocities in previous generations" (BUCKLAND, 2011, p. 77). It suffices to say that, in a certain moment, Death goes off on a tangent, interrupting his narrative about Liesel and comparing the year of 1942 (WWII) to the years of 79A and 1346. However, he does not offer any explanation to clarify his comparison. The reader must search for information to know that the year of 79A is the date when Pompeii is destroyed due to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, and 1346 is the date that marks the outbreak of the black death in Europe. Each event has caused thousands of deaths. "DEATH'S DIARY: 1942. It was a year for the ages, like 79, like 1346, to name just a few. Forget the scythe, Goddamn it, I needed a broom or a mop. And I needed a vacation" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 307). This sentence shows death as a tired entity, which has been

performing his task for countless centuries, being aware of all grand deadly events humans have been through.

Aside the narrator's considerations about himself and the humankind, the repertoire of Death's personification includes comments expressing approval or disapproval, warning or recommendation. In *The Book Thief*, Death expresses his disapproval of wars through comments that shape Death's personification as somebody who does not condemn all Germans for the Holocaust but, at the same time, realizes they are not the worst sufferers. His attitudes show a non-impartial narrator, which sides with Liesel and the victims of the war. He pities the German kids and shows sympathy to the German victims, but he is aware that the status of ultimate victim of the war belongs to the Jews. There is a moment, for example, when death watches Liesel and her neighbors hidden in a basement during an air raid menace. He, then, observes: "The Germans in basements were pitiable, surely, but at least they had a chance. That basement was not a washroom. They were not sent there for a shower. For those people, life was still achievable" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 376). Death's pitiable feelings to the Jews are perceived especially after his argument with his narratee about the difference between Liesel's and the Jews' suffering: "You could argue that Liesel Meminger had it easy. She *did* have it easy compared to Max Vandenburg. Certainly, her brother practically died in her arms. Her mother abandoned her. But anything was better than being a Jew" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 161).

Death constructs his personification as somebody who feels sorry for taking so many lives at war. He shows himself not as The Grim Reaper, as the cause of life's end; but as "a result" (p. 06), as a consequence of men's imprudence and greed. When speaking about Hitler and the war, he emphasizes how much he feels disoriented when witnessing the human paradox of being good and bad.

It's probably fair to say that in all the years of Hitler's reign, no person was able to serve the *Führer* as loyally as me. A human doesn't have a heart like mine. The human heart is a line, whereas my own is a circle, and I have the endless ability to be in the right place at the right time. The consequence of this is that I'm always finding humans at their best and worst. I see their ugly and their beauty, and I wonder how the same thing can be both. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 491)

Death continues speaks about his relation to war as obsessively as he speaks of colors, making it a constant in his speech. Being out of the continuum time and space, he holds the power of omnipresence. "For two days, I went about my business. I traveled around the globe

as always, handing souls to the conveyor belt of eternity”. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 23). Since it is war time in Germany, Death feels tired of being at war sites all the time, even with his omnipresent characteristic. Consequently, he is overloaded with such burden. He affirms: They say that war is death’s best friend, [...]. To me, war is like the new boss who expects the impossible. He stands over your shoulder repeating one thing, incessantly: Get it done, get it done. So, you work harder. You get the job done” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 309). His words symbolically represent what Guthke said about the mythological Thanatos, the Greek personification of death. The author says that Thanatos “certainly does not kill” (GUTHKE, 1999, p. 33). Indeed, in *The Book Thief* the narrator has a role he sometimes fulfills with pity and sorrow, but rather than humans and their wars, he is not the true responsible for ending people’s lives. It is possible to see that in the next sample:

The last time I saw her was red. The sky was like soup, boiling and stirring. In some places, it was burned. [...] Earlier, kids had been playing hopscotch there [...] When I arrived, I could still hear the echoes. [...] The children-voices laughing, and the smiles like salt, but decaying fast. Then, bombs. This time, everything was too late. The sirens. The cuckoo shrieks in the radio. All too late. Within minutes, mounds of concrete and earth were stacked and piled. The streets were ruptured veins. Blood streamed till it was dried on the road, and the bodies were stuck there, like driftwood after the flood. They were glued down, every last one of them. A packet of souls. Was it fate? Misfortune? Is that what glued them down like that? Of course not. Let’s not be stupid. It probably had more to do with the hurled bombs, thrown down by humans hiding in the clouds. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 12 - 13)

In a thoroughly analysis, it becomes clear that Death does not side with mankind, as somebody who cannot get along with humans. He confesses: “I wanted to explain that I am constantly overestimating and underestimating the human race — that rarely do I ever simply *estimate*” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 550). It collaborates to show how Death is a paradox, because, at the same time he does not show sympathy to humans, he tries appear good to the narratee, showing himself up as friendly as possible. Sometimes, Death is angry about the horrors he witnesses, and makes ironic comments and sarcastic observations to speak about mankind, such as “Still, they have one thing I envy. Humans, if nothing else, have the good sense to die” (p. 491). This kind of statement allows the narratee to see Death’s personification as someone who is deeply affected by the people’s aggression and willingness to fight. Again, it reinforces his humanistic traits, since he is capable of empathize with human’s suffering. The distance between the narrator and the facts he narrates is, in this sense, too short. Before checking other examples, which demonstrates Death’s involvement with the facts he narrates,

some clarification is needed on the matter of distance, since this term may cause some confusion.

According to the Genette, in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), narratives employ technical choices in order to produce particular results. In this way, the arrangement of narrative information granted to the reader is filtered through what Genette calls the distance and perspective:

Narrative "representation," or, more exactly, narrative information, has its degrees: the narrative can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way, and can thus seem [...] to keep at a greater or lesser *distance* from what it tells. The narrative can also choose to regulate the information it delivers, [...] according to the capacities of knowledge of one or another participant in the story (...), the narrative seems in that case [...] to take on, with regard to the story, one or another *perspective*. (GENETTE, 1980, p. 162)

Hence, distance is determined by the degree of involvement shown by the narrator in relation to the narrative. Therefore, four types of speech can be identified in the text: narratized speech (integrates narration and character's actions, narrator more involved to the story), transposed speech in indirect style (the character's actions are reported indirectly), transposed speech in free indirect style (direct report of what is said and done) and reported speech (direct report of what is said and done with the use of quotation marks). These categories of speech do not always show a rigid limit between them. As Genette capitulates: "Needless to say, unless one is deliberately trying to prove a point (...), the different forms we have just distinguished in theory will not be so clearly separated in the practice of texts" (GENETTE, 1980, p. 175).

In *The Book Thief*, Death does not have any part in the incidents he narrates. His only job is taking the departed, thus, he does not influence the course of the events beyond his sole impact as death. However, it is evident that this narrator is deeply involved with Liesel's story, which adds some more humanistic traits to his personification. He becomes emotional when Liesel suffers and he feels the urge to cry when Rudy dies. Death cares; he cares about the innocent children he has to take away and he cares about the victims of the war. He shows the narratee a highly sensitive being disgusted with humans' capacity to make wars and kill thousands of civilians at once. The following scene shows the moment when Death meets Liesel for the third time, in a town destroyed by the bombs. In my opinion, this is the time which shows the highest level of emotional involvement on the part of the narrator. He explicitly expresses his wish to comfort Liesel and he is so interested in her that he cannot

help from saving her diary from the garbage truck. Besides, his interest continues for years, since he carries her book and makes it a frequent source of reading.

The small German town had been flung apart one more time. [...] I was just about to leave when I found her kneeling there. [...] She was clutching at a book. Apart from everything else, the book thief wanted desperately to go back to the basement, [...] the basement didn't even exist anymore. It was part of the mangled landscape. Please, again, I ask you to believe me. I wanted to stop. To crouch down. I wanted to say: "I'm sorry, child." But that is not allowed. [...] I watched her awhile. When she was able to move, I followed her. She dropped the book. [...] the girl's most precious item was thrown aboard a garbage truck, at which point I was compelled. I climbed aboard and took it in my hand, not realizing that I would keep it and view it several thousand times over the years. I would watch the places where we intersect, and marvel at what the girl saw and how she survived. That is the best I can do—watch it fall into line with everything else I spectated during that time. When I recollect her, I see a long list of colors, but it's the three in which I saw her in the flesh that resonate the most. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 13)

Death's emotional states vary from anger to sorrow, and his personification acquires humanistic traits in such moments. By and large, it is clear that Death sides not only with Liesel, but also with the victims of the Nazi system as a whole. In this matter, Death's personification is highly politicized, even if he never says a word against Hitler or his followers. A close look at how Death acts and reacts to the events and people shows he also cares for the Germans who do follow the Nazi idea. Death's treatment to characters he considers the victims and the ones he considers the persecutors is extremely different. The contrast between Frau Diller (the Aryan shop's owner) and Mr. Steiner (Rudy's father) is an example of how Death is a partial in his moral judgements. Frau Diller is one of the true Hitler's followers, or rather, she puts her heart into the Nazi cause, and does whatever it takes to serve the regime. The narrator uses words such as nefarious and evil to talk about her.

Frau Diller was a sharp-edged woman with fat glasses and a nefarious glare. She developed this evil look to discourage the very idea of stealing from her shop, which she occupied with soldierlike posture, a refrigerated voice, and even breath that smelled like "*heil* Hitler." [...]. She lived for her shop and her shop lived for the Third Reich. Even when rationing started later in the year, she was known to sell certain hard-to-get items under the counter and donate the money to the Nazi Party. On the wall behind her usual sitting position was a framed photo of the *Führer*. If you walked into her shop and didn't say "*heil* Hitler," you wouldn't be served. (Zusak, 2007, p. 49 - 50)

Obsessed by the Third Reich, Frau Diller even spits on Hans' feet and calls him a "Jew lover" (p. 395), after he is seen giving bread to a hungry Jewish man arrested by the soldiers. Death's attitude, when he comes for her soul, indicates he really does not like wars and those who foment it. In a symbolical act, he does not mention the process he performs to collect her soul, like he normally does when speaking about other people. Normally, in other situations, he explains the way he extracts souls and the way he carries them, with special attention to children. Frau Diller, on the other hand, is not granted any word of consideration, and Death even steps on Hitler's picture on the ground, strengthening his attitude of disapproval. When Himmel Street is bombed by surprise at night, the narrator shows up to take everyone who lives there:

Frau Diller was fast asleep. Her bulletproof glasses were shattered next to the bed. Her shop was obliterated, the counter landing across the road, and her framed photo of Hitler was taken from the wall and thrown to the floor. The man was positively mugged and beaten to a glass-shattering pulp. I stepped on him on my way out. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 530)

Rudy's father, Mr. Steiner, on the other hand, deserves Death's consideration. It is a fact that he is a German who follows Hitler's system but, unlike Frau Diller, he does not make it his living passion. Like Hans Hubermann, he is a poor citizen in a poor German town, trying his best to survive and to feed his wife and six children. In fact, he is a common person who knows things are not right, but he is aware of the danger he runs if not accepting the rules. It is true he is relieved for not having the Jewish competitors on the business market, but does not buy the idea of extermination. The way Death depicts Mr. Steiner is different from the way he depicts Frau Diller, even the typeface deserves bold letters in a paragraph indicating the narrator's direct speech.

***** THE CONTRADICTION POLITICS OF ALEX STEINER *****

Point One: He was a member of the Nazi Party, but he did not hate the Jews, or anyone else for that matter.

Point Two: Secretly, though, he couldn't help feeling a percentage of relief (or worse - gladness!) when Jewish shop owners were put out of business - propaganda informed him that it was only a matter of time before a plague of Jewish tailors showed up and stole his customers.

Point Three: But did that mean they should be driven out completely?

Point Four: His family. Surely, he had to do whatever he could to support them.

Point Five: Somewhere, far down, there was an itch in his heart, but he made it

Point Five: Somewhere, far down, there was an itch in his heart, but he made it a point not to scratch it. He was afraid of what might come leaking out.

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 59 - 60)

Death does not have the opportunity to collect Mr. Steiner's soul in those days. His son, Rudy, is officially requested to join a school meant to create "an elite group of German citizens in the name of the *Führer*" (ZUSAK, 2007, p.409). Aware of the bad rumors about such school, Alex Steiner does not allow his kid to be taken away by the Nazi officers and, as a punishment, he is sent to war (just like Huns Hubermann, who helps a hungry Jewish on the street). When Liesel realizes that Hans and Mr. Steiner receive a written communication with the words *compulsory* and *duty*, she thinks: "She wondered how many letters like that were sent out as punishment to Germany's Hans Hubermanns and Alex Steiners - to those who helped the helpless, and those who refused to let go of their children" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 418). In a twist of fate, Alex Steiner works as a tailor for the army and survives the war, while Rudy and all the rest of the family die on Himmel Street during an air raid. After the war is over, Mr. Steiner comes back and continues working as a tailor, having Liesel as his helper. Alex Rosenfeld, specialist in Holocaust Studies, calls people like Mr. Steiner a bystander. According to Rosenfeld, Europe was composed by three main groups during the Nazi persecution: the victims, the persecutors and the bystanders. As he further explains:

the bystanders were those who were not 'involved,' not willing to hurt the victims and not wishing to be hurt by the perpetrators. Although some profited from the plight and disappearance of the Jews, most were guilty of no specific crimes; and while some aided their Jewish neighbors through small acts of decency and kindness, most won no honor for themselves through the commission of especially meritorious deeds. Neither heroes nor criminals, they were ordinary people who lived through hard times and looked on as others among them experienced even harder and much crueler times. (ROSENFELD, 2011, p. 05)

Another characteristic that calls attention is the amount of time Death spends talking about himself. I must agree with the narrator's opinion: he is self-obsessed. Death speaks of Liesel and mankind but, at the heart of the matter, he is speaking about himself most of the time. He wants to tell the narratee the story he likes, he wants to be seen a wise entity that has seen so much and has done so much in eternity. He is aware of the general opinion about him, and he tries, all the time, to dissociate his image from evil. When the narrator says "You see, even Death has a heart!" (p. 242), he proves he is not a merciless thing. He wants, above all, to understand how humans can be such contradictory living beings; showing mercy and cruelty. Death recognizes such trait:

I actually feel quite self-indulgent at the moment, telling you all about me, me, me. My travels, what *I* saw in '42. On the other hand, you're a human—you should understand self-obsession. The point is, there's a reason for me explaining what I saw in that time. Much of it would have repercussions for Liesel Meminger. It brought the war closer to Himmel Street, and it dragged *me* along for the ride. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 307 - 308)

Finally, it can be said that Death is a humorous person. It is one of the narrator's characteristic to make fun of people and their behavior, as well as fun of their pre-conceptions about death. However, as Death takes the side of the victims, he never makes fun of children, Jews or any of the characters he has in high consideration. In a specific moment of the narrative, for instance, Death mocks about the Nazi hand way of saluting Hitler:

Many jocular comments followed, as did another onslaught of “*heil* Hitlering.” You know, it actually makes me wonder if anyone ever lost an eye or injured a hand or wrist with all of that. You'd only need to be facing the wrong way at the wrong time or stand marginally too close to another person. Perhaps people did get injured. Personally, I can only tell you that no one died from it, or at least, not physically. There was, of course, the matter of forty million people I picked up by the time the whole thing was finished, but that's getting all metaphoric. Allow me to return us to the fire. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 111-112)

Yarova, in her analysis on Death's humor in *The Book Thief*, summarizes the effect it produces on the reader, as the narrator uses sarcasm and humor to convey criticism and judgmental values about the futility of war:

In *The Book Thief*, Death's humour has several functions. The narrator's ironic language predisposes the reader's affinity toward Death, making him likable. However, this characteristic not only serves to shape readers' impressions of Death's humanness, it also amplifies Death's scepticism towards humans. The sinister humour of the narrator is subversive and his ironic comments accentuate the ridiculousness of the war. (YAROVA, 2016, p. 65)

It is a fact that the sarcastic and dark humor of Death does not affect children and other victims of war. When it comes to children, it is easier for the narrator to show sympathy to humankind. He does not make any ironic or sarcastic comments on children behavior. In fact, he uses children to show how adults can be stupid or cruel and, in such moments, he makes fun of the adults. Children are depicted as smart and cunning creatures, whose simple and innocent judgements are meant to be trusted. When Liesel sees Hans Hubermann for the first time, she realizes he is a good person, unlike the German adults in the neighborhood, who simply do not recognize his moral value.

To most people, Hans Hubermann was barely visible. An un-special person. [...] Not noticeable. Not important or particularly valuable. [...] There most definitely *was* value in him, and it did not go unnoticed by Liesel Meminger. (The human child - so much cannier at times than the stupefyingly ponderous adult.) She saw it immediately. [...] Liesel, upon seeing those eyes, understood that Hans Hubermann was worth a lot. (ZUSAK, 2007, p.34)

As a personification, Death may not like human adults but, definitely, he is fond of human children. Later, in the narrative, Death describes a scene in which German officers go to Rudy's house to inform his parents the boy is requested to attend to a special German school. That means he needs to leave his family and join Hitler's young army of Nazi soldiers. While the adults have this conversation in the kitchen, Rudy and his siblings are next door, playing dominoes in the living room. Kurt, his elder brother, is the one who notices something is wrong in the kitchen:

[Kurt] He'd noticed the arguing from the kitchen. "What's going on in there?" It was one of the girls who answered. The youngest, Bettina. She was five. "There are two monsters," she said. "They've come for Rudy." Again, the human child. So much cannier. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 410)

The fact that Death is able to emotionally connect to children, recognizing their superiority in terms of feelings, makes Death an even more appealing personification. An attentive look shows that Death is deeply humanized in relation to his way of treating the unprotected ones – children, teenagers and Jews. In this way, Death, resembles someone who feels sorry to perform his job, as it is not his fault the abrupt ending of the lives of the innocents.

1.3 Death as the narrator

Death, in Zusak's novel, is the narrating agent that tells his story to another agent, here called the narratee. Under this perspective, is necessary to clarify some points about the narrator, as well as the narratee, under a narratological light. To begin with, the narrator in *The Book Thief* is a complex one, in the sense that it aggregates diverse characteristics that

belong to different types of narrators, according to the typology stipulated by Gérard Genette (1980). When speaking about types of narrators, Genette affirms:

We will therefore distinguish here two types of narrative: one with the narrator absent from the story he tells [...] the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells [...] I call the first type [...] *heterodiegetic*, and the second type *homodiegetic*. [...] within the homodiegetic type at least two varieties: one where the narrator is the hero of his narrative [...] and one where he plays only a secondary role, which almost always turns out to be a role as observer and witness [...] For the first variety (which to some extent represents the strong degree of the homodiegetic) we will reserve the unavoidable term *autodiegetic*. (GENETTE, 1980, p. 244 - 245)

If we borrow the narratological assumptions by Genette, we can conceive Death as heterodiegetic, homodiegetic and autodiegetic narrator. Death, in *The Book Thief*, may be understood as heterodiegetic due to his absence in the story he tells. In this sense, he is not a character in Liesel's story and he does not interact with any of the other characters. Beyond that, Death has an omniscient point of view which he uses to report characters' thoughts and feelings. He is able to see far into the future and long into the past, functioning as an entity located out of the time spatial continuum. He knows the fate of mankind in a whole, having witnessed the greatest catastrophes in human history. Death observes what happens to Liesel and to all the ones involved in her life with great interest, though never interfering as a character. However, sometimes he acts like an unseen entity; even close to the others without being perceived. When Liesel's brother is buried, he describes the moment Liesel and her mother are leaving the cemetery, while he stays there, as a silent and unnoticed witness: "A final, soaking farewell was let go of, and they turned and left the cemetery, looking back several times. As for me, I remained a few moments longer. I waved. No one waved back" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 24).

On the other hand, if we take Genette's definition of homodiegetic narrators, it becomes possible to classify Death as a homodiegetic narrator too, especially because he names himself in first-person. Death may not interact with people while they are still alive, but he does so when they pass away. Liesel's departing, at the end of the narrative, is the strongest example, as Death not only talks to her but also returns her old book, the same one he collected when she was a child. Besides, to some extent, it is feasible to comprehend the exact moment life takes its leave as a kind of interaction between death and the living. When Death comes to collect Hans, for example, his soul raises from his body instants before the bombs actually fall on Himmel Street. In such interlude, between present life and afterlife; I such a

dreamy atmosphere, Death mentally interacts with Hans, whose soul knows he is leaving. Interesting to notice that Hans' last thought is directed to Liesel, who survives that night:

Hans. Papa. He was tall in the bed and I could see the silver through his eyelids. His soul sat up. It met me. Those kinds of souls always do - the best ones. The ones who rise up and say, "I know who you are and I am ready. Not that I want to go, of course, but I will come." Those souls are always light because more of them have been put out. More of them have already found their way to other places. This one was sent out by the breath of an accordion, the odd taste of champagne in summer, and the art of promise-keeping. He lay in my arms and rested. There was an itchy lung for a last cigarette and an immense, magnetic pull toward the basement, for the girl who was his daughter and was writing a book down there that he hoped to read one day. Liesel. His soul whispered it as I carried him. But there was no Liesel in that house. Not for me, anyway. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 531 - 532)

As an homodiegetic narrator, Death may be considered autodiegetic. As Genette mentions, the autodiegetic narrator is the *hero* of the story (1980, p. 245). In order to understand such argumentation, it is necessary to view *The Book Thief* as a double story: it is Liesel's story but it is Death's story too. In this sense, Death is an autodiegetic narrator as intertwines his trajectory to Liesel's. Chapter six, for instance, has two of its sections entitled "Death's diary: 1942" (p. 307) and "Death's diary: Cologne" (p. 336). Both of them focus on Death's experiences of war, which he considers relevant for being related to Liesel's narrative. He recognizes: "I actually feel quite self-indulgent at the moment, telling you all about me, me, me. My travels, what *I* saw in '42. [...] The point is, there's a reason for me explaining what I saw in that time. Much of it would have repercussions for Liesel Meminger" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 307 - 308). As we can see, depending on how the narrator in *The Book Thief* is considered, the impact on the reception of the novel changes. Mieke Bal speaks about the importance of the issue of the narrator:

The narrator is the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts. The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character. (BAL, 1999, p. 19)

It is clear that Death plays a major role in *The Book Thief* due to his complexity as a narrator. However, the other agent of the narrative - the narratee - must also be taken into consideration. In *The Book Thief*, the narratee is an essential part of the narrator's rhetoric to develop the plot based on a one-sided conversation with his audience, which only pays attention and never replies. Death speaks all the time with an imaginary narratee, therefore,

the rules set for such interaction must be discussed in order to reveal some of the narrator's speaking traits.

