

The Transformation of the Main Characters in Markus Zusak's *I Am the Messenger* and *The Book Thief*

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce analyzuje proměnu hlavních postav v dílech *Posel* (*I Am the Messenger*, 2002) a *Zlodějka knih* (*The Book Thief*, 2005) Markuse Zusaka. Začátek práce popisuje žánr, do kterého tato díla spadají. Zaměřuje se na původ, vývoj, význam a témata, která jsou v něm interpretována. Poukazuje také na okruh problémů, které se pojí s tímto žánrem. Dále práce pojednává o Marku Zusakovi, jeho životě, dílech a faktorech, které jeho tvorbu ovlivnily. Těžištěm práce je analýza proměn hlavních postav ve výše zmíněných dílech, na základě vlivů, které na ně působily. Práce dochází k závěru, že obě hlavní postavy prochází velkou změnou v průběhu příběhu a postupně se z nich stavají dospělí. Tato proměna je v některých aspektech velmi podobná.

Klíčová slova: Markus Zusak, literatura pro mladé, dospělost, hlavní postavy, analýza díla, proměna, téma.

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the transformation of the main characters in the novels *I Am the Messenger* (2002) and *The Book Thief* (2005) written by Markus Zusak. The first part of the thesis deals with the definition, origin, significance, development and the themes, typical for young adult literature, which is the genre to which the aforementioned Zusak's novels belong. This genre is associated with a range of problems which are also pointed out. Furthermore, the thesis discusses Mark Zusak's life, his works and the factors that influenced his writing the most. The main goal of this thesis is to analyse the transformation of the main characters in *I Am the Messenger* and *The Book Thief* based on the influences that impact on them. The thesis concludes that both main characters undergo a great change in the course of the story, and they gradually become adults. This transformation is very similar in some aspects.

Keywords: Markus Zusak, young adult literature, adulthood, main characters, novel analysis, transformation, theme.

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INTRODUCTION

After young adults started to be perceived as a particular social group, the literary genre that is named after them appeared. Young adult literature is a very variable genre that stretches its boundaries, and this genre cannot be summed up in one definition. Although contemporary novels included in this genre have different features, the labelling of them as young adult literature is still present. The swift evolution and the attitude of readers and critics to this genre is influenced by many factors, however, the marketing plays a key role when it comes to young adult literature.

Markus Zusak belongs among the authors whose works are often labelled as young adult literature. However, just as the genre of young adult literature is unique for being elusive, so is this author who stands out with his novels. His most successful works include *I Am the Messenger* (2002) and *The Book Thief* (2005), whose main characters and their transformation and development will be analysed in this thesis. This analysis will focus on the formative factors and thanks to which, the protagonists undergo a significant change, with an emphasis on the similarities and differences between them.

In this thesis, I will introduce young adult literature, its origin, development, purpose and other aspects will be outlined. However, the emphasis is primarily on the themes and significance of this genre. Then I will present Markus Zusak and outline his career as a writer, from his literary beginnings to current achievements and the perception of him as an author. As this thesis concerns the transformation of the main characters, a greater emphasis will be put on analysing the factors that initiate the change in the protagonists and reflect some problems of the society, everyday life or they are specific to a particular time. The main purpose of my thesis is to focus on representations of the transformation of the main characters, compare and contrast their development, and identify the most significant influences on a young person during adolescence through these stories.

Even though Markus Zusak deviates with his novels from young adult literature, his works are dominated by the transformation of the main character. The main feature is the transformation from child to adult which is also a major theme of this genre. Both *I Am the Messenger* and *The Book Thief* present a protagonist whose life is influenced by the external and internal factors that initiate the transformation, which subsequently lead to them becoming a mature, strong, self-confident and kind-hearted people who care more about others. Their personality is shaped, and they are able to express their opinion or make a change.

1 YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Young adult literature belongs to very popular genres which generate a large part of the book industry's revenues. Because it is one of the major areas in the book industry its development, understanding and ranking of books is greatly influenced by marketing.¹ This is also obvious from the increase in the number of awards for contributions to young adult publishing.² The term young adult literature incorporates the collocation young adult which is perceived as the definition of a certain age category for which this genre is intended. However, the definition itself is not so simple. Indeed, it is very abstract and ambiguous.³ Approaches to the definition, as well as the classification vary and even experts in the field often are not in agreement.⁴ This genre is also greatly influenced by changes in the world and society, and for this reason it is very inconsistent, which complicates the definition even further.⁵

In addition, it could be argued that it is sometimes borderline impossible to determine the genre of a book, as the genres have frequently overlapped and mixed since the nineteenth century. As a result, one novel can bear features of several genres and it may be hard to determine which of them is dominant.⁶ However, the tendency for differentiation is still present. For this reason, one book can be labelled as several genres.