By and large, it is common to confuse the narratee with the real reader; the flesh and bone person in the extradiegetic level reading literary work. Most of the times, it is easier to happen when the narrator uses a general *you* form, not addressing another character as audience or not personifying his narratee. When no clear borders are defined to distinguish narratees and real readers, it becomes difficult to determine who the narratee is, since it lacks specific signs of identification. Nevertheless, even when not personified, the narratee should not be taken for the real reader because a narrative "can have an indefinitely varying set of real readers" (PRINCE, 1987, p. 57). In *The Book Thief*, the narrator refers to his audience in *you* form, though, sometimes, he uses the pronoun *we*, leveling their positions as accomplices in the narrative. Constantly discussing his accounts, Death speaks to someone with no participation in the events narrated, someone who is explicitly evoked even without being a character. No concrete traits are given to this narratee, aside the narrator's projections on his knowledge and feelings. Sometimes, Death takes for granted that his narratee already knows what he means, as when Death refers to the bombs the Allies throw at German cities. "You're well aware of exactly what was coming to Himmel Street by the end of 1940. I know. You know. Liesel Meminger, however, cannot be put into that category" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 142). As it is indicated, the narrator expects the narratee to be familiar with this information, which portrays the narratee as someone who shares the historical knowledge about the context of the war.

Such projections are also visible when we analyze the questions the narrator often asks throughout the narrative. In general, it can be said that one of the most visible speech characteristics of Death is his capacity of asking questions (most of them rhetorical) to his narratee. About questions asked by narrators, Gerald Prince states: "Sometimes, when questions or pseudo questions emanate from the narrator, they are not addressed to himself or to one of his characters but rather to his narratee, a narratee whose opinions and experiences are thus partly revealed" (PRINCE, 1982, p.18). The narrator of *The Book Thief* employs rhetorical questions that seem to be to himself, but, in a close look, such questions are meant for the narratee, which is expected to agree or to share Death's point of view. The following is such an example of: "How could that woman walk? How could she move? That's the sort of thing I'll never know, or comprehend - what humans are capable of" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 25). One must be alert to the inherent ambiguous feature of questions, because "Sometimes, these do not emanate from a character or from the narrator, who merely seems to be repeating them.

They can be attributed to the narratee” (PRINCE, 1982, p.18). Of course, sometimes it is impossible to point out when the narrator is asking the question or when he is just repeating what the narratee supposedly said, showing an interaction between these agents. The next excerpt is a clear example of a narrative that is interrupted by many questions that cannot be surely attributed either to the narrator or to the narratee, since both of them could have asked them.

“I knew it.” The words were thrown at the steps and Liesel could feel the slush of anger, stirring hotly in her stomach. “I hate the *Führer*,” she said. “I *hate* him.” And Hans Hubermann? What did he do? What did he say? Did he bend down and embrace his foster daughter, as he wanted to? Did he tell her that he was sorry for what was happening to her, to her mother, for what had happened to her brother? Not exactly. He clenched his eyes. Then opened them. He slapped Liesel Meminger squarely in the face. “Don’t *ever* say that!” His voice was quiet, but sharp. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 115)

The conversation with the narratee, which is marked by the frequent use of rhetorical questions, is also marked by a strong sense of orality. The way the narrator presents the story gives the impression he is talking to somebody in *The Book Thief*. The narratee is evoked as someone who is *listening* to the narrator. As Maziarczyk (2011a, p.261) states, this “addressee is not a specific interlocutor concretized on the level of the presented world; he/she is just a possible listener. [...] the *skaz* creates the illusion of the “you” being present at the narrator’s side, which is a prerequisite for oral communication.” Other signs of oral communication rely on the use of colloquial expressions like “you see”, “you know” and verbs that refer to orality like “tell”, “say” and “mention”, which make part of an “engaging strategy” (Maziarczyk, 2011a, p. 261) that creates the atmosphere of an oral conversation. In the following passage, it is possible to see that Death speaks to his narratee in an informal way, treating him like a friend in a conversation:

Now for a change of scenery. We’ve both had it too easy till now, my friend, don’t you think? How about we forget Molching for a minute or two? It will do us some good. Also, it’s important to the story. We will travel a little, to a secret storage room, and we will see what we see. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 138)

The use of German words also raise a feeling of orality in Death’s speech. It is true that the narrator reports the German words used by Liesel’s foster family and her neighbors, yet, he gives the narratee an explanation on the meaning of them. In a way, he knows he will

use those words a lot, and, although having the possibility of translating them into English (the language he tells the story), he decides to keep the German words the way they are used. Death even provides a brief explanation of how to pronounce them. This happens when Liesel arrives on Himmel Street for the first time, being adopted by a foster mother who is abusive in her treatment not only of Liesel, but of the world as a whole. Rosa Hubermann curses to everybody she knows and, although Liesel finds that strange, she soon learns the language of her new family:

In the beginning, it was the profanity that made an immediate impact. It was so *vehement* and prolific. Every second word was either *Saumensch* or *Saukerl* or *Arschloch*. For people who aren't familiar with these words, I should explain. *Sau*, of course, refers to pigs. In the case of *Saumensch*, it serves to castigate, berate, or plain humiliate a female. *Saukerl* (pronounced "saukairl") is for a male. *Arschloch* can be translated directly into "asshole." That word, however, does not differentiate between the sexes. It simply is. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 32)

Death, although making use of simple syntactical structures, conveys complex meanings through metaphors. *The Book Thief's* narrator accommodates the heavy weight matter of his subject with a language full of metaphors. Maher, although relating the language of this work to his author, also allows useful insight on the narrator's language rhetoric: "*The Book Thief* is elegant and often florid. Zusak uses poetic language, magical realism, embedded narratives and fractured narrative style to evoke a mythological perspective of the Holocaust" (MAHER, 2011, p. 57). An example of poetic language employed by Death refers to the scene when Liesel's mother wakes up in the train and realizes her son had died. Desperately, she shakes both him and Liesel, to check if the girl is alive or dead like her brother. "She woke her up with the same distraught shake. If you can't imagine it, think clumsy silence. Think bits and pieces of floating despair. And drowning in a train" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 21). In my opinion, the metaphors in *The Book Thief* serve for two purposes. First, it distinguishes Death's speech from ordinary humans' way of talking. It is expected, then, that the narrator expresses himself under a different light, finding metaphors and applying them to context of war in a way which humans would not think of. Second, I think the metaphors used by the narrator soften the blow on the reader. Such subject, like the Holocaust, due to its nature, is normally the cause of horror and disgust. The atrocities committed against defenseless people, including women and children, is strongly felt even nowadays, as if we think of how many survivors are alive; being a living portrait of what humans can do for power, in all spheres. Hence, the narrator does not speak, explicitly, of the barbarism

perpetrated in the war. He uses metaphorical language, in the following scene, to speak about the millions of people who died during that time and to speak about the poor German citizens punished for not blindly obeying the regime:

On the ration cards of Nazi Germany, there was no listing for punishment, but everyone had to take their turn. For some it was death in a foreign country during the war. For others it was poverty and guilt when the war was over, when six million discoveries were made throughout Europe. Many people must have seen their punishments coming, but only a small percentage welcomed it. One such person was Hans Hubermann. (ZUSAK, 2007, p...)

The way Death refers to the mass murder of Jews is understandable when Alvin Rosenfeld affirms that “the canonical number “Six Million” has been generally adopted to signify that the Jews, persecuted and slaughtered *en masse*, were the primary victims of the Holocaust” (ROSENFELD, 2011, p. 04).

Another relevant example of poetic language is the announcement that Liesel would become a book thief in the future. “She was the book thief without the words. Trust me, though, the words were on their way, and when they arrived, Liesel would hold them in her hands like the clouds, and she would wring them out like the rain” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 80). Here, Death uses the metaphors not to empathize the fact, itself, but to escape the harshness of his work. He tries to connect beauty and poetry to handle sad moments. More than once in the narrative, Death relates war, human loss and snow (from the battle of Stalingrad). “When I imagine that scene of the distraught woman and the tall silver-eyed man, it is still snowing in the kitchen of 31 Himmel Street” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 502 – 505). It is worth notice that Death makes the attention to colors and the use of metaphors his way to get distracted from the misery of a world at war. This mixture of prose and poetic images, altogether with apparent structural simplicity, is explained by Brady:

Perhaps the most original and innovative aspect of Zusak’s prose is his prolific use of figurative language including metaphor, simile, paradox, and irony. Zusak not only establishes the ethos and personality of his narrator early in the book, he also introduces his trope-heavy style. The reader becomes accustomed to it, and because of its deceitful simplicity, may skim over some of the richest metaphors unless instructed to look for them. (BRADY, 2013, p. 29)

Metaphors, however, are not the only figurative language elements used by Death as a narrator. Irony is another outstanding rhetorical style clearly seen in *The Book Thief*. The term irony, nevertheless, needs some consideration. It is said that “In most of the modern critical uses of the term ‘irony’ there remains the root sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects” (ABRAMS, 1999, p. 135). As it is possible to understand, ironic passages in a literary text may be hard to detect due to their “hidden” nature and, once detected, they may provoke different understanding on their meanings; that is why “every reader learns that some statements cannot be understood without rejecting what they seem to say” (BOOTH, 1975, p. 01). Fludernik shows how important metaphors are for a narratological analysis:

This subject has not yet been investigated from a narratological perspective. In spite of the importance of metaphor, its use in narrative texts has simply been attributed to the author and regarded as part of her/his individual style, seemingly irrelevant from a narratological point of view. Nevertheless, metaphors do have an important role to play in the interpretation of novels, although they are not usually considered to be the concern of narrative theory. (FLUDERNIK, 2009, p. 73)

The frequent use of irony, in *The Book Thief*, reveals a lot about the narrator. About the quality and voice revealing characteristics inherent in the use of irony, Hutcheon (1995, p. 37) says: “Irony does not simply add complexity or variety or richness [...] to a discourse; [...] irony also conveys something else: an attitude or a feeling. [...] it foregrounds the “evaluative accent” that context gives any utterance”.

Death, in *The Book Thief*, is also characterized by his frequent use of anachronism. Usually, narratives disturb the linear chronology by presenting events out of the right order they happen in the story. For these moments Genette employs the term “anacrony” (1980, p. 35) to refer to non-chronological segments within the narrative. These displaced temporal moments are normally possible to be detected by the reader. In *The Book Thief*, Death recurs to subsequent narration (after the events take place) to speak about the incidents he witnesses. As an overt narrator, he uses a free indirect speech style and, through aside comments, he judges people he sees and situations he observes. In a certain moment, for instance, Death tells the narratee he is going to invert the order of the events, foreshadowing important details he considers relevant; in a clear example of anachronism.

Again, I offer you a glimpse of the end. Perhaps it’s to soften the blow for later, or to better prepare *myself* for the telling. Either way, I must inform you that it was

raining on Himmel Street when the world ended for Liesel Meminger. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 497)

Obviously, anachronism can function to several purposes, as the break of the chronological order subverts the traditional way of narrating. Normally, analepsis (or flashbacks) provide useful information on past events that were not sufficiently clarified, such as the motivation for some actions or the “real” past of a given character. Thus, it functions as an explanatory tool. On the other hand, prolepsis (or anticipation/foreshadow) usually creates suspense by providing hints on future events. Here, the suspense does not focus on “what” will happen, but on “how” that event will happen. As Bal asserts:

The foreshadowing effect is preserved at the expense of suspense. This does not always imply that suspense is entirely lost. Another kind of suspense may arise. From the kind in which both reader and character are equally in the dark, we have stepped up to a second kind: the reader knows, but the character does not, how the fabula will end. The question that the reader raises is not 'How does it end?' but 'Will the character discover in time?' We can never be sure of this [...]" (BAL, 1999, p. 58)

The Book Thief intensely employs anachronism, and the narrator, most of the time, anticipates events. About future information provided by Death, Tem (2011, p. 44) realizes: “Having Death as the narrator provides Zusak with some rather unique opportunity for foreshadowing. Because he is Death we assume he is timeless and completely reliable in his predictions of what is to come.” While using a lot of prolepsis in his speech, Death does what narrators do not usually do, according to Genette. The author emphasizes that: “Anticipation, or temporal prolepsis, is clearly much less frequent than the inverse figure, at least in the Western narrative tradition” (GENETTE, 1980, p. 67). The beginning of the narrative in *The Book Thief* is an anticipatory summary of the three decisive events where the narrator will meet Liesel, who anticipates that she manages to escape death. Aside that, all chapters start with an anticipatory brief list of all crucial moments that are to come. The next extract, the short introduction for chapter 1, serves as example:

PART ONE
the grave digger’s handbook
featuring:
himmel street—the art of *saumensching*—an ironfisted
woman—a kiss attempt—jesse owens—

sandpaper—the smell of friendship—a heavyweight
 champion—and the mother of all *watschens*
 (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 17)

Maybe one would argue that this excess of anticipations kills the narrative suspense, as the outcome of all main events is already known. Notwithstanding the end of the mystery about the future results from present actions, the use of prolepsis is not a suspense killing technique. Bal (1997, p. 95) affirms: “The suspense generated by the question ‘How is it going to end?’ disappears; [...] another kind of suspense, or rather a tension which keeps the reader engaged, may take its place, prompting questions like ‘How could it have happened like this?’”. Indeed, *The Book Thief* shows constant anticipation of events either through prolepsis or through the arrangement of situations that allow the narratee to predict, to a certain extent, the aftermath of significant events. The matter in this narrative is not *what* is going to happen, but *how* things are going to happen, which produces a great amount of tension and also expresses a fatalistic point of view. Even the narrator recognizes:

Of course, I’m being rude. I’m spoiling the ending, not only of the entire book, but of this particular piece of it. I have given you two events in advance, because I don’t have much interest in building mystery. Mystery bores me. It chores me. I know what happens and so do you. It’s the machinations that wheel us there that aggravate, perplex, interest, and astound me. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 243)

The narrator also uses a good deal of analeptic devices, filling in important gaps about the past of the characters or providing relevant past information on current events. This disruption in time, which moves the story back to a description of an earlier event, usually interrupts the story-flow, especially when they are lengthy and detailed or when they configure an embedded story. In *The Book Thief*, flashbacks are presented both in the form of brief insertions and in the form of long passages. The long descriptions of past events produce an important effect on the story of *The Book Thief*: they finally answer Bal’s question “How could it have happened like this?” (1997, p. 95).

As the narrator sprinkles the narrative with hints of coming events, which sometimes are just cleared up many chapters ahead, the narratee becomes curious and focuses on the story, waiting for the moment when he will finally fully understand the actions that led to a specific result. The analeptic manipulation of the temporal frame is explicit and long in many moments. Chapter four, for instance, begins with the arrival of Max Vandenburg on Himmel Street, knocking on Hans Hubermann’s door and asking him for help. Then the narrator suspends the narrative at the crucial point when Hans was expected to answer “yes” or “no”,

shifting the sequential ordering backwards saying: “It all dated back many years, to World WarI. They’re strange, those wars. Full of blood and violence – but also full of stories that are equally difficult to fathom” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 174.) Only on page 185, after explaining how Hans met Max’s father and how Hans had to adapt to the Nazi system, the narrator returns to the earlier point, finally showing Han’s attitude of accepting Max as a fugitive Jew in his house.

So far, Death, as a narrator, has been perceived as a personification that employs metaphors and irony to tell his story. He uses anachronism, creating a different kind of suspense, and he makes the effort to communicate well to his narratee, a construct that does not participate in the events. It is clear the way Death speaks and how he does it. However, there is something about Death’s speech that must be mentioned: the way his words are visually presented. (Obviously, here, the typeface² is considered one of the narrator’s characteristics, not a stylistic device employed by the author Markus Zusak). Death’s use of boldface to relay information is the most visible of his characteristics as a narrator, since the reader immediately recognizes his bold side-comments from the beginning of the narrative. Chapter one calls attention for its use of boldface fonts, in the center of the page, right after some short sentences in which the narrator presents himself for the first time:

First the colors.
Then the humans.
That’s usually how I see things.
Or at least, how I try.

***** HERE IS A SMALL FACT *****
You are going to die.

I am in all truthfulness attempting to be cheerful about this whole topic, though most people find themselves hindered in believing me, no matter my protestations. [...]

***** REACTION TO THE *****
AFOREMENTIONED FACT
Does this worry you?
I urge you—don’t be afraid.
I’m nothing if not fair.

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 03)

² Typeface and font can be used interchangeably, as I do in this dissertation, according to the authors who support my arguments. However, professionals and designers, who need to make a distinction between these terms, normally use the term typeface as the family type of fonts at large, and font as type in a particular size. Hence, bold, alone, is a font; bold in a specific letterform, is a typeface.

Eva Brumberger, in her study about the use of typeface in documents, adverts and literature, says that “the *visual* tone of a text – the persona established by its typeface – affects reader’s/viewers’ perception of its verbal tone.” (BRUMBERGER, 2003, p. 208). Indeed, Death’s words and their typeface configuration contribute to the construction of meaning. It means that, Death, as an archetype, is a strong figure invested of a powerful capacity: to end people’s lives. Accordingly, he uses bold letterform to emphasize his speech and, to some extent, to show his fatalistic power. Bringhurst (1996) and Brumberger (2003) claim that typeface and the content of the text are meant to produce certain reactions on readers and viewers. In this way, boldface letters would call immediate attention to the reading, highlighting the impact of such words. At the same time, these words are spoken by Death, producing the sensation that they must be read attentively. As a matter of fact, Death uses the bold font for the following main reasons: to provide information to the narratee (going off on a tangent), to foreshadow events, to have inner talks about his own feelings and, finally, to emphasize tension and drama. There is a moment, for example, when Liesel and Max have a conversation by the fireplace. There, they talk about their nightmares, and Death uses boldface letters to highlight the tension of the scene. By the way, this is the only conversation in which this kind of typeface is used.

The fire was nothing now but a funeral of smoke, dead and dying, simultaneously.
On this particular morning, there were also voices.

THE SWAPPING OF NIGHTMARES

The girl: “Tell me. What do you see
when you dream like that?”

The Few: “. . . I see myself turning
around, and waving goodbye.”

The girl: “I also have nightmares.”

The Few: “What do you see?”

The girl: “A train, and my dead brother.”

The Few: “Your brother?”

The girl: “He died when I moved
here, on the way.”

The girl and the Few, together: “Fa —yes.”

It would be nice to say that after this small breakthrough, neither Liesel nor Max dreamed their bad visions again. It would be nice but untrue. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 220)

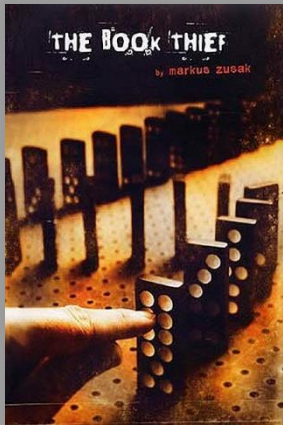
In a nutshell, the narrator of *The Book Thief* is a peculiar personification with a peculiar way of expression. Its comprehension goes beyond a simple representation, either as a gentle entity which observes humankind or as a fatal and gloomy force which employs sarcasm to judge the living ones. Understanding the narrator of *The Book Thief*, even in an

incomplete way, requires some knowledge about History, religion, archetypes, symbolism and psychoanalysis, not to mention notions about narrative construction. Obviously, it all concerns the analytical and academic reading of the novel. In a common reading act, though, the interpretation of the narrator in *The Book Thief* depends on the readers' pre-conceptions about death or, quoting Jung's words, on their stored "archetypal images".

2 A STORY ABOUT DEATH

No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all goods for people, but they fear it as if they knew for certain that it's the worst thing of all.

Plato, *Apology*



The Book Thief has death as its fundamental axis. In the domino effect, when one domino falls, the others are taken out, metaphorically representing cause and effect. In *The Book Thief*, every death causes a chain reaction of events which leads to other deaths. Although *The Book Thief* does not present the atrocities of Holocaust in a bloody descriptive way, it still shows dying scenes of people in general, be them Jews in gas chambers or German citizens killed in air raid attacks. It offers a dramatic treatment of the historical facts related to WWII;

omitting further (but not crucial) information about the violent menace of war and allowing the daily life of common citizens in a poor German town play the major role.

In general terms, it is the story about a ten-year-old German girl, Liesel Meminger, who is fostered by a family in the fictitious small town Molching, near Munich, on the verge of the World War II. It is, at the same time, the story of Liesel and the story of the narrator, who offers an insight of what it means being something like him. *The Book Thief* begins with Death willing to tell the story of a young book thief called Liesel. The narrator meets the girl when he comes to take her brother and, for some reason, Death feels he is seen by Liesel, which causes a strong impression on him. When Death decides to attend to the boy's burial, he observes when Liesel steals her first book.

Years later, Death comes for a pilot's soul. When his airplane falls next to a small town, Death waits for the right moment to act. In the meantime, a boy and a girl approach the scene of the accident; and Death remembers the book thief he once met. Later on, Death meets Liesel once more when he visits a German town devastated by an air raid. The girl is

there, in a state of chock, holding a book. The book falls from her hands while she is taken by the police, and Death picks it up, carrying it all around and reading it many times. This book, also called *The Book Thief*, is her handwritten little volume which describes the crucial moments of her life under the care of her foster parents Hans and Rosa Hubermann, who defy the Nazi regime by concealing a Jewish man in their basement. When Liesel reaches an advanced age, she dies peacefully, and Death finally returns her book.

The book summary, provided so far, is relevant to understand the role of death in the novel. *The Book Thief* offers an insight into death through three main features. Without taking the narrator into consideration, death is presented through the death of individuals, mass death and the death drive. Throughout the book, the reader is confronted with characters dying because of the cold, war and famine. Some of them simply disappear, and the reader imagines their deaths according to the vicious structure of the Nazi Genocide. In this case, they are addressed by name or by a term that individualize them (as the pilot, the sister, the boy). On the other hand, those who present some kind of trauma endured during the war or those who suffered great loss or great emotional pressure, become hostages of their death instincts, or rather, the primary feeling of self-destruction. Besides, the story also touches the mass death of Jews and mass death of citizens killed in air raids. Sometimes, in this case, there are depictions of individual deaths, but, normally, the narrator generalizes, saying he is there to collect souls or that he sees bodies of Russians, Germans and French. All these features are developed in the following sections, which have in Sigmund Freud its main theoretical voice that orients the proposed analysis.

2.1 Death of Individuals

The Book Thief is a grieving account filled with frequent death, dying and close-to-death states of adults and children. Liesel Meminger is the little German survivor who eludes death three times from the years 1939 to 1943. In the meantime, she loses to death all her beloved ones, her brother dies of cold, her mother (a communist) disappears, her father (also said to be a communist) is long gone and all her neighborhood is burnt by the bombs, killing her foster family, her friends, acquaintances and Rudy, a mix of best friend and first love. Of all people who know Liesel, just three are able to survive and share her life. Max Vandenburg, her Jewish friend who is taken by the Germans but survives the concentration camp, Ilsa

Hermann, the Mayor's wife; who lives in the town's surroundings, and Alex Steiner, Rudy's father; who is not in town when the bombs from the allies destroy Himmel Street. In his analysis of *The Book Thief* Huggan questioned: "What difference does it make that *The Book Thief* is a *German*, not a *Jewish*, survivor's tale?" (HUGGAN, 2014, p. 10). In my view, it makes all the difference.

The most obvious difference is that the approach to the suffering and brutality of the WWII through German's eyes rather than Jewish transfers the most barbaric aspects of the war to the periphery of the narrative. Jewish people are whipped and herded to camps, Max Vandenburg's family is captured while he manages to escape, Liesel's Jewish neighbors suffer indignities and are sent away, nevertheless, none of their deaths is focused by the narrator in any extermination context as individual characters. Max, the central Jewish character, suffers a lot but lives through it. The only two Jewish characters that have their deaths detailed as single individuals have not had the Holocaust persecution as direct cause of their ends. The first Jewish character to have the occasion of his death explained is Erik Vandenburg, Max's father, who died in the World War I as any other German soldier fighting the war. The narrator remembers about the beginning of the friendship between Hans Hubermann, Liesel's foster father, and Erik Vandenburg:

It was a man a year older than himself—a German Jew named Erik Vandenburg—who taught him to play the accordion. The two of them gradually became friends due to the fact that neither of them was terribly interested in fighting. [...] The only trouble with this was that Erik Vandenburg would later be found in several pieces on a grassy hill. His eyes were open and his wedding ring was stolen. I shoveled up his soul with the rest of them and we drifted away. The horizon was the color of milk. Cold and fresh. Poured out among the bodies. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 175)

The second Jewish death not resulted from the persecution involves Max's uncle. The narrator explains: "[...] he died of something growing in his stomach. Something akin to a poison bowling ball. As is often the case, the family surrounded the bed and watched him capitulate. [...] The man's face was so accepting. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 188). One may argue that lack of descriptions about Jewish people directly resulted from the Holocaust is a representational flaw, but I agree with Phillip in the following passage about *The Book Thief*:

Its primary focus on non-Jewish Germans (and their ensuing sympathies with Jewish Germans) sheds light on the hunger and joblessness caused by the war, the

manipulation of the community by the party, and feelings of hopelessness, guilt, and depression that plagued society. As such, it is a novel that considers the equalizing effects of violence felt on both sides of the war. (PHILLIPS, 2015, p. 23).

The story centers on the everyday life of non-Jewish German people, therefore, it also centers on their death and dying as single individuals. Not considering the prologue, which announces three dying scenes which will be witnessed by Liesel, the first death description of an individual occurs in Part I and deeply reverberates in Liesel's life provoking emotional distress which will have as main consequence nightmares and ghostly visions. Her brother, a child, dies in their way to their foster parents, and his dying scene is the specific moment when the narrator becomes interested in Liesel. The narrator describes the instant of the boy's death using his technique of dramatic bold uppercase letters and asterisks:

***** A SPECTACULARLY TRAGIC MOMENT *****

A train was moving quickly.

It was packed with humans.

A six-year-old boy died in the third carriage.

The book thief and her brother were traveling down toward Munich, where they would soon be given over to foster parents. We now know, of course, that the boy didn't make it.

***** HOW IT HAPPENED *****

There was an intense spurt of coughing.

Almost an *inspired* spurt.

And soon after—nothing.

When the coughing stopped, there was nothing but the nothingness of life moving on with a shuffle, or a near-silent twitch. A suddenness found its way onto his lips then, which were a corroded brown color and peeling, like old paint. In desperate need of redoing. Their mother was asleep. I entered the train. My feet stepped through the cluttered aisle and my palm was over his mouth in an instant. No one noticed. The train galloped on. Except the girl. With one eye open, one still in a dream, the book thief—also known as Liesel Meminger—could see without question that her younger brother, Werner, was now sideways and dead. His blue eyes stared at the floor. Seeing nothing. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 20)

The death of Werner is emblematic not only because of its consequence over Liesel's future fears but also because it is the death of a child. Although he is not the only child who dies in the story, still, the death of children is not considered natural even in war contexts. As Avery and Reynolds (2000, p. 06) state "children belong not only to their families, but also represent the future of society. Times when children and young people die *en masse* threaten the fundamental mechanism by which societies as well as individuals reproduce themselves." Even the narrator emphasizes how unnatural the dying of children is through his way of

taking their souls. Death shows himself as a salvation figure that makes them warm and healed. The moment Death is collecting souls from a bombed town called Knöl, he says: “Five hundred souls. I carried them in my fingers, like suitcases. Or I’d throw them over my shoulder. It was only the children I carried in my arms” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 536). Not only his treatment to kids is different but he also becomes perplexed when he has to take Rudy’s soul in his sleep, together with all his young siblings. It is relevant to say that the description of Rudy’s death as an individual character inside a mass death is the longest depiction provided by the narrator, who takes two long paragraphs for it, contrasting with his depiction of other deaths, which take one paragraph (the main characters) or less (the secondary ones). As the narrator starts:

Oh, crucified Christ, Rudy . . . He lay in bed with one of his sisters. She must have kicked him or muscled her way into the majority of the bed space because he was on the very edge with his arm around her. The boy slept. His candlelit hair ignited the bed, and I picked both him and Bettina up with their souls still in the blanket. If nothing else, they died fast and they were warm. The boy from the plane, I thought. The one with the teddy bear. Where was Rudy’s comfort? Where was someone to alleviate this robbery of his life? Who was there to soothe him as life’s rug was snatched from under his sleeping feet? No one. There was only me. And I’m not too great at that sort of comforting thing, especially when my hands are cold and the bed is warm. I carried him softly through the broken street, with one salty eye and a heavy, deathly heart. With him, I tried a little harder. I watched the contents of his soul for a moment and saw a black-painted boy calling the name Jesse Owens as he ran through an imaginary tape. I saw him hip-deep in some icy water, chasing a book, and I saw a boy lying in bed, imagining how a kiss would taste from his glorious next-door neighbor. He does something to me, that boy. Every time. It’s his only detriment. He steps on my heart. He makes me cry. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 531)

Of course, analyzing the words, the sentence construction and the tone of such passage, it is obvious that Death gets emotional and describes the scene in a touching way. However, even when the death of a child does not take such a long internal monologue, it calls the attention for being a heartbreaking moment. The death of Arthur Berg’s sister, for example, is totally depicted in bold and makes reference to the bombing of another city.

***** A SMALL TRIBUTE TO ARTHUR BERG, ***
A STILL-LIVING MAN**

**The Cologne sky was yellow and rotting,
flaking at the edges.
He sat propped against a wall with a child
in his arms. His sister.
When she stopped breathing, he stayed with her,
and I could sense he would hold her for hours.
There were two stolen apples in his pocket.**

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 166-167)

The different attitudes Death takes in relation to children and adults do not mean he is less fraternal to the second ones. He keeps offering all victims his protection as an end to an unbearable suffering. I would risk saying he is just more compassionate towards children, which is coherent since he is a personification and humans are not normally willing to accept children's death easily. As Avery and Reynolds (2000, p. 06) say: "Death today can only be understood as 'good' when it comes painlessly at the end of a long life of achievement - all elements which effectively preclude child death."

In their turn, the German adults who die as individuals (the ones who have their deaths mentioned in a more or less degree of details) die in two circumstances: either as civilian war victims (in consequence of air raids) or soldiers (in or out the camp fight). The exception belongs to the foreign pilot who has his death detailed even though he is not a German character. When his airplane falls on the outskirts of the town, Liesel and Rudy rush to the plane and Rudy gives him a teddy bear before he dies:

He [Rudy] stepped through the remainder of trees to where the body of the plane was fixed to the ground. (...)He placed the smiling teddy bear cautiously onto the pilot's shoulder. [...] The dying man breathed it in. He spoke. In English, he said, "Thank you." His straight-line cuts opened as he spoke, and a small drop of blood rolled crookedly down his throat.
 "What?" Rudy asked him. "*Was hast du gesagt?* What did you say?"
 Unfortunately, I beat him to the answer. The time was there and I was reaching into the cockpit. I slowly extracted the pilot's soul from his ruffled uniform and rescued him from the broken plane. [...] Above me, the sky eclipsed—just a last moment of darkness— and I swear I could see a black signature in the shape of a swastika. It loitered untidily above. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 490 – 491)

Once again, Death shows up "to rescue" a soul from a dying body. The death of this pilot is the first of many others which happen to soldiers. I would state that, because of the implication on the fate of other characters, there are two other relevant dying scenes of soldiers. Ilsa Hermann, the mayor's wife, suffers from a pathological melancholia due to the death of her son at war. This fact shapes her actual way of life and her behavior cause a great impression on Liesel. The narrator, using his dramatic visual asides, describes the soldier's death:

***** THE NAME OF A BOY *****
Johann Hermann

Liesel bit down on her lip, but she could not resist it for long. From the floor, she turned and looked up at the bathrobed woman and made an inquiry. "Johann

Hermann,” she said. “Who is that?” (...) The woman’s face did not alter, yet somehow she managed to speak. “He is nothing now in this world,” she explained. “He was my . . .”

***** THE FILES OF RECOLLECTION *****

Oh, yes, I definitely remember him.

The sky was murky and deep like quicksand.

**There was a young man parceled up in barbed wire,
like a giant crown of thorns. I untangled him and carried him
out. High above the earth, we sank together,
to our knees. It was just another day, 1918.**

“Apart from everything else,” she said, “he froze to death.” For a moment, she played with her hands, and she said it again. “He froze to death, I’m sure of it” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 145)

Another death involving soldiers that deserves attention, in my opinion, is the death of two brothers who were fighting side by side in the battle of Stalingrad, Russia. As one of them die the other one is so deeply affected that he commits suicide. Their mother, Liesel’s mother’s neighbor and long-term disaffection, is devastated by her double loss. Death narrates the death of her elder son like this:

Her son was dead. But that was only the half of it. She would never really know how it occurred, but I can tell you without question that one of us here knows. I always seem to know what happened when there was snow and guns and the various confusions of human language. [...] His name was Robert, and what happened to him was this.

***** A SMALL WAR STORY *****

**His legs were blown off at the
shins and he died with his
brother watching in a cold,
stench-filled hospital.**

It was Russia, January 5, 1943, and just another icy day. Out among the city and snow, there were dead Russians and Germans everywhere. Those who remained were firing into the blank pages in front of them. Three languages interwove. The Russian, the bullets, the German. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 468 – 469)

Of course, there are other depictions of war scenes with many soldiers dying; yet, they are secondary characters whose deaths help uncovering the miseries of war, imprinting a dramatic image. One could argue that there is another important death at war represented by the soldier Reinhold Zucker, since his death meant Hans Hubermann’s life. When Hans is sent to war as a member of the squad responsible for the rescue of civilian victims from air raids, the narrator foreshadows: “In the messy space of a few months, Reinhold Zucker would be dead. He would be killed by Hans Hubermann’s seat” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 432). Although Hans Hubermann has his life saved because he swapped seats with another soldier, and a

bomb exploded right there, I think this death does not have the same impact of the previous deaths mentioned. I chose analyzing more deeply those two soldiers' deaths, Johann and Robert, because of their undeniable reverberation, as a domino effect, on other characters. The effect one can notice more clearly is the death instinct they were able to leverage on their relatives, as it will be discussed in the next session.

2.2 The Death Drive

One of the few commonalities between different thinkers on Psychoanalysis is the importance humans attribute to death and dying. Sigmund Freud, about six months after the outbreak of World War I, wrote the essay *Thoughts for the Times of War and Death* (1915), in which he comments the tragedies of war and the human attitudes towards death. According to the author, although people show constant and almost obsessed concern on the matter of death, they still think of it as something that does not belong to the natural process of living. As he states:

(...) death was the necessary outcome of life, that everyone owes nature a death and must expect to pay the debt-in short, that death was natural, undeniable and unavoidable. In reality, however, we were accustomed to behave as if it were otherwise. We showed an unmistakable tendency to put death on one side, to eliminate it from life. [...] It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death; and whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators. Hence the psycho-analytic school could venture on the assertion that at bottom no one believes in his own death, or, to put the same thing in another way, that in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality. When it comes to someone else's death, the civilized man will carefully avoid speaking of such a possibility in the hearing of the person under sentence. (FREUD, 1915, p. 289)

Hence, the denial of death may be considered a “cultural and conventional attitude” (FREUD, 1915, p. 290), as people cannot accept the idea of their own finitude. Nonetheless, war and its consequences is an event meant to drastically change this denying attitude towards death. A person can avoid speaking, and even thinking, of his own death or the death of others. Nonetheless, during the war, death becomes omnipresent; and running away from it, literally or metaphorically, is almost impossible. The author continues saying: “Death will no longer be denied; we are forced to believe in it. People really die; and no longer one by one,

but many, often tens of thousands, in a single day. And death is no longer a chance event” (FREUD, 1915, p. 291).

Freud proposes that men face death in three circumstances: 1. the death of themselves, 2. the death of strangers/enemies and 3. the death of beloved ones. The first situation is considered the most inaccessible experience, since no one has ever had any truly equivalent experience in meaning, and the ones who have it cannot give the account for it anymore. As evidenced by Historians, the second situation may have been natural for primitive men due to their violent nature. In this case, the uneasiness for killing other humans may have led to guilt. The death of the beloved ones, on the other hand, may have produced the sense of sorrow. Later on, guilt and sorrow could have been one of the ingredients which allow men to visualize the abstract ideas of soul and afterlife. The imagery of the immortal soul, which transcends the finitude of the body, serves as comfort to smooth sorrow. Under this light, death is just the end of material (not spiritual) life.

It was only later that religions succeeded in representing this after-life as the more desirable, the truly valid one, and in reducing the life which is ended by death to a mere preparation. After this, it was no more than consistent to extend life backwards into the past, to form the notion of earlier existences, of the transmigration of souls and of reincarnation, all with the purpose of depriving death of its meaning as the termination of life. (FREUD, 1915, p. 295)

Freud concludes his work saying: “If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death” (FREUD, 1915, p. 300). Indeed, although men try to put death aside, it is a constant in human life. It is an inescapable event and, even, an unconscious desire. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud concludes that humans, as other species, are governed by drives³, inner impulses that go far from reasoning and logic. In a nutshell, all human beings, as living organisms, are led by urges, some of them biological (like hunger or thirst) and some of them psychological (like as the need for attention). These urges, called *drives*, are defined like this: “1. An inferred process of motivation which energizes a person and directs him or her toward a goal or goals. 2. In psychoanalysis, the biological energy which underlies a motivation” (MATSUMOTO, 2009, p. 170).

³ Intending to clarify any possible terminological confusion, it is relevant, here, to say that Freud used the German word *Triebe*, which differs from *Instinkts*, to speak about inner impulses. However, Strachey, the translator and organizer of the canonical *Standard Edition of Freud's Complete Work*, chose to translate *triebe* for “Instinct” instead of “Drive”. Thus, too much controversy on the different meanings of these words have arisen, since Freud seldom employs “Instinct”, and when he does so, the word is in a different context. Then, following the modern translations discussed by specialists on Psychology, this dissertation chose to keep the term “drive” rather than “Instinct”, although Strachey’s *Standard Edition* is the main source on Freud in the references which base this dissertation.

Freud defends that humans hold an unconscious wish to return to the inorganic state from which they have been originated. This wish to die manifests itself through self-destructive behaviors that, when directed to others rather than to the self, gives space to violence and aggression. Therefore, people would hold an innate aggressive nature. The death drive finds balance in its opposite, the life drive, also called Eros, in reference to the Greek God. The life drive is associated to positive feelings of self-preservation, which engage humans to eat and procreate, for example. Meanwhile, the death drive is associated to negative feelings, such as anger and hate. It has been called Thanatos by Freud's followers, who viewed the extreme poles of life and death as a dualistic approach, since one defines the other by opposition. Thus, if life drive regards the Greek God Eros, death drive regards the Greek God Thanatos

This conception of innate tendency to self-destruction is highly controversial and, sometimes, even misunderstood, since it has been common to find studies that simplistic take Eros as a sexual trace of the libido and Thanatos as an excuse for suicide. It must be taken into consideration, however, that Freud use his thesis of innate aggression as a justification for the historical moment he was living: The First World War. As he posits:

This [the death drive] would serve as a biological justification for all the ugly and dangerous impulses against which we are struggling [WWI]. It must be admitted that they stand nearer to Nature than does our resistance to them for which an explanation also needs to be found... there is no use in trying to get rid of men's aggressive inclinations. (FREUD, 1933, p. 210)

Then, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is enough to keep to the main point proposed by Freud. Life, in a whole, means finding balance between Thanatos and Eros, the two opposite forces which represent risky behaviors that may destroy (the self or the other) and behaviors that enhance love and pro-social attitude that help developing society.

If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons becomes inorganic once again then we shall be compelled to say that 'the aim of all life is death and, looking backwards, that 'inanimate things existed before living ones. [...] In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state. (FREUD, 1920, p. 32)

In *The Book Thief*, we can see the fight between these forces throughout the whole story; first, in a more general level; second, in a more specific level through the behavior of the characters. Accordingly, what the narrator shows – the war – is the collective death drive

projection of thousands of followers of the Nazi regime. In *The Book Thief*, the narrator often describes his astonishment before the human will of destruction, which he views as intrinsic to humans, the same way Freud did. When the narrator gives his account on the book burning Liesel witnesses, for instance, he highlights the love for destruction Germans hold in their minds:

You see, people may tell you that Nazi Germany was built on anti-Semitism, a somewhat overzealous leader, and a nation of hate-fed bigots, but it would all have come to nothing had the Germans not loved one particular activity: To burn. The Germans loved to burn things. Shops, synagogues, Reichstags, houses, personal items, slain people, and of course, books. They enjoyed a good book-burning, all right—which gave people who were partial to books the opportunity to get their hands on certain publications that they otherwise wouldn't have. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 84)

The narrator's perplexity turns into confusion as he realizes that the capacity of destruction walks hand in hand with the capacity of preservation and love, in a clear Freudian point of view about the struggle between Eros and Thanatos. In a certain moment, in *The Book Thief*, Rudy gives up the idea of breaking into houses to steal and Death predicts that this boy, one day, will help a group of hungry captive Jews marching to a concentration camp. Hence, Death expresses that "In years to come, he [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" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 164). Later on, he reinforces the conflicting life and death forces presented in humankind when he says "I'm always finding humans at their best and worst. I see their ugly and their beauty, and I wonder how the same thing can be both" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 489)

If we focus on self-destructive behaviors, as a reflection of the death drive, the most noticeable example is the mayor's wife, Ilsa Hermann, who loses her only son, Johann Hermann, at war. Although no hints are given about her way of life before this fact, we suppose that she is deeply affected by her son's departing. We assume she falls in a state of profound melancholy, feature we consider related to Thanatos, force associated to negative emotions (like fear and anger), which can lead to anti-social behavior. One could argue that the Ilsa Hermann is working through a natural moment of mourning, which every single human once feels due to the loss of a beloved person. Freud, however, provides a fundamental difference between these similar states. He asserts:

Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. [...] We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful. The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (FREUD, 1917, p. 243 – 244)

Upon closer observation, we can see that Ilsa Hermann, although not clearly presenting all features formulated by Freud, shows signs of melancholy. First, her presence is only marked through Liesel's presence; she never talks to anyone but to Liesel. She is always seen at home wearing a bathrobe and just three times she is seen outside the house (she is at the book burning, she goes to Liesel's house and she is the one who takes Liesel from the bombed town). As Death once describes her: "And Frau Hermann, the mayor's wife, standing fluffy-haired and shivery in her enormous, cold-aired doorway. Always silent. Always alone. No words, not once" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 93 – 94). Death gives his account on her attitude facing her son's loss, which makes the topic of death drive arise again:

The point is, Ilsa Hermann had decided to make suffering her triumph. When it refused to let go of her, she succumbed to it. She embraced it. She could have shot herself, scratched herself, or indulged in other forms of self-mutilation, but she chose what she probably felt was the weakest option—to at least endure the discomfort of the weather. For all Liesel knew, she prayed for summer days that were cold and wet. For the most part, she lived in the right place. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 146)

Freud says that there is a "tendency to suicide which makes melancholia so interesting - and so dangerous" (FREUD, 1917, p. 251) Ilsa Hermann did not suicide but one may speculate she might have. Still in terms of interpretation, it is possible to infer that her great confront with Liesel, when she is forced to face her pathological condition, may have saved her from the consequences of the death drive. Liesel, through an aggressive behavior, helps the mayor's wife to find balance between Eros and Thanatos. When Ilsa Hermann tells Liesel that she could not keep the clothe washing (Liesel's mother making of living), Liesel becomes furious, especially after being given a book as present, which she understood as a lame consolation. This scene is emblematic by the results it produces both on Ilsa Hermann and on Liesel.

“You think,” she said, “you can buy me off with this book?” [...] Now she became spiteful. More spiteful and evil than she thought herself capable. [...] “It’s about time,” she informed her, “that you do your own stinking washing anyway. It’s about time you faced the fact that your son is dead. He got killed! He got strangled and cut up more than twenty years ago! Or did he freeze to death? Either way, he’s dead! He’s dead and it’s pathetic that you sit here shivering in your own house to suffer for it. You think you’re the only one?” Immediately. Her brother was next to her. He whispered for her to stop, but he, too, was dead, and not worth listening to. He died in a train. They buried him in the snow. Liesel glanced at him, but she could not make herself stop. Not yet. “This book,” she went on. She shoved the boy down the steps, making him fall. “I don’t want it.” The words were quieter now, but still just as hot. She threw *The Whistler* at the woman’s slippered feet, hearing the clack of it as it landed on the cement. “I don’t want your miserable book. . . “[...] Her brother, holding his knee, disappeared. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 252 – 253)

After this confrontation, Ilsa Hermann disappears into the house, silent as usual. One day, Ilsa knocks on Liesel’s door to offer her a notebook so that she could improve her writing. Ilsa advises the girl: “don’t punish yourself, like you said you would. Don’t be like me, Liesel” (p. 524). This piece of advice is meaningful, implying that Eros finally balanced Thanatos in Ilsa’s life. The aggressive behavior Liesel demonstrates, parallel to her visions of her dead brother, is also relevant, since it goes against the oversimplifying idea that views Liesel as a character full of life, hence representing Eros. Although she has a strong will to survive, like her Jewish friend Max Vandenburg, she also reveals an innate aggressive behavior (resulted from the death drive). In fact, her aggressiveness is revealed more than once, as she fights against a boy at school and almost kills him. Liesel has problems with reading out loud at school, and her spelling difficulties calls the attention of Ludwig, a boy who bullies her. Unable to stand the situation anymore, Liesel gives way to Thanatos and sets her aggression free.

“Come on, Liesel.” He stuck the book under her nose. “Help me out, will you?” [...] She stood up and took the book from him [...] she threw it away and kicked him as hard as she could in the vicinity of the groin. Well, as you might imagine, Ludwig Schmeickl certainly buckled, and on the way down, he was punched in the ear. When he landed, he was set upon. When he was set upon, he was slapped and clawed and obliterated by a girl who was utterly consumed with rage. His skin was so warm and soft. Her knuckles and fingernails were so frighteningly tough, despite their smallness. “You *Saukerl*.” Her voice, too, was able to scratch him. “You *Arschloch*. Can you spell *Arschloch* for me?” [...] Children were there, quick as, well, quick as kids gravitating toward a fight. A stew of arms and legs, of shouts and cheers grew thicker around them. They were watching Liesel Meminger give Ludwig Schmeickl the hiding of a lifetime. “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” a girl commentated with a shriek, “she’s going to kill him!” Liesel did not kill him. But she came close. In fact, probably the only thing that stopped her was the twitchingly pathetic, grinning face of Tommy Müller. Still crowded with adrenaline, Liesel caught sight of him smiling with such absurdity that she dragged him down and started beating *him* up as well.

“What are you doing?!” he wailed, and only then, after the third or fourth slap and a trickle of bright blood from his nose, did she stop. On her knees, she sucked in the air and listened to the groans beneath her. She watched the whirlpool of faces, left and right, and she announced, “I’m not stupid.” No one argued. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 78 - 79)

The passage provided shows Liesel in such a commotion that even another boy is caught up in the fight and is beaten up by the girl. Here, the narrator details the bloody scene, focusing on Liesel’s rage. The girl punches and scratches the boys hard, and Death recognizes she could have killed one of them. Probably, such assertion is a rhetoric figure, as Liesel would need more than just a school fight to kill someone. Nevertheless, the force of the violence resulting from Thanatos is not to be ignored, even if Liesel is depicted by the narrator as someone ruled by Eros. Unlike Ilsa Herman, Liesel does not take the death drive takes over her, although she has such violent rampant. In my view, Ilsa and Liesel deal with the death drive in different ways, still, the root of their negative feelings is similar: the loss of family. Ilsa cries for her son, Liesel cries for her brother. The fact that Liesel speaks of her brother after the fight at school, on her way home, is a hint that she still suffers the traumatic loss, and aggressiveness is just one of the many sides of the death drive.

At the end of the school day, Liesel walked home with Rudy [...]. Nearing Himmel Street, in a hurry of thoughts, a culmination of misery swept over her – [...] the demolition of her family, her nightmares, the humiliation of the day - and she crouched in the gutter and wept. It all led here. Rudy stood there, next to her. It began to rain, nice and hard. [...] One sat painfully now, among the falling chunks of rain, and the other stood next to her, waiting. “Why did he have to die?” she asked, but still, Rudy did nothing; he said nothing. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 80)

Liesel’s death drive, however, is not perceived only in moments of furor. After her brother dies, the traumatic experience is potentialized by her mother’s leaving, as she parks Liesel with the Hubermanns and disappears. At the Hubermann’s house, Liesel’s reaction is her refusal in taking a bath, which lasts for two weeks:

“*Saumensch, du dreckiges!*” Liesel’s foster mother shouted that first evening when she refused to have a bath. “You filthy pig! Why won’t you get undressed?” [...] Liesel, naturally, was bathed in anxiety. There was no way she was getting into any bath, or into bed for that matter. She was twisted into one corner of the closet like washroom, clutching for the nonexistent arms of the wall for some level of support. There was nothing but dry paint, difficult breath, and the deluge of abuse from Rosa. “Leave her alone.” Hans Hubermann entered the fray. [...] “Leave her to me.” He moved closer and sat on the floor, against the wall. [...] “You know how to roll a

cigarette?" he asked her, and for the next hour or so, they sat in the rising pool of darkness, playing with the tobacco and the cigarette papers and Hans Hubermann smoking them. When the hour was up, Liesel could roll a cigarette moderately well. She still didn't have a bath. [...] When Liesel finally had a bath, after two weeks of living on Himmel Street, Rosa gave her an enormous, injury-inducing hug. Nearly choking her, she said, "*Saumensch, du dreckiges*—it's about time!" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 35)

When Liesel suffers her second traumatic experience, that is, the loss of all her family and friends due to the air raid, she demonstrates the same behavior. She is taken to Ilsa Herman's house and, again, she refuses to take a bath.

She sat in the exquisite spare room of the mayor's house and spoke and spoke - to herself -well into the night. She ate very little. The only thing she didn't do at all was wash. For four days, she carried around the remains of Himmel Street on the carpets and floorboards of 8 Grande Strasse. She slept a lot and didn't dream, and on most occasions she was sorry to wake up. Everything disappeared when she was asleep. On the day of the funerals, she still hadn't bathed, and Ilsa Hermann asked politely if she'd like to. Previously, she'd only shown her the bath and given her a towel. People who were at the service of Hans and Rosa Hubermann always talked about the girl who stood there wearing a pretty dress and a layer of Himmel Street dirt. There was also a rumor that later in the day, she walked fully clothed into the Amper River and said something very strange. Something about a kiss. Something about a *Saumensch*. How many times did she have to say goodbye? (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 546)

Unlike the characters who could not resist the death drive, or the ones who embraced melancholy, Liesel does not fall into a permanent choking state. However, her refusal to bathe may be considered one of the symptoms of the death drive. She does not try to kill herself, or leave life in any ways, yet, her self-abandonment is one of the characteristics of the urge for self-destruction. Another example of Freudian death drive concept relies on the character of Frau Holtzapfel, whose death drive becomes strong after her elder son, Michael Holtzapfel, returns from war with a mutilated hand and news about his brother's death. One day, when the sirens alert to the coming of an air raid, all people run to safe basements in the neighborhood, except Frau Holtzapfel, who simply remains in her kitchen and shows no interest in protecting herself from the approaching bombs, which demonstrates that Thanatos has the inner control of her psyche.

[...] the sirens made their presence felt again in Molching. [...] Michael Holtzapfel was knocking furiously at Rosa Hubermann's door. When she and Liesel came out, he handed them his problem. "My mother," he said, and the plums of blood were still on his bandage. "She won't come out. She's sitting at the kitchen table." As the

weeks had worn on, Frau Holtzapfel had not yet begun to recover. When Liesel came to read, the woman spent most of the time staring at the window. Her words were quiet, close to motionless. [...]. “Can I go in?” She [Liesel] ran the short distance of the path and shoved past Mama. Frau Holtzapfel was unmoved at the table. (...)

***** THE OPTIONS *****

- “Frau Holtzapfel, we have to go.”
- “Frau Holtzapfel, we’ll die if we stay here.”
 - “You still have one son left.”
 - “Everyone’s waiting for you.”
 - “The bombs will blow your head off.”
- “If you don’t come, I’ll stop coming to read to you, and that means you’ve lost your only friend.”

[...] The woman looked up and made her decision. She didn’t move. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 485 – 486)

Although Frau Holtzapfel refuses to shelter from the bombs, she finally shows up at the basement where her son and Liesel’s family stay. The Thanatos urge was not strong enough but, when she later discovers that Michael hang himself she has a nervous breakdown. Interesting to notice that, after her double loss, she loses interest in life, giving space to Thanatos in a strong way. When finally meeting death, she seems to welcome it. Even the narrator is surprised with her reaction when he comes to Molching due to the air raid that caught everyone by surprise. As the narrator says when he meets her: “At 31 Himmel Street, Frau Holtzapfel appeared to be waiting for me in the kitchen. A broken cup was in front of her and in a last moment of awakesness, her face seemed to ask just what in the hell had taken me so long” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 530)

Differently from Ilsa Hermann, whose death drive is balanced by the life drive, Frau Holtzapfel cannot reach this balance, just like her son Michael, whose death drive leads him to suicide. Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of Michael’s suicide is its reason: his will to live. The inner fight between Eros and Thanatos produced a strong sensation of guilt, since Eros was such a winning force that compelled Michael to fight for his survival and look for shelter while his mother, falling for Thanatos, remained in the kitchen waiting for the bombs. The following passage is a presage of how guilt destabilizes Michael’s emotions:

In the far corner of the shelter, Michael was cramped and shivery. “I should have stayed,” he said, “I should have stayed, I should have stayed. . . .” His voice was close to noiseless, but his eyes were louder than ever. They beat furiously in their sockets as he squeezed his injured hand and the blood rose through the bandage. [...] “Tell me something,” he said, “because I don’t understand. . . .” He fell back and sat against the wall. “Tell me, Rosa, how she can sit there ready to die while I still want to live.” The blood thickened. “Why do I want to live? I shouldn’t want to, but I do” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 487)

The narrator reinforces Michael's guilt of feeling the urge to live when he emphasizes how many people feel the death drive and seek for self-destruction, longing for death as a way out of the war context. As we can see in the following extract, the death drive is a force that permeates the whole story of *The Book Thief*.

***** JULY 24, 6:03 A.M. *****

The laundry was warm, the rafters were firm, and Michael Holtzapfel jumped from the chair as if it were a cliff.

So many people chased after me in that time, calling my name, asking me to take them with me. Then there was the small percentage who called me casually over and whispered with their tightened voices. [...] There was nothing I could do. They had too many ways, they were too resourceful — and when they did it too well, whatever their chosen method, I was in no position to refuse. Michael Holtzapfel knew what he was doing. He killed himself for wanting to live. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 488)

Of course, there are many other examples of death drive in *The Book Thief*, and naming all of them would be pointless. It suffices to say that the whole matter is so strong that even Death gets tired of people and their Thanatos urges. The example provided demonstrates how Death is bound to the such drive, because the result of self-destruction thoughts, when put into action, means more work to be done. In a time when thousands die every day in consequence of the war, people who cannot stand their despair and attempt against their lives only increase Death's burden; as he is "in no position to refuse" (p. 488). Death's awareness of the destructing drives which rule the inner psyche of individuals is not due to the simple fact of people trying to suicide. In a metaphysical way, the narrator is able to sense the inner urge which calls him from the deep and hidden thoughts of the characters. When Death comes for a Jewish prisoner, he feels people reactions to his invisible, but perceptible, presence. Some of the prisoners want to die, while some still want to live (Eros gains force in this occasion).

I climbed through the windshield of the truck, found the diseased man, and jumped out the back. His soul was skinny. [...] My feet landed loudly in the gravel, though not a sound was heard by a soldier or prisoner. But they could all smell me. Recollection tells me that there were many wishes in the back of that truck. Inner voices called out to me. Why him and not me? Thank God it *isn't* me. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 389)

To sum, *The Book Thief* is not only about death and dying, it is also about the urge to live and survive. Thanatos and Eros fight along the pages of the novel, while characters deal with their personal nightmares and hopes.

2.3 Mass Death

The task of addressing such a dark topic, as mass death, is not an easy one; still, the author of *The Book Thief* does not turn away from it. It is true that descriptions of the Jewish genocide and other mass killings (cities wiped out) remain partial, only mentioned by the narrator through poetic “imagery and imagination” (MACKAREY, 2014, p. 37). About such attempt to spare readers from the true horrors of the Holocaust, Mackarey says: “Death states things simply, in basic terms that any reader of any age level could understand. However, the simplicity of the statements, although often delivered in a joking or sardonic tone, is chilling in its grim accuracy” (MACKAREY, 2014, p. 41). I must confess that, in the beginning of my research on *The Book Thief*, I used to agree with Mackarey, and I saw the gap which covers mass death just as a technique to spare young readers’ sensibility. However, after having read the M.A. Thesis by Mirjam Romeijn, I have changed my mind. In her thesis, the author focuses on translation issues, nonetheless, she makes an explanatory observation which defends (and justifies) the curtains that falls on the scenes of mass death and all the Holocaust horrors.

Beyond softening the blow, so to speak, *The Book Thief* does not dwell on facts and figures simply because it does not depend on a realistic account of the number of victims or perpetrators during World War II, at its heart being a story about what it means to be human during a time of war. It is not just for the sake of the reader that the book does not linger on or graphically describe the events one can find in any history book; the war is the background against which a young girl learns to read and cope with loss. As Death says in the prologue, presenting the reader with an itemized list, the story is about “a girl, some words, an accordionist, some fanatical Germans, a Jewish fist-fighter, and quite a lot of thievery” (15). This perhaps feels like an understatement, in that more things happen to and around Liesel in the novel (which is over 500 pages long), but the understatement is telling in itself: the Nazis are just another item on the list of elements that characterize Liesel’s story. It is not war itself Death is concerned with: he has been faced with many of them over the years. It is Liesel who captures his attention by stealing a book when she does not even know how to read yet; it is Liesel who makes the story worth telling. (ROMEIJN, 2017, p. 08)

Hence, some of the mass killings are avoided, some are evoked through allusions and some of them are explicit, though not fully detailed. The disappearance of Liesel's biological parents, for instance, is never fully explained either by the narrator or by any of the character. Nonetheless, when Death mentions her father, he states:

***** A STRANGE WORD *****

Kommunist

She'd heard it several times in the past few years. "Communist." There were boardinghouses crammed with people, rooms filled with questions. And that word. That strange word was always there somewhere, standing in the corner, watching from the dark. It wore suits, uniforms. No matter where they went, there it was, each time her father was mentioned. [...] At one boardinghouse, there was a healthier woman who tried to teach the children to write, using charcoal on the wall. Liesel was tempted to ask her the meaning, but it never eventuated. One day, that woman was taken away for questioning. She didn't come back. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 41)

Nor does Liesel understand the meaning of the word "Kommunist", neither is she capable of relating this word to the suits and uniforms, she just understands that her teacher was "taken away for questioning", but the reason behind this questioning is not said. Here one may find allusions to the mass murder of people who antagonized the Nazi regime. Liesel, as a child, is not aware of the political danger her family and acquaintances suffered. Later, when she witnesses a book burning in honor to Hitler's birthday, she has some intuition about her parents' fate. She asks her foster father: "Did the *Führer* take her away?" [...] He said, "I think he might have, yes" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 115). Obviously, the mass death of political antagonists is implicit and depends of the reader's knowledge to have its gaps filled. For those who know about the Holocaust the expression used by Hans Hubermann "he might" is an evident attempt to protect Liesel from the real expression "he must". The political persecution, which killed so many people, is, therefore, alluded to. If the narrator never goes into further details about political dissidents' mass murder, he does not even provide any clue about other kinds of mass murder, like the murder of homosexuals, disabled people or gypsies, for instance. These topics are avoided.

On the other hand, some of the mass murders are clearly explicit in the narrator's comments. The persecution to the Jews is shown through three main features: 1. Allusions to the indignities they suffered, as having their legal properties taken away. 2. Descriptions of the marches to camps and their deaths in gas chambers. 3. The hiding of Max Vandenburg in the Hubermanns' basement and consequent danger to everyone in the house. Although it is the core of the story, the mass murder of Jews is not the only mass death depicted in *The Book*

Thief. A frequent type of mass death concerns the bombing of cities and descriptions of war sites. When Death refers to the bombing of Munich he just says: “Far away, fires were burning and I had picked up just over two hundred murdered souls” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 488). Recurring to numbers is a technique Death often employs when narrating his visits to bombing places and war camps:

*** JULY 27, 1943 ***

Michael Holtzapfel was buried and the book thief read to the bereaved. The Allies bombed Hamburg—and on that subject, it’s lucky I’m somewhat miraculous. No one else could carry close to forty-five thousand people in such a short amount of time. Not in a million human years.

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 506)

On the other hand, sometimes the narrator does not need numbers. The mass death scenes of soldiers and civilians have their dramatic effect sometimes empowered by depictions death and dying of individual characters. The air raid that fell on Molching, wiping out all Liesel’s friends and family, is an example of how the narrator describes the death of the main characters who were part of Liesel’s everyday life. The following extract is a brief sample of long-page descriptions of Rudy, Hans and Rosa’s deaths. Liesel, who survived because she was writing in her basement during a surprise air raid, is walking through the ruins of the city and comes to find their bodies.

“God, Rudy . . .” She leaned down and looked at his lifeless face and Liesel kissed her best friend, Rudy Steiner, soft and true on his lips. [...] She kissed him long and soft, and when she pulled herself away, she touched his mouth with her fingers. (...) She did not say goodbye. She was incapable, and after a few more minutes at his side, she was able to tear herself from the ground. It amazes me what humans can do, even when streams are flowing down their faces and they stagger on, coughing and searching, and finding.

*** THE NEXT DISCOVERY ***

**The bodies of Mama and Papa,
both lying tangled in the gravel
bedsheet of Himmel Street**

Liesel did not run or walk or move at all. Her eyes had scoured the humans and stopped hazily when she noticed the tall man and the short, wardrobe woman. That’s my mama. That’s my papa. The words were stapled to her. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 536)

The recurring strategy of talking about individual deaths inside a war mass death context can be well explained in Confino words, when he gives his account on the spectrum of death in Nazi Germany.

What began as a story of impersonal horror, numbing facts, and mass death, is revealed as a family tale: mass death was related to private life as much as it was to the nation and to ideology. It is precisely this tension between mass death and individual loss that warrants our attention. (CONFINO et al, 2008, p. 04)

Indeed, this “tension between mass death and individual loss” is deeply explored in *The Book Thief*. As we could see in the examples provided so far, Death shows combatants dying at war and non-combatants dying in consequence of aerial bombings. This strategy serves a double goal, since it allows the reader to empathize with the dying character; through the shock of individual loss, and it also touches the problematic of mass death and killing. The link between individual and mass death is clearly perceptible when Hans is sent to war. When his patrol is in at the ruins of a bombed city, among survivors who call for their relatives, Hans trips over the dead body of a young boy. Some instants later, he sees the boy’s mother looking for him.

After perhaps two hours, he [Hans] rushed from a building with the sergeant and two other men. He didn’t watch the ground and tripped. Only when he returned to his haunches and saw the others looking in distress at the obstacle did he realize. The corpse was facedown. It lay in a blanket of powder and dust, and it was holding its ears. It was a boy. Perhaps eleven or twelve years old. Not far away, as they progressed along the street, they found a woman calling the name Rudolf. [...] Her body was frail and bent with worry. “Have you seen my boy?” “How old is he?” the sergeant asked. “Twelve.” Oh, Christ. Oh, crucified Christ. They all thought it, but the sergeant could not bring himself to tell her or point the way. [...] The bent woman still clung to hope. She called over her shoulder as she half walked, half ran. “Rudy!” Hans Hubermann thought of another Rudy then. The Himmel Street variety. Please, he asked into a sky he couldn’t see, let Rudy be safe. His thoughts naturally progressed to Liesel and Rosa and the Steiners, and Max. (ZUSAK, 2007, p...)

The fact that the boy is called Rudy, shows how mass deaths cannot be taken in an impersonal matter, as if it did not affect personal lives. Still on the matter of mass death, it is important to remember that the narrator recurs to an illustration to convey the shocking meaning of mass murder. In the following scene, Liesel takes Max’s sketch book while he is sleeping and randomly opens it. In the first page, she reads the legend “Not the Fuhrer – the conductor” (p...) In the second page, she reads: “Isn’t it a lovely day?” (p...) The picture

drawn by Max is an outstanding reference to the murderer of millions of Jews. Maybe one could argue that it is not Death's own product, in the sense that the narrator is not using his own words or visual techniques, yet, Death's story telling is based on Liesel's diary. Therefore, Death, selects the pieces of information he wants to show his narratee, and he decides to show Max's pages on mass murder. Liesel takes his sketchbook and opens it by curiosity, with no intention other than checking a book she does not know. Death could have opted by orally reporting the content of that picture, maybe just speaking of it with more or less details. However, he prefers to have both pictures exposed.



Not the Führer... the conductor!



(ZUSAK, 2007, p...)

The first one shows Hitler and his power of seducing people with his words, which leads to the nefarious consequences portrayed on the second page, where Hitler and a girl stand on a pile of dead bodies. They admire the beauty of the day, brighten swastika symbol inside the sun in the sky. It is relevant to note that Liesel, looking at the pictures, does not realize Max wakes up. When he speaks to her she becomes scared but, as we can see in the following scene, it is an ambiguous moment. The reader is not able to determine if her fear is due to Max's sudden voice coming from the dark or if her fear has to do with the pictures. At first, it seems she got scared by both, but as she says "You scared me", we do not know if, by that, she means his unexpected voice or his pictures. In my opinion it is both.

One afternoon [...] he fell asleep against the basement wall. When Liesel came down, she found the book sitting next to him, slanted against his thigh, and curiosity got the better of her. [...] Max was sitting with his head and shoulder blades against the wall. She could barely make out the sound of his breath [...] as she opened the book and glimpsed a few random pages [...] Frightened by what she saw, Liesel placed the book back down, exactly as she found it, against Max's leg. A voice startled her. "*Danke schön,*" it said [...]. "Holy Christ," Liesel gasped. "You scared me, Max." He returned to his sleep, and behind her, the girl dragged the same thought up the steps. You scared me, Max. (Zusak, 2007, p. 280 - 281)

No wonder why Death, as the narrator, has so many issues about his task. Aside worrying with the death of individuals, he needs to cope with the high demand of the war. Death has the right to feel exhausted.

2.4 Social death

In *The Book Thief*, the narrator is overloaded with work. He feels the heavy weight of his burden and complains about the moments he needs to be on the spotlight, collecting soul after soul; war after war. Individuals die all the time; mass deaths are a constant in this given context and those who do not die try to find a way to flee from life. In all these cases, death is perceived as a physical phenomenon. Characters die when their bodies succumb either to old age, to (mental or physical) disease, to famine or to war. The last alternative is, by and large, the most recurring reason for dying in *The Book Thief*. War kills, and it kills randomly. However, there is an element which may be detected in Zusak's novel: the social death. In such case, social death is not necessarily linked to the physical end of the body. In *The Book Thief*, some people socially die in the context of the WWII, undergoing poverty, misery and famine, yet, they are still alive. Of course, the social death does not erase the possibility of actual death, to mention the example of the Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and so many other groups considered a threat to and by the superior white German race.

The term *social death* was first coined by Orlando Patterson who, in 1982, wrote a study on slavery, entitled *Slavery and Social Death*. In his book, Patterson explains the process through which slave owners alienated slaves from their cultural origins and heritages. Slaves would not be accepted as fully human by society, and their historical and environmental contexts would no longer exist. Patterson defines such condition as a social

death, a state in which people are dehumanized and, therefore, lose all links to their original social background. Claudia Card, in her article *Genocide and Social Death* (2003), borrows Patterson's theoretical framework and applies it to the experience of Genocide. Card considers the social death the main feature of Genocides, whenever and wherever they take place.

Social death, central to the evil of genocide (whether the genocide is homicidal or primarily cultural), distinguishes genocide from other mass murders. Loss of social vitality is loss of identity and thereby of meaning for one's existence. Seeing social death at the center of genocide takes our focus off body counts and loss of individual talents, directing us instead to mourn losses of relationships that create community and give meaning to the development of talents. (CARD, 2003, p. 63)

In *The Book Thief*, the most notorious kind of social death is the one which affects the Jews, Communists and people who do not accept the Nazi system. Max, as a Jewish survival, represents the social death which Claudia Card speaks about. Max suffers his social death right from the moment the German Government starts its discourse of hate against the Jews, and he undergoes all kinds of deprivation. He loses his freedom, he never eats and sleeps properly, he is constantly on the verge of dying and, finally, he cannot assume his true identity as a Jewish person. When Max is mentioned, for the first time, there is already a hint of what he endures, as Liesel thinks "Max Vandenburg arrived on Himmel Street carrying handfuls of suffering" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 30). His social death, however, is explicit in many other passages throughout the narrative, especially in the descriptions of his confinements and hideouts. When the narrator mentions Max, he emphasizes his subhuman conditions, as a reflection of his social death.

We will travel a little, to a secret storage room, and we will see what we see.

***** A GUIDED TOUR OF SUFFERING *****

**To your left,
perhaps your right,
perhaps even straight ahead,
you find a small black room.
In it sits a Jew.
He is scum.
He is starving.
He is afraid.
Please—try not to look away.**

[...] a man was sitting in the dark. It was the best place, they decided. It's harder to find a Jew in the dark. [...] How many days had it been now? He had eaten only the foul taste of his own hungry breath for what felt like weeks, and still, nothing. [...]

There was sleep, starving sleep, and the irritation of half awakesness, and the punishment of the floor. Ignore the itchy feet. Don't scratch the soles. And don't move too much. Just leave everything as it is, at all cost. [...] (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 138 - 139)

Max's social death is recognized by his friend Walter, who helps him hide and get in touch with Hans Hubermann. Walter is a Nazi soldier who cannot arrest Max due to their long-lasting friendship. When Walter is sent to war and needs to depart with the army, he arranges fake documents so Max can travel to Molching in search of Hans, the only one able to hide him and provide some relative protection.

"I'm leaving soon," his friend Walter Kugler told him. "You know how it is—the army."
 "I'm sorry, Walter."
 Walter Kugler, Max's friend from childhood, placed his hand on the Jew's shoulder. "It could be worse." He looked his friend in his Jewish eyes. "I could be you."
 That was their last meeting. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 158)

It is clear that Walter would rather go to war than being a Jew. Here, the social death is clearly perceived, for the German Government excluded individuals and communities from society up to the point that even war and death would be considered less punishing than being part of a segregated group. Max knows he is not German anymore, he knows he is metaphorically dead as he lost part of his German identity. When he leaves his hideout to travel to Molching, he thinks: "With a clean-shaven face and lopsided yet neatly combed hair, he had walked out of that building a new man. In fact, he walked out German. Hang on a second, he *was* German. Or more to the point, he *had been*" (p. 159)

Another kind of social death present in *The Book Thief* is the one related to Liesel's mother. When she disappears, her destiny is never revealed. As she is a Communist, she may have died or survived. If we consider that Liesel's mother is, somehow, alive, we can say she suffers from social death. As a political antagonist of the German *status quo*, Liesel's mother would permanently live under the threat of fear and intimidation. Being alive would mean denying all connections to unwanted people and beliefs, hiding communist relations and pretending a German xenophobic conviction. In this case, Liesel's mother would not be discovered and killed but, on the other hand, she would feel her social segregations as she would not be allowed to openly express her true beliefs. She would be socially dead by betraying her true inner self.

Under this light, we can argue that Hans Hubermann is also socially dead. It is true he does not openly defy the system and does not make any stand against the Nazi, nevertheless, he takes decisions which arise suspicion about his true intents. He does not join the Nazi party, he paints and erases xenophobic messages from Jewish walls and he does not go to war to fight on his own will. As the narrator says:

When Hitler rose to power in 1933, though, the painting business fell slightly awry. Hans didn't join the NSDAP like the majority of people did. He put a lot of thought into his decision.

***** THE THOUGHT PROCESS OF HANS HUBERMANN *****

He was not well-educated or political, but if nothing else, he was a man who appreciated fairness. A Jew had once saved his life and he couldn't forget that. He couldn't join a party that antagonized people in such a way. Also, much like Alex Steiner, some of his most loyal customers were Jewish. Like many of the Jews believed, he didn't think the hatred could last, and it was a conscious decision not to follow Hitler. On many levels, it was a disastrous one.

Once the persecution began, his work slowly dried up. It wasn't too bad to begin with, but soon enough, he was losing customers. Handfuls of quotes seemed to vanish into the rising Nazi air. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 180)

When Hans Hubermann finally understands the meaning of not being a member of the Nazi party, he tries to enlist again but, as the Nazi officers know he refuses the party and paints Jewish doors, they put him on a waiting list. As a matter of fact, Hans is not killed because he is in this list. There is a time when Gestapo shows up in town and take all people they consider suspect of illicit involvements, and Hans is saved by actually being killed.

For the next year, Hans was lucky that he didn't revoke his membership application officially. While many people were instantly approved, he was added to a waiting list, regarded with suspicion. Toward the end of 1938, when the Jews were cleared out completely after Kristallnacht, the Gestapo visited. They searched the house, and when nothing or no one suspicious was found, Hans Hubermann was one of the fortunate: He was allowed to stay. What probably saved him was that people knew he was at least *waiting* for his application to be approved. For this, he was tolerated, if not endorsed as the competent painter he was. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 183)

The word *tolerated* summarizes the social death Hans Hubermann lives. He is not a German citizen with great opportunities, usually originated from the Jewish business

decadence. He is a poor man, with a poor wife, who cannot make enough money to buy food or clothes. It is true his situation is similar to other neighbors, yet, he is not part of the Nazi society in his heart, which is a dangerous attitude at that time. When Hans decide to hide a Jew in his basement, he makes his life even harder, as he needs to feed and shelter someone without being discovered. The fact that he has a Nazi son who strongly fights for Hitler increases the level of his social death, as his son does not forgive his father for not making all efforts to help Germany in its search for power. When Hans Junior has a fight with his father, it is clear that his son is aware of his social death too. Hans Junior knows his father is, in a way, invisible to society, segregated from the high levels of the Nazi party and, worse, suspected of helping Jews in the past.

“You’ve never cared about this country,” said Hans Junior. “Not enough, anyway.” Papa’s eyes started corroding. It did not stop Hans Junior. He looked now for some reason at the girl. With her three books standing upright on the table, as if in conversation, Liesel was silently mouthing the words as she read from one of them. “And what trash is this girl reading? She should be reading *Mein Kampf*.” [...] But Hans Junior wasn’t finished. He stepped closer and said, “You’re either for the *Führer* or against him—and I can see that you’re against him. You always have been.” Liesel watched Hans Junior in the face, fixated on the thinness of his lips and the rocky line of his bottom teeth. “It’s pathetic—how a man can stand by and do nothing as a whole nation cleans out the garbage and makes itself great.” [...] Trudy and Mama sat silently, scaredly, as did Liesel. There was the smell of pea soup, something burning, and confrontation. They were all waiting for the next words. They came from the son. Just two of them. “You coward.” He upturned them into Papa’s face, and he promptly left the kitchen, and the house. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 105)

The clash between Hans and his son shows that not even family is meant to be trusted when you socially died in the context of Genocide. Han’s daughter, Trudy, who watches the fight between her brother and her father, does not do anything to take sides, but it is predictable the side she would take. When Hans and Rosa talk about how dangerous it is to keep a Jew hidden from their son and daughter, they realize it is the best way to be kept alive.

Christmas came and went with the smell of extra danger. As expected, Hans Junior did not come home (both a blessing and an ominous disappointment), but Trudy arrived as usual, and fortunately, things went smoothly.

***** THE QUALITIES OF SMOOTHNESS *****

**Max remained in the basement.
Trudy came and went without
any suspicion.**

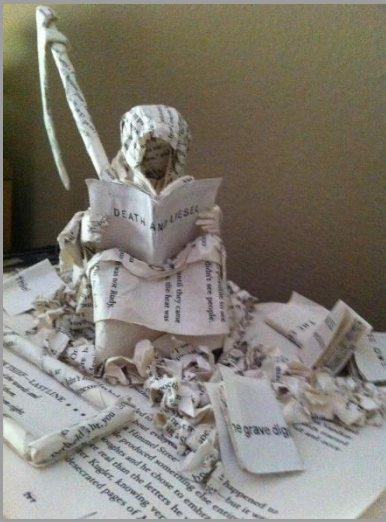
It was decided that Trudy, despite her mild demeanor, could not be trusted. “We trust only the people we have to,” Papa stated, “and that is the three of us.” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 215 - 216)

If we take into consideration only what Patterson and Card state about social death, *The Book Thief* would grant the status of social death only the most prominent victims (Jews and communists) of the Genocide. However, I think that being socially dead is a concept which may be applied in a different view. Persecutions of any kind may result in a social death, as long as individuals or groups are not accepted by the wider society. Regarding Markus Zusak's novel, the understanding of social death as something that affects not only the traditional victims of the Holocaust but also the Germans who conceal their true feelings (aside acting against the system), is a way of improving its reading. Of course, I do not try to compare the victims of social death, as it would be innocuous affirming that Jews and communists suffered way more than German citizens who did not make a stand against the Nazi regime, and had no official reason to be persecuted. Nonetheless, it is important to see that the effects of the Genocide were devastating for not only one social group. Under this light, I think that Claudia Card summarizes this topic by stating:

Still, it is true that not all victims of the holocaust underwent social death to the same extent as prisoners in the camps and ghettos. Entire villages on the Eastern front were slaughtered by the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) without warning or prior captivity. Yet these villagers were given indecent deaths. They were robbed of control of their vital interests and of opportunities to mourn. Although most did not experience those deprivations for very long, these murders do appear to have produced sudden social death prior to physical extermination. The murders were also part of a larger plan that included the death of Judaism, not just the deaths of Jews. Implementing that plan included gradually stripping vast numbers of Jews of social vitality, in some places over a period of years, and it entailed that survivors, if there were any, should not survive as Jews. The fact that the plan only partly succeeded does not negate the central role of social death within it or the importance of that concept to genocide. (CARD, 2003, p. 77)

3 DEATH AND PERCEPTION

Death is not the worst that can happen to men.
Plato, *Republic*



For a better understanding of a given narrative, it is essential to be aware of the position the teller occupies in relation to the story told, since “narrative is a rhetorical action in which somebody tries to accomplish some purpose(s) by telling somebody else that something happened” (PHELAN, 2005, p. 209). The teller’s position in time and space, for example, greatly influences the way narrative situations and events are apprehended through his perception. His beliefs and comprehension determine which characters and circumstances are to be ignored or closely examined

through his use of sight, hearing, feeling, taste, or smell. In short, the one who perceives, and how he does it, help creating the atmosphere and meaning of the literary text. Therefore, issues concerning focalization, time and space are relevant to be analyzed as well as issues related to time and space. Although there is an interplay between these issues, whose relationship enriches a narrative, they are studied in the following section as separate units only as a matter of organization of this dissertation.

3.1 Death and focalization

The filter that determines the presentation of the elements that compose the narrative (such as its quantity of information and the time and order they are presented) has received the name of focalization, concept that has been used by Genette when he asked his seminal questions: “Who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective? [...]

Who sees? [...] Who speaks?" (GENETTE, 1980, p. 183). Mieke Bal, refining the concept, says that: "Focalization is the relationship between the 'vision,' the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the story part, of the content of the narrative text: A says that B sees what c is doing" (BAL, 1997, p. 146). That said, a narrative presupposes, at least, the existence of one focalizer and its focalized objects.

This concept has aroused a substantial amount of controversy, especially about the possibility of considering the narrator as a focalizer. Mieke Bal is radically opposed to this idea, saying that "narrator and focalizer are not to be conflated" (BAL, 1997, p. 147). Although holding similar opinion, Genette (1988, p. 73-74), not without reluctance, is open to concede the narrator as focalizer. Other narratologists like Rimmon-Kennan (1983, p. 74), Herman & Vervaeck (2005, p. 73) and Jong (2014, p. 48) argue that narrator can focalize as well as characters. According to Jahn (1996, p. 245) "Typically, these theorists advocate a "narrator-focalizer" position that invests narrators with the power of seeing; as a consequence, speaker and seer may even, in certain cases, coincide." Jahn justifies this tendency to believe that narrators can focalize by adding: "Even though the narrator is obviously the insubstantial invention of the author, pragmatic meaning construction remains very firmly predicated on the assumption of an addresser observing the maxims of cooperation in human communication" (JAHN, 1996, p. 260).

That said, it is justifiable to say that in *The Book Thief* the primary narrator-focalizer (the one who tells the main story). He normally shifts from character-bound or internal focalization to an external one (BAL, 1997, p. 146). Therefore, the limitation of perception is not bound only to internal characters that would have a restricted impression of the events. The effect of the frequent shift between internal and external focalization present in *The Book Thief* produces an impression of reliability, since Death would possess an omniscient power that would allow him to perceive what characters feel as well as what they cannot know; such as important events to come. This technique is mentioned by Jong:

Focalization also has a cognitive aspect: the less restricted the focalization of the narrator, the more the narratees are allowed to know. As of old, Narratology knows the concept of "omniscience", which means that an undramatized and hence bodiless external primary narrator-focalizer (not impaired by any anthropomorphical restrictions) has access to his characters' inner thoughts, is present at all settings and knows the future. (JONG, 2014, p. 56)

Death describes his roundabouts during the II World War in Germany having Liesel Meminger as his main focalized object. Her impressions are perceived, felt and evaluated by

him, who adds his own impressions to what she experiences. As she is the main character who guides the story, the closest characters to her (like family and friends) are also focalized, although to a lesser extent. Death focalizes what is perceptible (appearance and actions) and imperceptible (feelings and thoughts) on Liesel, diving into her inner thoughts and sewing up his memories to hers. The only characters who receive such attention in *The Book Thief* are her foster father Hans, her Jewish friend Max and her best friend Rudy, although not to the same deep degree as Liesel's. Her foster mother, Rosa, receives a lot of attention to her perceptible features; but the same does not apply to her inner thoughts. In fact, Rosa, as a focalized object, never has her real thoughts or point of view shown for sure. In the following extract, for example, Death describes her reaction after an argument between her husband and their son; a Nazi soldier.

With his son gone, Hans Hubermann stood for a few moments longer. The street looked so big. When he reappeared inside, Mama fixed her gaze on him, but no words were exchanged. She didn't admonish him at all, which, as you know, was highly unusual. Perhaps she decided he was injured enough, having been labeled a coward by his only son. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 106)

Rosa's personality is evaluated by Death according to her actions (or lack of), but not according to her thinking. When Death focalizes Hans, on the other hand, the narratee is allowed to have a glimpse of his feelings (more than Rosa's). However, even in such situations, character and narrator's discourses get blended and the narratee is not able to detect whose voice it is in certain moments. After the argument with his son, Hans becomes introspective and it is impossible to know who is asking the following questions, as they may belong either to the narrator or to the character.

For a while, he remained silently at the table after the eating was finished. Was he really a coward, as his son had so brutally pointed out? Certainly, in World War I, he considered himself one. He attributed his survival to it. But then, is there cowardice in the acknowledgment of fear? Is there cowardice in being glad that you lived? His thoughts crisscrossed the table as he stared into it. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 106 - 107)

Although Death shows he has the power to scrutinize people's thoughts (he reports the Jewish prisoners' thoughts in Dachau), he affirms he cannot do it. When Liesel and her family and friends are hiding in a basement, Death reports only what Liesel thinks. "Max, Hans, and Rosa I cannot account for, but I know that Liesel Meminger was thinking that if the bombs

ever landed on Himmel Street, not only did Max have less chance of survival than everyone else, but he would die completely alone” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 384). It is noteworthy the fact that Death does not speculate about Liesel’s thoughts, he asserts “I know”, which demonstrates how close the narrator is this character. This kind of connection between the focalizer and the focalized object can be explained by Herman and Vervaeck:

On the emotional level, focalization can be detached or empathic. The relation between focalizer and focalized object is crucial in this respect. If only the outside of the focalized object is perceived, focalization is detached. If, on the contrary, there is constant speculation about the thoughts and feelings of the focalized object, then perception is empathic. (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 2005, p. 77)

Indeed, the narrator is emotional in relation to Liesel and one of the consequences of this empathic focalization is that he takes her side, painting a positive image of a poor child who copes with the misery of war thanks to the power of friendship and reading. It is true that Liesel perceives the Nazi world around her through childish eyes; and is not capable to fully understand its social and political mechanisms. Yet, her lack of adult comprehension is compensated by the narrator’s comments and evaluation about what she experiences but is not able to assimilate. The narratee does not have access to what Liesel thinks and sees, but to what Death thinks of what Liesel thinks and sees. It may be supposed that there is a tendency to accept this positive view presented by the narrator-focalizer as “the reader watches with the character’s eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character. (BAL, 1997, p. 146). An example of an emotional focalization moment is the occasion when Death arrives on Himmel Street when it is bombed and finds Liesel in a state of shock watching her destructed house and dead friends.

I was just about to leave when I found her kneeling there. A mountain range of rubble was written, designed, erected around her. She was clutching at a book. Apart from everything else, the book thief wanted desperately to go back to the basement, to write, or to read through her story one last time. In hindsight, I see it so obviously on her face. She was dying for it—the safety of it, the home of it—but she could not move. Also, the basement didn’t even exist anymore. It was part of the mangled landscape. Please, again, I ask you to believe me. I wanted to stop. To crouch down. I wanted to say: “I’m sorry, child.” But that is not allowed. I did not crouch down. I did not speak. Instead, I watched her awhile. When she was able to move, I followed her. She dropped the book. She knelt. The book thief howled. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 211)

Mieke Bal says that “The way in which an object is presented gives information about that object itself and about the focalizer” (BAL, 1997, p. 152). The empathic focalization that

guides the narrator-focalizer towards Liesel's fate reverberates on the way he presents the other characters that take part on her life. Liesel's friends and family are also pictured as positive, and when the narrator focalizes them he makes the effort to show their qualities to attenuate their mistakes or bad actions. Liesel's foster mother Rosa, for instance, constantly beats the girl up with a kitchen wooden spoon, to the point that Liesel cannot even move from the ground. Besides the constant physical violence, the girl also suffers psychological humiliation, such as being called offensive names. However, Death softens her actions towards Liesel by highlighting her good heart, especially in moments related to the hiding of Max. By showing how Rosa risks her life helping a Jewish man, Death shows that Liesel is not wrong in loving her foster mother and obeying her. When Rosa received Max and tried her best to keep him well fed and alive, Death emphasizes in bold letters her good will.

What shocked Liesel most was the change in her mama. Whether it was the calculated way in which she divided the food, or the considerable muzzling of her notorious mouth, or even the gentler expression on her cardboard face, one thing was becoming clear.

***** AN ATTRIBUTE OF ROSA HUBERMANN *****

She was a good woman for a crisis.

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 211)

Death also focalizes those who treat Liesel badly or those Nazis who do not suffer from the poverty caused by war (like Hans and Rosa's son and daughter), yet, they do not receive the same focalization depth. They are either briefly focalized or not focalized at all (like the mayor). In general, they usually are taken as examples of behavior (being a nazi) that highlight the good behavior of Liesel and her friends and family (being secretly against or suspicious of the regime).

Embedded narrative (also known as interpolated or inserted narrative) is another major component of *The Book Thief*. Mieke Bal explained that "A phenomenon is embedded when there is: 1. Insertion: the transition must be assured; 2. Subordination: the two units must be ordered hierarchically; 3. Homogeneity: the two units must belong to the same class" (BAL, 1981b, p. 43). As Mieke Bal uses the word "phenomenon" to speak about embedding, it is possible to concentrate textual analysis not only on embedded narratives but also on the aspect of focalization. In the following extract, Jong explains embedded focalization with more details:

It is one of the special characteristics of narrative texts that a primary narrator-focalizer can embed the focalization of a character in his narrator-text, recounting what that character is seeing, feeling, or thinking, without turning him into a secondary narrator-focalizer (who would voice his own focalization in a speech). Such embedding of focalization is explicit when marked by verbs of seeing, feeling or thinking and so on. [...] The embedding of focalization may, however, remain implicit when verbs of seeing and so on are lacking. (JONG, 2014, p. 50-51)

In *The Book Thief* the narrator-focalizer constantly expresses not only his own perception but the perception of other characters. The most notable cases of embedded focalization rely on Liesel's dream about Adolph Hitler and the frequent visions she has about her dead brother, the visions Max has about boxing against Hitler, and the nightmares both characters are afflicted with. Interesting to notice that the first time Death sees Liesel she is sleeping next to her brother Werner and their mother. Despite being busy taking the boy away, Death is able to pay attention to Liesel's dream, from which she wakes up and feels Death in the act of removing her brother's soul. Death describes her dream and hands the focalization over to Liesel:

Prior to waking up, the book thief was dreaming about the *Führer*, Adolf Hitler. In the dream, she was attending a rally at which he spoke, looking at the skull-colored part in his hair and the perfect square of his mustache. She was listening contentedly to the torrent of words spilling from his mouth. His sentences glowed in the light. In a quieter moment, he actually crouched down and smiled at her. She returned the smile and said, "*Guten Tag, Herr Führer. Wie geht's dir heute?*" She hadn't learned to speak too well, or even to read, as she had rarely frequented school. The reason for that she would find out in due course. Just as the *Führer* was about to reply, she woke up. [...] Her brother was dead. One eye open. One still in a dream. It would be better for a complete dream, I think, but I really have no control over that. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 20 – 21)

In this case, the narrator remains the same while the focalizer changes. However, the narrator regains control of the focalization by adding information Liesel is not able to know at this point of the narrative. When he predicts "The reason for that she would find out in due course" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 21), the narrator manipulates the narratee by keeping him in suspense while the future of the character is revealed. Besides that, Liesel's dream allows the narratee to have a glimpse on Adolph Hitler in one of his public speeches, which helps situating the narratee in time and space. As Bal reminds her readers: "Embedding of focalization is a phenomenon that contributes to the meaning of a narrative text" (BAL, 1981b, p. 204). After this dream, which coincided with Liesel's first great loss, during the nights she is tormented by nightmares and during the day she has visions of her brother. In

both situations the primary narrator focalizer shifts the focalization and Liesel becomes the secondary focalizer, however, she never becomes the secondary narrator as Death keeps rigid control over the facts narrated, as the next extract shows it:

Every night, Liesel would nightmare. Her brother's face. Staring at the floor. She would wake up swimming in her bed, screaming, and drowning in the flood of sheets. On the other side of the room, the bed that was meant for her brother floated boatlike in the darkness. Slowly, with the arrival of consciousness, it sank, seemingly into the floor. This vision didn't help matters, and it would usually be quite a while before the screaming stopped. Possibly the only good to come out of these nightmares was that it brought Hans Hubermann, her new papa, into the room, to soothe her, to love her. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 36)

Again, death takes the focalization back by commenting that "This vision didn't help matters" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 36). The narratee is allowed to see what Liesel sees, thinks and feels; and these dreams, nightmares and daytime visions form a net of embedded units which reflect the frame narrative that embeds them. A significant fact in *The Book Thief* is that all narrative passages characterized by embedded focalization do not take more than four short paragraphs to deliver the message. Even Liesel, whose perception is normally on the spotlight, is not granted with long descriptions of her own. Death concedes short but frequent moments of focalization for the young protagonist. On the other hand, Max Vandenburg, is granted four and a half long pages to have his vision of an imaginary boxing fight between him and Hitler. Here Death hands the focalization over to Max and does not intrude or make any of his sarcastic comments. The following extract serves as example:

He was twenty-four, but he could still fantasize. "In the blue corner," he quietly commentated, "we have the champion of the world, the Aryan masterpiece—the *Führer*." He breathed and turned. "And in the red corner, we have the Jewish, rat-faced challenger—Max Vandenburg." Around him, it all materialized. White light lowered itself into a boxing ring and a crowd stood and murmured [...] Diagonally across, Adolf Hitler stood in the corner with his entourage. [...] The ringmaster swung over toward Max, who stood alone in the challenger's corner. [...] The bell. [...] "He's given up," someone whispered, but within moments, Adolf Hitler was standing on the ropes, and he was addressing the arena. "My fellow Germans," he called, "you can see something here tonight, can't you?" Bare-chested, victory-eyed, he pointed over at Max. "You can see that what we face is something far more sinister and powerful than we ever imagined. Can you see that?" They answered. "Yes, *Führer*" [...] Max shook. Horror stuttered in his stomach. Adolf finished him. "Will you climb in here so that we can defeat this enemy together?" In the basement of 33 Himmel Street, Max Vandenburg could feel the fists of an entire nation. One by one they climbed into the ring and beat him down. They made him bleed. They let him suffer. Millions of them—until one last time, when he gathered himself to his feet . . . He watched the next person climb through the ropes. It was a girl, and as

she slowly crossed the canvas, he noticed a tear torn down her left cheek. In her right hand was a newspaper. "The crossword," she gently said, "is empty," and she held it out to him. Dark. Nothing but dark now. Just basement. Just Jew. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 251 - 255)

Such a long shift on focalization might be justified by the empathy Death feels towards the suffering of the Jews, whose inner voices he hears every time he goes to concentration camps or any other site where Jews are being killed. Aside that Death assumes a neutral position in relation to this vision and refrains from making any kind of comment before, during or after this vision. It is relevant to say that Death, when collecting the souls of murdered Jews, does not make any of his sarcastic comments either, which might imply a respectful attitude towards the miserable situation Max is going through. It is clear, also, that the boxing scene functions as a metaphor of the current mass murder program instituted by the Nazis against the Jews. As Hitler cannot defeat the Jews by himself he uses the power of oratory to instigate the nation against supposed enemies. As Death cannot give voice to the millions of Jewish souls he collects he uses the boxing scene as a long embedded narrative that summarizes and mirrors their agony. Long after this vision, when Liesel is told about it by Max, the narrator offers another shift on focalization using the same boxing scene. Now Liesel is in a painting activity with max and her parents when, suddenly, she digresses and has a vision based on Max's vision:

As she started painting, Liesel thought about Max Vandenburg fighting the Führer, exactly as he'd explained it.

***** BASEMENT VISIONS, JUNE 1941 *****
Punches are thrown, the crowd climbs out of
the walls. Max and the Führer fight for their
lives, each rebounding off the stairway.
There's blood in the Führer's mustache, as
well as in his part line, on the right side
of his head. "Come on, Führer," says the
Jew. He waves him forward. "Come on, Führer. "

When the visions dissipated and she finished her first page, Papa winked at her. Mama castigated her for hogging the paint. Max examined each and every page, perhaps watching what he planned to produce on them. Many months later, he would also paint over the cover of that book and give it a new title, after one of the stories he would write and illustrate inside it. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 256 - 257)

The painting activity involves painting in white all the pages of Hitler's autobiographical book *Mein Kempf*. Not by coincidence, the attitude of painting the book arouses Liesel's memory about Max's boxing visions. The two levels of narrative

complement each other. Death, again, refrains from intruding with sarcastic comments, but regains control of the focalization by foreshadowing Max's future plans for that book.

Although engaging the five senses, the term focalization tends to indicate visual activity. Jahn says: "Perception, thought, recollection, and knowledge are often considered to be criterial features of focalization, and all these mental processes are closely related to seeing, albeit only metonymically or metaphorically". (JAHN, 1996, p. 243). Notwithstanding the link between focalization and visual oriented activity is strong, there are other sensory modes through which focalization is realized. Rimmon-Kenan, clearly influenced by the multiple-facet perspective theory of Boris Uspensky (1973, p.57), proposes a typology of what she names "facets of focalization" (RIMMON-KENAN, 1983, p. 79), which covers the perceptual facet (the five human senses connected to time and space), the psychological facet (compromising cognition and emotion) and the ideological facet (the focalizer's world-view). As the psychological and ideological facets are subject of a heated controversy and debate for stretching too long the scope of focalization as proposed by Genette, the present discussion focuses only on the perceptual facet, whose issues find relevant examples in the narrative of *The Book Thief*.

Rimmon-Kenan (1983, p. 79) states that "the purely visual sense of 'focalization' is too narrow." Therefore, the perception of the focalizer involves the five senses which are regulated by temporal and spatial dimensions that constitute the *locus* of the focalizer. On the matter of space the authors explains:

'Translated' into spatial terms the external/internal position of the focalizer takes the form of a bird's-eye view v. that of a limited observer. In the first, the focalizer is located at a point far above the object(s) of his perception. This is the classical position of a narrator focalizer, yielding either a panoramic view or a 'simultaneous' focalization of things 'happening' in different places. [...] A panoramic or simultaneous view is impossible when focalization is attached to a character or to an unpersonified position internal to the story. (RIMMON-KENAN, 1983, p. 79 – 80)

In *The Book Thief*, the narrator expresses himself through optical activity, although shifting to the other senses. As he is Death, his vision is unlimited; allowing him to see beyond the frontiers of human eyes and perception. It is true he is telling a story based on a book he has been reading repeatedly for a long time and, for that, he would have the limited view of an internal focalizer. However, he is able to have a panoramic bird's eye view as his supernatural nature allowed him to be around during the past events registered on the book. Every time there was death in Liesel's life, the narrator was there, watching the events as an

omniscient external narrator. Next passage shows one of these moments, when Death arrives at a plane crash site, collects the pilot's soul and leaves towards the sky, describing the scene panoramically.

I walked in, loosened his soul, and carried it gently away. All that was left was the body, the dwindling smell of smoke, and the smiling teddy bear. As the crowd arrived in full, things, of course, had changed. The horizon was beginning to charcoal. What was left of the blackness above was nothing now but a scribble, and disappearing fast. (...)The crowd did what crowds do. As I made my way through, each person stood and played with the quietness of it. It was a small concoction of disjointed hand movements, muffled sentences, and mute, self-conscious turns. When I glanced back at the plane, the pilot's open mouth appeared to be smiling.[...] As with many of the others, when I began my journey away, there seemed a quick shadow again, a final moment of eclipse—the recognition of another soul gone. You see, to me, for just a moment, despite all of the colors that touch and grapple with what I see in this world, I will often catch an eclipse when a human dies. I've seen millions of them. I've seen more eclipses than I care to remember. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 10 -11)

On the matter of time as an aspect associated to perceptual focalization, Rimmon-Kenan says that “External focalization is panchronic in the case of an unpersonified focalizer, and retrospective in the case of a character focalizing his own past. On the other hand, internal focalization is synchronous with the information regulated by the focalizer” (RIMMON-KENAN, 1983, p. 80). In *The Book Thief* Death owns a panchronic view, as he has access to the past, present and future of the characters. As he recognizes at the last chapter when he finishes the reading of Liesel's book: “Also, I can tell you what happened after the book thief's words had stopped, and how I came to know her story in the first place”. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 529). Besides the recurring visual activity (especially used to notice colors), Death employs his hearing not only to focalize perceptible elements, like the sound of approaching bombs or gunshots, for example, but also to detect thoughts from souls that call him. In the following paragraph the narrator describes the death of a Jew:

When the soldiers pulled over to share some food and cigarettes and to poke at the package of Jews, one of the prisoners collapsed from starvation and sickness. I have no idea where the convoy had traveled from, but it was perhaps four miles from Molching, and many steps more to the concentration camp at Dachau. I climbed through the windshield of the truck, found the diseased man, and jumped out the back. His soul was skinny. His beard was a ball and chain. My feet landed loudly in the gravel, though not a sound was heard by a soldier or prisoner. But they could all smell me. Recollection tells me that there were many wishes in the back of that

truck. Inner voices called out to me. Why him and not me? Thank God it *isn't* me. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 389)

The ability Death has of listening to the suffering souls is explored throughout the narrative, which increases the dramatic effect of the story, especially because the narrator, as focalizer, focuses only in the inner voices of those he considers the victims of the war, be them the Jews, the poor German citizens or soldiers that die in the name of an unfair political regime. Regarding the other senses, Death normally mixes them, which creates images close to poetry.

At that moment, you will be lying there (I rarely find people standing up). You will be caked in your own body. There might be a discovery; a scream will dribble down the air. The only sound I'll hear after that will be my own breathing, and the sound of the smell, of my footsteps. The question is, what color will everything be at that moment when I come for you? What will the sky be saying? Personally, I like a chocolate-colored sky. Dark, dark chocolate. People say it suits me. I do, however, try to enjoy every color I see—the whole spectrum. A billion or so flavors, none of them quite the same, and a sky to slowly suck on. It takes the edge off the stress. It helps me relax. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 4)

This literary device of playing with the senses, exploring the perceptual focalization of the primary focalizer, finds explanation in one of Zusak's interviews. When speaking about the language used by the narrator of *The Book Thief* the author clarified: "I wanted Death to talk in a way that humans don't speak" (ZUSAK, 2006b, p. 62). It is relevant to affirm that the perceptual focalization would demand a bond to a corporeal existence, unless the focalizer is a bodiless entity whose omniscient presence in the narrative allows him only to observe events through sight and hearing senses, but not to experience them through the other ones. However, in *The Book Thief*, Death does not present himself as a human-like figure, but he implies it to his narratee when using verbs related to senses, like inhale (p. 7), for instance. When describing the second time he finds Liesel he says:

She did not back away or try to fight me, but I know that something told the girl I was there. Could she smell my breath? Could she hear my cursed circular heartbeat, revolving like the crime it is in my deathly chest? I don't know, but she knew me and she looked me in my face and she did not look away. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 490)

So far only the narrator-focalizer had his perceptual focalization analyzed. Nonetheless it is important to state that Liesel and those close to her also focalize, although never in the same degree of depth and meaning as the primary focalizer. When Death hands in the focalization to Liesel and to other characters their perception of the world include all the five senses, especially sight, hearing and taste. The last one is explained by the starvation they go through during the war, when food was not enough for everybody. Death, as primary focalizer, speaks generically about flavors. Liesel, on the other hand, is constantly in the kitchen and focalizes the world through taste and smell, especially Rosa's pea soup, the only kind of food her family sometimes has to eat within weeks. The same happens to Rudy, always searching for food.

3.2 Death and Time

In *The Book Thief*, the time locus of the narrator is uncertain. The time locus of the narrator is part of "a traditional framework which underlies much of the narratological study of fiction" (CURRIE, 2007, p. 31). However, sometimes the time locus of the narrator is impossible to be inferred. In *The Book Thief*, the only thing known is that Death narrates the events after they have occurred and after the main character Liesel has died. As he is death, it is supposed that his insertion in time cannot be equaled to human's. First, he admits: "Which in turn brings me to the subject I am telling you about tonight, or today, or whatever the hour and color. It's the story of one of those perpetual survivors—an expert at being left behind" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 05). Later Death concludes: "It has been many years since all of that, but there is still plenty of work to do" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 543). In these cases, when there is "little in the text to tell us about the time frame of the narrator's performance, it is the time of *reading* which is the important reference time for discourse" (BRIDGEMAN, 2007, p. 53).

In general, the temporal markers in *The Bok Thief* are consistent. The time of the "now" and "then" is clearly demarcated and Death refers to years, months and seasons to mark the passage of time even during the anachronic deviations. Aside that, time is also used in a more meaningful way, as to express years of great disasters, plagues or war, which made death work a lot. As the narrator confirms: "Death's Diary: 1942. It was a year for the ages, like 79, like 1346, to name just a few" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 307).

According to Genette (1980, p. 86), the duration of events is one of the three aspects, along with order and frequency, which must be taken into consideration when one analyzes the use of time in a narrative, be it the story time (the chronological sequence of events and the length of time that passes by in the story) or the discourse time (the manner as the events are presented and the respective number of words, lines, sentences, paragraphs or pages devoted to them). It is true that there is a problematic matter about the practical impossibility of measuring the duration of a narrative; yet, the temporal aspect of duration reveals expressive peculiarities in a literary work, since narratives do not tell absolutely everything that supposedly happens in a story. On this matter, Bridgeman (2007, p. 58) was clear when she stated: “The treatment of duration is an important way of foregrounding certain events and reducing the status of others. If an episode is narrated in great detail, this leads us to assume that it is of some significance”.

There are five⁴ main categories that involve the relation between story-time and discourse-time: scene (the story-time equals the discourse-time, as in a dialogue), summary (story-time longer than discourse-time, also known as speed up), stretch (discourse-time longer than story-time, also known as slow-down), ellipsis (discourse-time omits parts of story-time) and pause (story-time freezes while discourse-time continues). *The Book Thief* numbers approximately 586 pages for developing the story-time which covers about four years of Liesel’s lifetime, from 1939 (when she is nine, almost ten) to 1943 (when she is almost 14). Here there is a life span about her early childhood and an ellipsis of many years after she is 14. The narrator, then, devotes about two pages to describe his encounter with the old aged Liesel who died of natural death.

Of the five elements listed in the analysis of duration, the scene is the one which is the least employed, since the story-time would only equal the discourse-time if no interventions are made on the part of the narrator. In *The Book Thief* Death just few dialogues do not contain any of Death’s remarks inserted, but even in these cases the dialogues are brief, extending no more than five short lines. Death’s side-comments in dialogues are constant, disrupting the synchrony between story-time and discourse-time. The only dialogue without any interruption (characterizing a scene) is highlighted in bold letters and show the interlocutors in italics:

⁴ Genette describes four categories for the analysis of story time and discourse time in the narrative. Gerald prince (1982, p. 56) suggested the inclusion of “stretch” as the fifth category to complement Genette’s table.

*** THE SWAPPING OF NIGHTMARES ***

The girl: "Tell me. What do you see
when you dream like that?"

The Few: ". . . I see myself turning
around, and waving goodbye."

The girl: "I also have nightmares."

The Few: "What do you see?"

The girl: "A train, and my dead brother."

The Few: "Your brother?"

The girl: "He died when I moved
here, on the way."

The girl and the Few, together: "Fa —yes."

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 220)

On the other hand, summary is far more employed by the narrator, since it speeds up the narrative through brief sentences that cover months or years in the story-time, such as in "For the next two years, he remained in hiding, in an empty storeroom" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 194). As stretch slows down the speed of the narrative, it is possible to infer that the narrator does not allow the discourse-time to exceed too much certain parts of the story-time because he constructs a narrative that interweaves many plots, leading to different narrative levels. Another fact that corroborates this dissertation is that the narrator frequently uses ellipsis. This device, along with summary, contributes to accelerate the narrative, giving the impression that actions are happening quickly. An example of ellipsis which is considered the most noticeable in *The Book Thief* is the period subsequently to Max's departure from the Hubermann's home. Afraid of being discovered after Hans called too much attention of the Nazi community by giving bread to a Jewish prisoner, Max leaves Molching at night. These facts happen in chapter seven (p. 397) but only in chapter ten (p. 511) there is some little light on Max's disappearance, as Liesel finds him being marched to a concentration camp. "There was an intense sadness in his eyes. They swelled. "Liesel . . . they got me a few months ago." The voice was crippled but it dragged itself toward her." (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 511). Interesting to notice that, after this moment, there will be another ellipsis concerning Max's time in the camp, as he will return to Liesel's life only when the war is over and nothing is mentioned about this period or events. The ellipsis concerning Max's departure and return to Liesel cannot be exactly measured by specific time expressions, as in other moments in *The Book Thief* when death clearly states the amount of time skipped. About these cases, Mieke Bal clarifies (1997, p. 103):

An ellipsis cannot be perceived: according to the definition, nothing is indicated in the story about the amount of fabula-time involved. If nothing is indicated, we

cannot know what should have been indicated either. All we can do, sometimes, is logically deduce on the basis of certain information that something has been omitted. [...] Sometimes, however, an ellipsis is indicated. Mention is made of the time that has been skipped. (BAL, 1997, p. 103).

The use of pauses also is recurring in *The Book Thief*. As it normally involves descriptions or narrator remarks, there are countless pauses in this narrative due to the narrator comments. It is true he seldom spends more than brief lines with descriptions of places or people, yet, his judgments, ideas and opinions are spread all over the narration. At first sight one may infer that these pauses, as usual, slow down the narrative. However, these pauses are brief and they normally are used to connect the situations as a patchwork. When the narrator stops to add a comment on a certain event, he often links his comments to another situation which, in its turn, may be happening simultaneously or may be inferred from the past or to the future. Chapter 3 (p. 129), for instance, describes the tension lived by Liesel when she is sent to collect the laundry at the mayor's house, knowing that somebody from there had seen her steal a book from a bonfire of forbidden Jewish books; such act that could result in her death. However, when the chapter ends and Liesel relaxes a while as nobody accused her, the narrator starts the following chapter (p. 138) by explicitly proposing a pause on what he has been speaking about Liesel and invites the narratee to change the topic. Consequently, the time of Liesel's life in that moment stands still while Death concentrates on introducing Max and his life over the past two years up to then.

Now for a change of scenery. We've both had it too easy till now, my friend, don't you think? How about we forget Molching for a minute or two? It will do us some good. Also, it's important to the story. We will travel a little, to a secret storage room, and we will see what we see. [...] A few hundred miles northwest, in Stuttgart, far from book thieves, mayors' wives, and Himmel Street, a man was sitting in the dark. It was the best place, they decided. It's harder to find a Jew in the dark. He sat on his suitcase, waiting. How many days had it been now? (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 138)

In a whole, *The Book Thief* uses the elements that compose duration a varied way, affecting the narratee's perception of speed and, mainly, of what matters more according to the narrator's concepts. Minor actions are not described extensively, not delaying the development of the narrative. The relevant and more impacting events concerning Liesel (like her personal losses, Max's hiding and the book theft) are showed in detailed ways, usually loaded with Death's comments. All this variation produces a sensation of fast-paced narrative.

The interpretation of the narratee about the narrative presented is greatly influenced by the temporal aspect of frequency, since the number of times an event is mentioned may produce a varied range of understandings and comprehension. Rimmon-Kenan summarizes the definition and the main features of frequency in the following statement:

Frequency, a temporal component not treated in narrative theory before Genette, is the relation between the number of times an event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated (or mentioned) in the text. Frequency, then, involves repetition, and repetition is a mental construct attained by an elimination of the specific qualities of each occurrence and a preservation of only those qualities which it shares with similar occurrences. Strictly speaking, no event is repeatable in all respects, nor is a repeated segment of the text quite the same, since its new location puts it in a different context which necessarily changes its meaning. (RIMMON-KENAN, 1983, p. 59)

Variation in frequency reveals which moments of the narrative are supposed to be more relevant or which scenes the narrator is more (or less) concerned with. In *The Book Thief* it is interesting to analyze the repetitive telling, or rather, “Narrating *n* times what happened once (nN/IS)” (GENETTE, 1980, p. 119). The repetitive telling in *The Book Thief* falls especially on a distinct moment at the level of discourse: Werner’s death. At the level of the story time, Liesel, her younger brother Werner and their mother are traveling in a train in the year of 1939, on a very cold winter day. In the middle of the trip the boy dies, presumably from a complication derived from the extreme cold weather. At the level of the discourse time, the span between his death and his burial takes approximately seven pages. Previously to his death, in the prologue, the narrator uses an analepsis to tell the narratee that a boy would be dead, as the narrator’s presence would mean this consequence. “As you might expect, someone had died. [...]. There were two guards. There was one mother and her daughter. One corpse. The mother, the girl, and the corpse remained stubborn and silent. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 07). After this introduction foreshadowing Werner’s death and the description from his death to his burial, there are about other twenty-five references to this event which, most of the time, appears in the form of Liesel’s memories, nightmares and visions. Nonetheless, Werner’s death is also mentioned by the narrator. In the next extract, for example, Death mentions Werner’s death as he comes to the following conclusion:

*** A SMALL ADDITION ***

The word *communist* + a large bonfire + a collection of dead

**letters + the suffering of her mother + the death of her
brother = the *Führer***
(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 115)

This obsession for the boy's death expressed through so many recounting of the same event at the story level shows the repetitive potential of *The Book Thief*. Firstly, the narrator has his own experience of the event, since he is Death and, consequently, he is the one responsible for taking Liesel's brother away. Secondly, the narrator is reading a diary and there he finds notes on the same event, Werner's death. As he develops the reading, he mentions what Liesel wrote about Werner and he adds his personal comments on the subject. This witnessing, reading and judging creates an ideal context for repetitive telling which, in turn, may open a multiple range of interpretations that would take Werner's death as a symbol of the victims of the Nazism, for instance.

Another event which frequency is noteworthy is the one concerning Max's visions about Hitler. Although not so frequent as Werner's death, Max's visions are mentioned six times and they supposedly happen more than once in the story-time, characterizing a type of singulative telling, where an event which happens several times may be related several times. The first time Max has his vision he is in the basement (p. 251). Secondly, he tells Liesel about his visions (p. 255). It is relevant to notice the technique used to make these repetitions vary. After Liesel is told about this vision she imagines it, which constitutes the third time this event is mentioned.

As she started painting, Liesel thought about Max Vandenburg fighting the *Führer*, exactly as he'd explained it.

***** BASEMENT VISIONS, JUNE 1941***
Punches are thrown, the crowd climbs out of
the walls. Max and the *Führer* fight for their
lives, each rebounding off the stairway.
There's blood in the *Führer*'s mustache, as
well as in his part line, on the right side
of his head. "Come on, *Führer*," says the
Jew. He waves him forward. "Come on, *Führer*."**

When the visions dissipated and she finished her first page, Papa winked at her.
(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 257)

Again in the narrative, Death makes reference to this vision by stating: "Later, she walked down to the basement, where Max was standing in the dark, most likely boxing with the *Führer*" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 265). The narrator continues his reference to Max's visions when he is sick: "Unfortunately, that night signaled a severe downslide in Max's health. The

early signs were innocent enough, and typical. Constant coldness. Swimming hands. Increased visions of boxing with the *Führer*” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 313). Finally, almost at the end of the narrative (p. 528), the narrator mentions this event for the last time. The fact that Max daydreams about fighting Hitler several times and this is narrated six times means it is one of the moments which mostly concerned the narrator. As a recurring image, it also may function as a motif or a symbol. In *The Book Thief* no Jewish resistance is ever mentioned, and the only kind of fight people (Jewish or not) could offer against the *status quo* of that time happens to be symbolically represented in Max’s delusions. The insistence of the narrator in touching this point may mean he takes side of the victims of the war.

The frequency of other events in *The Book Thief*, aside the constant reference to Werner’s death and Max’s vision, depends a lot on the impact these same events have on Liesel’s life. There a great deal of minor events which happen just once and are narrated just once, as they do not alter Liesel’s life too much and do not call the narrator’s attention. There are also other events that happen many times and are narrated more than once, yet, they do not possess such a high symbolic importance.

Finally, it is important to remember that Death relates several wars in the story time several times in the discourse time. It is true that these are different wars, and such as so, they are considered different events. However, if we take war as one general phenomenon, it can be said that the narrator always recounts the war event, and he touches this topic all over the narrative. Due to the nature of his task, this obsession with the war event is entirely expected.

The temporal disruption presented in *The Book Thief* reflects both the nature of the narrator as well as the social and political events of the Nazi era. Death, as a supernatural being, does not experience time the same way humans do. Consequently, past, present and future get entangled. The narrator lives these three human conceptions at once, which allows a panoramic view of the events which are gone and the ones which are still to come. The immediate result of this temporal presentation is the construction of meaning, since the readers must be attentive to the linear break in order to grasp the features which give significance to the narrative. Besides, such disruption also represents the fragmentation of identities of the Nazi era and all the confusion which blurred the minds of people in Germany. Liesel and her foster parents, for instance, live a double life, pretending to be Nazis while they were truly against the whole system. Max, a Jewish man, travelled from his former hideout to Liesel’s house carrying the *Mein Kampf*, the book written by Hitler to spread the idea of the Nazism. Due to this book, Max is able to pass as a German and find the Hubermanns. For a non-attentive reader, the time in *The Book Thief*, as the Nazi regime in German, may be

confusing to understand. An analysis of the temporal aspect in such piece of work contributes for the reader to relate the historical happening of the Holocaust to complex time structure used in *The Book Thief*. Huehls (2009), when speaking of a set of authors who wrote after the WWII, says:

[...] historical events complicate temporal experience, [...] they [the authors] develop innovative literary forms that deliver new experiences of time—all of them qualified in some way—that in turn produce new ideas about and approaches to the political themes [...]. (HUEHLS, 2009, p. 08)

3.3 Death and Space

Reading a narrative is diving into a fictional world with its own spatial structure loaded with its own significance. Although space has been commonly regarded either as just the background of the plot or static descriptions that slow down the rhythm of the narrative, spatial circumstances are an essential key for the narratee to perceive possible meanings that lie within the text. Knowledge regarding the *where* of the narrative helps the narratee build the mental images of what is read and, according to the narrative strategies used for narrating space, the effect produced by spatial information will hugely differ. As Bal (2007, p. 375 – 376) exemplifies:

Narrative is a form of place-making. The link between beauty and pleasure, horror and displeasure, necessitates description. The topos of the *locus amoenus* turns a sweet landscape into a solicitation of eroticism: the love story can begin. Writers averse to this sweetness come up with an alternative. However, all they can do is reverse it and, thus, the romantic *locus terribilis* is born. (BAL, 2007, p. 375 – 376)

There have been many spatial concepts developed in the field of narrative theory, from the literal one (accounting for physical environment) to metaphorical ones (like mental spaces). The author whose definition guides the present analysis is Jong, when she states: “Space is here understood in the broad sense of the setting of the action of a story, other localities that are referred to (e.g. as part of dreams or reports), and the objects that fill that space as ‘props’” (JONG, 2010, p. 105). The author continues saying that “a narrative text

may address not only the space of the events but also the space of the narrator (at the moment of narration)” (JONG, 2010, p. 106).

In *The Book Thief*, the space of the narrator may be divided according to three levels in the narrative. First, when he functions as an extradiegetic narrator, telling a story he has witnessed in some moment of his eternal existence, no specific space is determined. As he is Death, it is expected some omniscience that would allow him to occupy any space any time, or even all spaces at the same time. The space where Death is at the moment of the narration, as it is never mentioned, depends exclusively on the interpretation of the reader and his personal construct about death as a fact of life. It is possible to infer *when* (after the events took place), but not possible to clearly infer *where* (especially because he is death, a bodiless entity, not a person that occupies a space in time). This literary technique of leaving the space to the narratee’s own imagination is not totally new; however, the fundamental role of the narratee to fill in gaps left by the narrative is explained by Jong when she speaks about the descriptions of spaces in literature:

Whether space is described in abundance or sparingly, narratologists agree it can never be presented in a narrative text in its totality: the narratees are offered a mere selection of details. The narrative evocation of space, therefore, always requires active cooperation on the part of the narratees. They are asked to summon the implications of “Paris” or “a dark wood” from their own memory” (JONG, 2010, p. 106)

Not mentioning the space of the narrator at the moment of the narration opens possibilities of interpretation in *The Book Thief*. The narratee, therefore, does not get bound by philosophical, religious or cultural restrictions imposed in the text through space hints that would delimit his view. The narrator’s space when he says he is going to tell a story remains as broad as the narratee’s imagination.

The second space that must be considered is the one the narrator occupies as an internal character whose existence crossed Liesel’s. As he got her diary the last time he saw her, Death has the opportunity to read about her life and, at the same time, he has the chance to remember when and where their lives crossed each other. Therefore, it is possible to identify two main kinds of environments in this level of the narrative: the settings where Death met Liesel or any of her acquaintances and the setting where Death performed his job as a soul collector not directly involving Liesel’s familiar world. The following extract summarizes Death’s wandering around the Earth and reveals the main scenario where the actions of the events with respect to Liesel will take place.

For two days, I went about my business. I traveled the globe as always, handing souls to the conveyor belt of eternity. I watched them trundle passively on. Several times, I warned myself that I should keep a good distance from the burial of Liesel Meminger's brother. I did not heed my advice. From miles away, as I approached, I could already see the small group of humans standing frigidly among the wasteland of snow. The cemetery welcomed me like a friend, and soon, I was with them. I bowed my head. Quite a way beyond the outskirts of Munich, there was a town called Molching, said best by the likes of you and me as "Molking." That's where they were taking her, to a street by the name of Himmel.

*** A TRANSLATION ***
Himmel = Heaven

Whoever named Himmel Street certainly had a healthy sense of irony. Not that it was a living hell. It wasn't. But it sure as hell wasn't heaven, either. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 26)

Maybe one could argue that this reference to Munich, Molching and Himmel Street is related only to the narrated space (the space of the events), and that Death knows about these spaces due to his reading of Liesel's diary. Nevertheless, he is inserted in this *locus* as he unfolds his memories and shows he visited Liesel's town more than once, as he almost took Max away when he was sick (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 317) and also came for the inhabitants during the air raid that destroyed the poor part of Molching, leaving Liesel alive. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 498)

Although reading Liesel's memories, making allusion to her space, the narrator adds his own memories about places where he had been while Liesel and her friends were living their lives. The most revealing passages are the three death's diaries in Chapter VI which are inserted in Liesel's narrative, where death stops the reading of Liesel's book and speaks about his job and indicates the spaces he was in. The first one receives the title "Death's Diary: 1942" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 307). Even though he is focusing on a date, he complains about his never ending journeys in times of war while giving the narratee some brief indication of his space: "There were certainly some rounds to be made that year, from Poland to Russia to Africa and back again" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 308). His complaint is made clear little later when he gives new spatial indication: "In all honesty (and I know I'm complaining excessively now), I was still getting over Stalin, in Russia. The so-called *second revolution* - the murder of his own people. Then came Hitler. [...] To me, war is like the new boss who expects the

impossible” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 309). In the second diary, which gives title to another subsection of chapter VI; he speaks again about his presence at a war site:

***** DEATH’S DIARY: COLOGNE *****

The fallen hours of May 30. I’m sure Liesel Meminger was fast asleep when more than a thousand bomber planes flew toward a place known as Köln. For me, the result was five hundred people or thereabouts. [...] There were several more places to go, skies to meet and souls to collect, [...] (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 336)

The third diary Death introduces to the narratee follows the same principle in structure, giving title to the subsection, and in content, presenting Death still amazed about the human capacity of murdering. Again, he also provides spatial indications of his whereabouts that require the narratee to picture the whole scene according to his historical knowledge:

***** DEATH’S DIARY: THE PARISIANS *****

Summer came. For the book thief, everything was going nicely. For me, the sky was the color of Jews. [...] I’ll never forget the first day in Auschwitz, the first time in Mauthausen. [...] Smoky sky in those places. The smell like a stove, but still so cold. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 349)

Consequently, the narrator introduces multiple plots which contain their own spaces. The construction of multiple spaces, in this case, is important for guiding the narratee through the change of plots and, at the same time, expands the space of the story, whose totality is seen as the multiple pieces of space description are set together. On this matter Bridgeman stated: “As a basic mechanism of reading, in texts which develop more than one plot-line at once, location allows us to identify rapidly a return to an already-established ongoing scene” (BRIDGEMAN, 2007, p. 56).

Finally, the third space occupied by the narrator in *The Book Thief* happens to be indicated after Death finished reading Liesel’s book, long years after the events narrated by her when she was a child. At her final moment, when she is an old lady with a big family, Death goes to Sydney, Australia, and keeps a real interaction with Liesel through the following dialogue:

Yes, I have seen a great many things in this world. I attend the greatest disasters and work for the greatest villains. But then there are other moments. There's a multitude of stories (a mere handful, as I have previously suggested) that I allow to distract me as I work, just as the colors do. I pick them up in the unluckiest, unlikeliest places and I make sure to remember them as I go about my work. *The Book Thief* is one such story. When I traveled to Sydney and took Liesel away, I was finally able to do something I'd been waiting on for a long time. I put her down and we walked along Anzac Avenue, near the soccer field, and I pulled a dusty black book from my pocket. The old woman was astonished. She took it in her hand and said, "Is this really it?" I nodded. With great trepidation, she opened *The Book Thief* and turned the pages. "I can't believe . . ." Even though the text had faded, she was able to read her words. The fingers of her soul touched the story that was written so long ago in her Himmel Street basement. She sat down on the curb, and I joined her. "Did you read it?" she asked, but she did not look at me. Her eyes were fixed to the words. I nodded. "Many times" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 549 - 550)

Before finishing the discussion on the narrator's space in this section, it is important to pay attention to the fact that Death, even not providing elements to determine his position at the moment of the narration, subtly says in the previous passage that he picks stories to read "in the unluckiest, unluckiest places". Again, it is up to the narratee to decide if the reading of *The Book Thief* is happening in such a space.

Traditionally, all narratives are set in a place which forms the narrative world. The narrated space, being the general spatiality where events happen, may be described through full details or through scarce indications. From a broad perspective the macro space where the events take place in *The Book Thief* is Germany, at the height of the Nazi regime. The specific setting related to the plot is 33 Himmel Street, a street in the fictitious poor small town of Molching. Bathed by the Amper River, on the outskirts of Munich, Molching is located on the way to Dachau, the concentration camp. Now and then the narrator also mentions places related to war contexts, like Russia, Poland, Africa, France and England. Although such localities are not the stage for the actions performed by the protagonist, they are still important for extending the panoramic view on the setting that composes the Second World War. The inscription of the narrative in real spaces (Germany, Munich, Amper River, Dachau and other countries) illustrates how the narratee is required to complete the scenery with his own imagination, as they are just presented by the narrator and do not receive any description. About that Jong says: "By referring to a real place [...] the narrator anchors the setting of his narrative in real geography with which his narratees would be familiar" (JONG, 2010, p. 108).

Normally the space in *The Book Thief* is introduced by the narrator focalizer, who displays panoramic shots of open landscapes as well as limited views of inner spaces, like

house interiors, for instance. These space indications may appear within the narrative as the object of description or during the narration of events when action calls for it. However, in none of the situations the rhythm of the narrative is slowed down by long and detailed spatial descriptions. Brief in length and summarized in content, space descriptions in *The Book Thief* become an integral part of the story, providing important symbolic meanings to the narrative. Bridgeman (2007, p. 55) states: “Objective spatial relationships between aspects of a narrative are helpful in enabling readers to visualize its contents, but equally important, here, is the way in which characters inhabit the space of their world both socially and psychologically.” Indeed, by presenting space as an object of reflection, the narrator manages to construct a more complex narrative world. An example is the description of Himmel Street, main stage for the crucial events that happen in Liesel’s life. After informing the narratee that Himmel means heaven, (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 26), the narrator provides a second brief description about Himmel Street highlighted by centered bold letters and rich in significance.

***** A PHOTO OF HIMMEL STREET *****

**The buildings appear to be glued together, mostly small houses
and apartment blocks that look nervous.
There is murky snow spread out like carpet.
There is concrete, empty hat-stand trees, and gray air.**

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 27)

It is interesting to notice that the narrator proposes to describe “a photo”, dedicating four short lines to create an image of a poor neighborhood. “The buildings that appear to be glued together”, when the narrative unfolds, reveal an oppressing connotation. It shows, at the same time, the extreme financial difficulties of its people and, when Liesel’s family conceal a Jew; the presence of so many people in such proximity become a danger to the Hubermanns, who must be always cautious when opening their curtains. Aside that, the description of the climate, shown through expressions like “murky snow” and “gray air” will reinforce the oppressing situation of the Hubermanns, who need to protect their Jew friend from the cold (although not having enough blankets) and consequent diseases, as he spends most of his time hiding in the basement. Later in the narrative, the narrator provides the last description of Himmel Street. This time it is declared: “On the whole, it was a street filled with relatively poor people, despite the apparent rise of Germany’s economy under Hitler. Poor sides of town still existed. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 46). Not only does the narrator emphasize the misery of

Himmel's inhabitants but he also makes a judgment on the social organization of Germany, attaching more meaning to the space description by showing the huge contrast between the German citizens. This spatial description technique, not centered on physical explanation, characterizes space through non-physical traces, but through actions, events and characters located within or next to it.

Not tired of emphasizing the poor condition of the neighborhood where Liesel is sent to be adopted, the narrator shifts his gaze from Himmel Street and directs it toward Liesel's new home; the Hubermman's house. The previous description of the neighborhood is completed by the description of the house. Their connection form a panorama explained as it follows: "some locations need to be precisely situated with respect to each other because they are the stage of events that involve space in a strategic way" (RYAN, 2009, p. 428). Here, space description is used in a way that foresees future events, as great attention is paid to the basement and how unfit it would prove to be against air raids.

The Hubermanns lived in one of the small, boxlike houses on Himmel Street. A few rooms, a kitchen, and a shared outhouse with neighbors. The roof was flat and there was a shallow basement for storage. It was supposedly not a basement of *adequate depth*. In 1939, this wasn't a problem. Later, in '42 and '43, it was. When air raids started, they always needed to rush down the street to a better shelter. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 32)

Indeed, while the narrative is developed, the basement will be set as the major space which will serve as stage for the most important events concerning Liesel and her family, as Max will be hiding there. The ironic fact regarding the previous passage is that although not considered proper for the protection against bombs, the basement resisted an air raid and Liesel, reading there when the first bombs fell on Himmel Street, managed to survive. In fact, since max's arrival, the basement receives great attention from the narrator, who sprinkles indications of its conditions (if painted, if cold, if having objects) all over the text. There are only two more spaces in *The Book Thief* which are granted with more details, including all the objects that fill it in. The descriptions of spatial objects include the kitchen, being Rosa Hubermann's domain, and the library at the mayor's house, being Liesel's space of acquired literacy knowledge. All the other houses, even when focalized from the inside, do not receive too much attention to their inner object. On this matter, Bal (1997, p. 135) says:

The filling in of space is determined by the objects that can be found in that space. Objects have spatial status. They determine the spatial effect of the room by their shape, measurements, and colours (...). The way in which objects are arranged in a space, the configuration of objects, also influences the perception of that space. In some stories, an object or objects are sometimes presented in detail. In other stories, space may be presented in a vague and implicit manner. (BAL, 1997, p. 135)

On the other hand, while Liesel's main spaces are clearly defined and described, the major spaces concerning the Holocaust do not receive so much light on: the concentration camps. Being the touchstone of every production which deals with the holocaust, concentration camps are expected to be extensively discussed about or described in their full terror. However, this kind of space is represented in *The Book Thief* through Dachau, the most famous concentration camp in Germany, with some kind of reserve, in a clear attempt to spare the narratee from its horrors. Liesel knows that Jews are taken away, for example, and that her mother, as well as other people, must have been taken. She does not have fully clarity on this topic, nevertheless, the narrator does. Not only does the narrator have the knowledge of what is happening but he also goes to concentration camps to collect souls and gets shocked about what he sees. Death comments on the murdering of Jews, but by the time Max is taken and returns almost at the end of the narrative, no allusion to his time in the camp is made.

For me, the sky was the color of Jews. When their bodies had finished scouring for gaps in the door, their souls rose up. When their fingernails had scratched at the wood and in some cases were nailed into it by the sheer force of desperation, their spirits came toward me, into my arms, and we climbed out of those shower facilities, onto the roof and up, into eternity's certain breadth. They just kept feeding me. Minute after minute. Shower after shower. I'll never forget the first day in Auschwitz, the first time in Mauthausen. At that second place, as time wore on, I also picked them up from the bottom of the great cliff, when their escapes fell awfully awry. There were broken bodies and dead, sweet hearts. Still, it was better than the gas. Some of them I caught when they were only halfway down. Saved you, I'd think, holding their souls in midair as the rest of their being—their physical shells—plummeted to the earth. All of them were light, like the cases of empty walnuts. Smoky sky in those places. The smell like a stove, but still so cold. I shiver when I remember—as I try to de-realize it. I blow warm air into my hands, to heat them up. But it's hard to keep them warm when the souls still shiver. God. I always say that name when I think of it. God. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 349)

It is clear to see in the above mentioned passage that spatial description of the concentration camp is more attached to events and characters than to physical qualities, which provides an insight of the camps, but in general terms. The narration of how prisoners die (gas and fall from hills) is balanced by the idea of death as a comforting end to their miseries. About this narratorial choice of not focusing on death camps Kirk is lucid when proposing the

following interpretation: “This lack of representation in itself is interesting, as Death is inarguably *most* present in the death camps of the Holocaust. However, ostensibly because it is not central to the story of the book thief, the inside of the camps is never represented” (KIRK, 2010, p. 91).

Finally, the last space concerning Liesel is Sydney, the location where she will have the opportunity to meet Death, after a life that allowed her construct a large family, with husband, kids and grandchildren.

When I traveled to Sydney and took Liesel away, I was finally able to do something I'd been waiting on for a long time. I put her down and we walked along Anzac Avenue, near the soccer field, and I pulled a dusty black book from my pocket. The old woman was astonished. She took it in her hand and said, “Is this really it?” I nodded. With great trepidation, she opened *The Book Thief* and turned the pages. “I can't believe . . .” Even though the text had faded, she was able to read her words. The fingers of her soul touched the story that was written so long ago in her Himmel Street basement. She sat down on the curb, and I joined her. “Did you read it?” she asked, but she did not look at me. Her eyes were fixed to the words. I nodded. “Many times” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 549)

Again, there is a brief description about the setting that, here, is summoned up due to the events of the narrative, and not as object of reflection. It is important to emphasize that this is the first time death talks to one of the souls recently departed. Taking a walk like long term friends, they keep the dialogue in a soft mood. Maybe it can be inferred that the invocation of Sydney, a traditionally sunny place, serves to highlight the change in the atmosphere, which now is distant from the gloomy Nazi Germany. Also, it might be speculated that Sydney, as Markus Zusak's hometown, is in some degree paid tribute to.

When literary space is analyzed just as the primary condition for a story to take place, many layers of meanings may be missed. In order to attend to the question of meaning in a given narrative it is also necessary to observe the functions fulfilled by space construction. According to Jong (2010, p. 123 – 127) there are five main functions involved in the interpretation of literary space: thematic, mirror-description, symbolic, characterizing and psychologizing functions.

First, Jong states that “space may acquire thematic function when it is itself one of the main ingredients of a narrative” (JONG, 2010, p. 123). In *The Book Thief* most of the central events and actions occur at 33, Himmel Street; the main street that cuts Molching from beginning to end. It is on Himmel Street that Liesel learns to socialize with other kids and adults. There she finds the small houses of her neighbors who interweave with her life. This is

the street of poor people, far from the other neighbors who are in a better financial condition and can afford paying for Rosa's washing and ironing services. Himmel Street is occupied by suffering people who barely have what to eat; especially those families whose number of kids reaches six (like Rudy's family). For Liesel 33, Himmel Street is an ambiguous place and her relation to it is troubled by what it represents. On one hand, it is a space that represents freedom, where she lives her adventures with Rudy and from where she collects little objects, newspapers and even snow to take to her friend in the basement, so he may have the chance to see the external world. It is a safe place for an abandoned girl who is known in all neighborhood; a place where all kids play outside from morning till night. On the other hand, it is also unsafe and dangerous, a place where anybody may discover about the Jew in her basement and denounce the Hubermanns to the authorities; which would equal to death sentence. About spaces which acquire a thematic function Bal (1997, p. 136) mentions: "The fact that 'this is happening here' is just as important as 'the way it is here,' which allows these events to happen." Accordingly, even the narrator demonstrates strangeness when Himmel is destroyed:

Through the overcast sky, I looked up and saw the tin-can planes. I watched their stomachs open and the bombs drop casually out. They were off target, of course. They were often off target.

*** A SMALL, SAD HOPE ***

**No one wanted to
bomb Himmel Street.
No one would bomb a
place named after
heaven, would they?
Would they?**

The bombs came down, and soon, the clouds would bake and the cold raindrops would turn to ash. Hot snowflakes would shower to the ground. In short, Himmel Street was flattened. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 497 – 498)

The second space function listed by Jong, the mirror-description, is not applied in *The Book Thief* if we consider space as a physical location. Although this dissertation does not expand so much the concept of space, it is worth mentioning that the fight imagined by Max against Hitler, in his delusion, creates a mental space representing a boxing ring (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 251) that mirrors the Jewish resistance against Hitler, even though such resistance had been done in the form of escaping and hiding; and not in the form of physical confrontation. The third function, on the other hand, is often employed in *The Book Thief* as part of the narrative technique. The symbolic function, which loads spaces with symbolic interpretations, may be explicitly recognized in relation to two locations: the basement and the

library in the mayor's house. The basement is the place where Liesel does not need to pretend she likes Hitler or any of the actions performed by the Nazis. There she lives happy moments with Max and her foster parents. In a psychoanalytical reading Karpasitis (2014) summarizes the role of the basement:

From the kitchen table the progressive development of the sheltered space comes in the form of the basement. Unlike the kitchen table, this new space does in fact provide Liesel, Max and to some extent Hans with a degree of safety, security, privacy and space for interiority. [...] she feels that the basement, the place of secrets, the place of Max, is the only space where she can be psychologically comfortable with her various traumas (including witnessing the death of her brother). The writing of her story in the basement is also significant in terms of plot – it saves her life. From a practical perspective, she is in the basement writing her story when the bomb drops on Himmel Street and is thereby saved from death. From a psychoanalytic perspective – her ability to put finally her trauma into words (the Freudian talking cure) saves her life. Ironically, it is the basement, the hidden unconscious room of secrets and trauma, that is the only setting to remain standing after the rest of Himmel Street is destroyed. (KARPASITIS, 2014)

The library that belongs to the mayor's wife, on the other hand, does not hold any sense of security, although Liesel likes being there. It is the place where Liesel has the opportunity to read books and, because of her hidden incursions into the library, she is given a notebook where she will write her personal story. Representing the power of words, the mayor's library is the tool for Liesel to her own book the future. She writes "I love this place and hate it, because it is full of words" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 522).

The last two space functions according to Jong are the characterizing and the psychologizing ones. Jong (2010, p. 128) states: "the characterizing function refers to a character's permanent traits, the psychological to his or her mood of the moment". Therefore, using the mayor's library and, as an extension, the rest of the house an example, it can be said that they perform both the characterizing and psychologizing functions. First, the house represents the Nazi power of its inhabitants, rich and distant from the common citizens like Liesel. The physical description shows their superior social and political status as it is located at the top of the hill: "The house straddled the hill, overlooking the town, and it was unforgettable" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 130). Also, the description given by Rosa about the mayor's wife, blended with the description of the house, provides an insight about the psychology of the former:

Rosa's greatest disdain, however, was reserved for 8 Grande Strasse. A large house, high on a hill, in the upper part of Molching. "This one," she'd pointed out to Liesel the first time they went there, "is the mayor's house. That crook. His wife sits at home all day, too mean to light a fire—it's always freezing in there" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 42.)

As it will become clear in the unfolding of the narrative, the mayor's wife lives a state of agony after the death of her son at war, who she believes died of cold. Her melancholic behavior starts being merged with the atmosphere of her house, as the narrator also notices: "And Frau Hermann, the mayor's wife, standing fluffy-haired and shivery in her enormous, cold-aired doorway. Always silent. Always alone. No words, not once" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 93 - 94). Her behavior, after meeting Liesel and spending some time with her, starts changing and it is possible to infer that her melancholic way of living was a temporary psychological condition.

All the previous functions of space obviously refer to the spaces depicted either by the narrator or by a character in *The Book Thief*. However, before concluding, it is relevant to mention that many important spaces are just inferred, like the ghettos, for instance. When Max is with his family and the Nazi police knock at his door, he manages to escape but his family stays to back him up. It is possible to infer they are living in a ghetto, since this is the first step towards segregation taken by the Nazis. The whereabouts of Max's family, as well as Liesel's biological parents, is never mentioned. The camps of extermination are a possible answer that is not given by the narrative. When it happens, the destiny of characters, and their probable deaths, cannot be set in a specific space. Adams (2012, p. 144) speaks of *placeable* and *unplaceable* deaths, that is, deaths that cannot have their location determined in any passage of the narrative.

FINAL REMARKS

No one knows whether death, which people fear to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good.
Plato, *Apology*

I open my final remarks by returning to Freud, whose explanation on the uncanny inspired the title of this dissertation. In “*Das Unheimliche*” (1919) or “The Uncanny”, Freud explains that this concept goes beyond the merely frightening or mysterious. It is the strangely familiar, or rather, the unknown or the unrecognizable, which is perceived within our normal and safe experience. In this sense, *unheimlich* means the “un-familiar”. Such concept may also be understood as “not secret”, something that should have been kept hidden but has failed to do so. In this sense, it represents something that should be repressed under the layers of our conscious, but is not. Death, in *The Book Thief*, is uncanny in both senses. It is familiar to humans as a result of our living condition (every living being one day will die), and it is also unfamiliar, as nobody has ever returned from this experience. Even situations when people supposedly come back after being considered dead are called near-death experience. *Near*, not death itself, as death is the ultimate point of no return. Therefore, death is uncanny, it is familiar and un-familiar. In *The Book Thief*, the characters live in a state of war and, although they are used to death, they still get shocked when somebody they know dies at war, as if that was not expected or not supposed to happen this way. The uncanny feeling about death may be found in the passage when Rosa discovers about her neighbor’s fate:

“My brother’s dead,” said Michael Holtzapfel, and he could not have delivered the punch any better with his one usable fist. For Rosa staggered. Certainly, war meant dying, but it always shifted the ground beneath a person’s feet when it was someone who had once lived and breathed in close proximity. Rosa had watched both of the Holtzapfel boys grow up. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 467)

On the other hand, *The book Thief* reverts the natural order of the uncanny, and sees the unfamiliar inside the familiar. As a narrator, Death is presented as a friendly entity with

special care for the dying and the wounded. He is seen as the only familiar and certain element within the chaos and uncertainty of war. Hopeless characters follow death as he wanders through cities in ruins, and those who really want to meet the narrator find a way to escape life for good. People would rather die than live the atrocities of war and their consequences, as misery and loneliness. Freud uses fairy tales to exemplify how we find the familiar within unfamiliar situations, since characters return from the realm of death causing no horror or terror among the ones around them:

Apparently death and the re-animation of the dead have been represented as most uncanny themes. But things of this sort too are very common in fairy stories. Who would be so bold as to call it uncanny, for instance, when Snow-White opens her eyes once more? (FREUD, 1953, p. 246)

In the sense of representing what is not secret, the element we suppress and hide from ourselves, death, in *The Book Thief*, is the part of our knowledge and perception we would rather not pay attention to. In Zusak's novel, no one speaks of death, no one debates its meaning and it is not subject of too much thought (maybe because people are too used to it in the context of war). Therefore, Death is like an old friend who follows us everywhere without being noticed, the omniscient narrator which makes us company throughout our history. We know he is there but we do not dare look into his direction. Liesel, in *The Book Thief*, shows how each day living is a day that death does not take her. Hence, each day alive is a symbolic victory against death, which may strike at any time.

The term uncanny in the title of the dissertation has been connected to the Freudian concept to approach the matter of death in *The Book Thief* because it represents my first feelings when I started reading Zusak's work. The representation of death made me consider that narrator familiar and unfamiliar, since it corroborates traditional images and, at the same time, reverts them. Also, the studies on narratology, mainly through the voices of Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal, provided an insight on how the narrative is constructed as a reflection of death's way of expressing and positioning himself before the facts he narrates.

Chapter 1 allowed me to approach the uncanny nature of death in *The Book Thief*. Death was analyzed as an archetypal image, as a personification and as a narrator. Durand's theory of the order of the imaginary, as well as Jung's sayings on this matter, helps us to understand death as an archetypal image in literature. Death is conceived according to our collective unconscious and, therefore, carries the marks of our cultural background.

Depending on the time and place, death may come as a monstrous being, which represents the difficulties of survival of a specific population. Or it may come as a gentle friend, the ultimate solution for a life of misery and disease. Such dichotomy is also touched by Durand, when he speaks of the symbolic weight the archetypal images may carry. In the field of symbols, death depends on our personal experience, since our point of view formats the eternal images we unconsciously hold, attributing meaning to them. About the symbols, Jung says that they: “are meant to attract, to convince, to fascinate and to overpower” (1969, p. 07). Indeed, the symbolic representation of death as one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse and the grim reaper, both in the Christian tradition, attract and fascinate. In *The Book Thief*, the author uses the symbol of the Grim Reaper as a starting point for the representation of death as an image. Death is what the Grim Reaper is not. He does not look like the Reaper, in fact, he makes fun of the image of the scythe and the black hood. He breathes, he says he has a heart and he has deep feelings for Liesel and her best friend, Rudy. In this sense, he has a human nature. However, it is the image of the Reaper that gives us a glimpse of death as a symbol, since he performs the Reaper’s job, he has the same cold hands and he works for somebody, be it God (in the religious sense) or some other entity that regulates the end of human life. In *The Book Thief*, death comes as the messenger, not as a God which personifies death.

The section on the archetypal images concerning death is followed by the section death as a personification. As a personification, Death is polite and highly conscious about the meaning of war. He emphasizes, more than once, that humans, not him, are the true responsible for death, he is only the entity that puts into action what humans have provoked. Besides, he does not seem to be a God, as he has no power over the decision of sparing lives. Talking to his narratee, an imaginary audience that never replies, Death constructs, little by little, a friendly image of somebody who cares for the victims of war and, to some extent, tries to minimize their suffering by collecting their souls before they suffer too much. He uses words like *healing* and *softening* to indicate his role, aside declaring he is “cheerful”, “amiable”, “agreeable” and “affable” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 05). Death, as a personification, makes the effort to keep a good image before his audience.

Death as narrator shows how death as a personification works. The subtleties of such movement can be better understood with the help of Genette and Mieke Bal, who offer the keys to the narrative strategies. The narrator of *The Book Thief* is a peculiar one due not only to his supernatural nature, but also to the fact that he is, at one time, homodiegetic, heterodiegetic and autodiegetic, if we borrow Genette’s classification for narrators. Death is homodiegetic if we take into consideration his interaction within the story. Although he does

not talk to anybody, he mentally connects to them at the moment of their departing or when they reach the afterlife. Liesel, for example, has a dialogue with the narrator after she dies. Nonetheless, as he is death, he has the power of an omniscient narrator. Therefore, he is heterodiegetic, with the ability to report thoughts and feelings which belong to other characters. Finally, he is autodiegetic if we consider that he is the hero of the story, while Liesel is a character he is fond of. He tells her story and her life, but his position towards it makes *The Book Thief* his own history. In order to develop his narrative, he makes use of metaphors, irony and a large colorful imagery, while talking to a *you* form which I call the *narratee* (narratological term borrowed from Gerald Prince). An attentive look shows that the narrative is based on the dialogue between Death and his narratee, even if the former one never replies. However, Death, as the narrator, makes all his comments based on what this narratee supposedly thinks, setting an atmosphere of informality and orality to his speech.

Besides being the narrator, death is also a recurring theme throughout the novel. It relates to the death of individuals. It is clear, in *The Book Thief*, that this is a story focused on poor German citizens who felt the effects of the Second World War, although they were not the major victims persecuted at that time. The individuals who have their deaths depicted are, mostly, either civilian or German soldiers. Among the civilians, the main cause of death is the bombing of their towns, or diseases. Death, in such situations, shows special care for children. The soldiers, in their turn, do not have their deaths depicted in details, death normally speaks about them when referring to mass death. However, the narrator focuses on the death of the soldiers who are, somehow, connected to Liesel's life, as their deaths cause a domino effect. The death drive which assaults many of the characters is studied in the section about characters who try to suicide, or suffer from mental illnesses which would lead them to death, even if unintentionally. In this section, the main theoretical voice is Sigmund Freud, as he presents the concept of *death drive* as one the vital human urges. Freud's followers call this urge Thanatos, in opposition to Eros, the urge of living. I examine how such forces simultaneously push and pull the characters along the story. To mention some examples, the mayor's wife suffers from melancholia, the soldier Michal Holtzapfel commits suicide and Liesel, although representing Eros and the urge of living, also presents some violent rampants.

As to the matter of mass death and social death, the narrator, focusing on the lives of German characters, does not provide details about the death of the Jews or other groups who are persecuted by the Nazis. People either disappear (like Liesel's mother) or they are taken away (to a place people do not discuss about). Death, as an omniscient narrator, goes to concentration camps, but does not fully describe what he sees, although describing his state of

shock when he needs to go to such places. Therefore, mass death, although implied and, sometimes, referred to in numbers, is not Death's main subject to discuss. On the other hand, when soldiers die, he normally gives details about that, as well as details about the cities which are destroyed by bombs. In such occasions, the narrator explains how many people died, how they died and the attitude he takes to collect them. By and large, death announces mass death by mentioning the bombs, bullets, fire and snow. Then, he goes on depicting the horror he sees. Finally, there is the theme of social death. It is interesting to notice that death is so much present in *The Book Thief* that it is felt even when not meaning the literal end of life. In this case, we can feel social death, a term coined by Orlando Patterson in his study about slavery, indicating the metaphorical death slaves (or other repressed social group or gender) suffer when they are excluded from mainstream society. In *The Book Thief*, Max is the ultimate representation of social death in the novel. As a Jew, he loses his personal and social identity, and all bonds to his former cultural background are cut off. To some extent, even Liesel's foster parents suffer that kind of social death, as they are excluded for not being aligned with the current regime.

The use of narratological devices has proved necessary for me to be able to deal with all those different instances of representation. Without that I would not be able to analyze how Death, as a narrator, positions himself in the narration. Three elements helped open the way: focalization, time and space. In terms of focalization, Death holds most of the focalization in the narrative. He hands over the perspective of things only to Liesel and Max. In such moments, these characters are allowed to mentally focus on a memory, or on a vision, a situation Mieke Bal refers to as *embedded focalization*. Liesel's thoughts are not only described by Death. The narrator allows Liesel to think and focalize on the death of her brother or on her own nightmares, while Max is allowed to think about an imaginary fight with Hitler. Allowed, in this sense, means that the narrator does not interrupt their line of thought, he does not interfere by making any comments about them. Their memories, visions and dreams are presented as they are and, consequently, death is not the focalizer in these cases.

In relation to time and space, Death occupies an interesting position. He is out of the temporal and spatial continuum as humans conceive it. He can be everywhere and nowhere whenever he wants. The analysis of time concerns the aspects of order, duration and frequency, as proposed by Gérard Genette. Death inverts the order of the narrative through constant flashbacks and flash-forwards which, to some extent, change the suspense of the narrative. I say change because, usually, suspense relies on *what* is going to happen next. In

The Book Thief, yet, suspense relies on *how* things are going to happen. The narrator warns the reader of who is going to die and, from that moment on, the reader tries to figure out how that death will happen. Concerning duration and frequency, Death is a traditional narrator. In other words, he dedicates more time (duration) to speak about the events he is interested in and speaks of them more than once (frequency). In general, Death pays attention to Liesel and her friends, reserving long descriptions and comments to deal with her states of mind. The death of her brother, for instance, is a fact the narrator is constantly referring to in the narrative, as it is one of the most traumatic events Liesel goes through.

Having exposed the findings about death in *The Book Thief*, it is important to insert this dissertation in a much wider body of possibilities of research about Zusak's novel. Death, as one of the predominant themes in literature, is an intriguing subject that allows endless approaches under so many different prisms. *The Book Thief* is not only a story with a peculiar narrator, it is a complex representation of death, since it deals with archetypal images and symbols in a level that, at the same time, corroborate traditional images and subvert them. Besides all this complexity in the representation of death, *The Book Thief* also employs interesting narrative strategies which go from the use of metaphors and imagery to the intense use of flashbacks, causing a reorientation in the natural order of the narrative. If the reader expects a story with a beginning, middle and end in this sequence, he gets frustrated. In *The Book Thief*, each line must be read carefully, as most of them are explained many pages ahead. I hope that this combination of Death as narrator and figurative language serves to prove that *The Book Thief* well deserves its place in the literary tradition not just as a book of the moment, but as a piece of work which offers a good insight into the theme of death.

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