To pin down a definition of young adult literature, it is literature where the protagonist is a teenager typically around 16–18 years old⁷ or a person who deals with problems from a teenage perspective. The story can be told from a first-person perspective and stories are of medium length.⁸ The common themes are searching for identity and clash with adulthood. Nowadays there is another defining criterion which is the target reader. This genre is now usually written for teenagers and for this reason the style of writing, the choice of themes,

¹Shelby Anne Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 487.

²Michael Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," *Voices from the Middle* 9, no. 2, (December 2006): 96, <https://library.ncte.org/journals/VM/issues/v9-2/2395>.

³Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 179-180.

⁴Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 302.

⁵Melanie D. Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," *The ALAN Review* 36, no. 3, (Summer 2009): 73, <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v36i3.a.9>.

⁶Jonathan D. Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 3.

⁷Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 95.

⁸Steven VanderStaay, "Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre," *English Journal* 81, no.4 (April 1992): 48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/819930>.

the choice of characters and other components of the story are adjusted to them.⁹ However, the features of this genre vary, and the approach to this definition is broad. Young adult literature is known for its diversity because many other genres and subgenres are interwoven into it. Examples of the genres enriching contemporary young adult literature are magical realism which combines fantasy and reality, historical fiction which erased the boundaries between history and fiction or science fiction.¹⁰ The current trend mainly includes fantasy, magic realism, sci-fi and historical novels.¹¹

1.1 The origin

A historical approach to this issue is connected with the usage of the word teenager. When the word teenager started to be used in everyday language and teenagers became recognized as a separate social group the literature for them could appear.¹²

Still, many authors and their works do not strictly fit the genre of young adult literature and yet they are categorized as such, solely because the main theme in their novels is adolescence. Sometimes their work also has other features that are generally perceived to belong to young adult literature.¹³ These titles include Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, Anderson's *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing* or David Almond's *Clay*; the proper classification of which is often debated.¹⁴ In addition, they convey other themes such as family life, love, cultural and historical changes.¹⁵

The term Young Adult literature was first introduced in the 1960s by the YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) which belongs to the ALA (American Library Association). At the time it referred to realistic fiction for young readers between 12 and 18 years of age.¹⁶ However, the first novel which fits the criteria for young adult literature is *Seventeenth Summer* written by Maureen Daly in 1942. In this time the adolescent phase began to be perceived in the USA as a specific period of time in human life¹⁷ and the

⁹ Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010), 8-10.

¹⁰ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 310-312.

¹¹ Scot Smith, "The Death of Genre: Why the Best YA Fiction Often Defies Classification," *The ALAN Review* 35, no.1, (Fall 2007): 44-49, <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v35i1.a.5>.

¹² Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 96.

¹³ VanderStaay, "Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre," 48-49.

¹⁴ Smith, "The Death of Genre: Why the Best YA Fiction Often Defies Classification," 43.

¹⁵ Jonathan Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name . . . : Defining the Genre," *The ALAN Review* 35, no. 1, (Fall 2007): 34-35, <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v35i1.a.4>.

¹⁶ Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 95.

¹⁷ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 11-14.

emergence of a genre to cater to the needs of an adolescent audience can be seen as a logical outcome.

The most well-known book, which is classified as young adult literature¹⁸, *The Catcher in the Rye* was written by J.D. Salinger in 1951. This book was not aimed at young adult readers, but it appeared among American young adult novels according to The Young Adult Library Service Association. Even though the term young adult literature appeared in the 1960s and this book was written in 1951, it meets all the criteria for inclusion in this genre.¹⁹ From today's perspective, this classification is possible due to the subsequent definition of this literature.

Salinger's book attracted a great deal of attention, mainly because of its controversial character. The themes included in the novel, such as sexual content, were unacceptable to the general public. Also, the style of how the author worked with the language was new because of the usage of profanities.²⁰ Previously, it was common for literature to avoid these topics, but Salinger decided to present a not always simple and positive reality of teenage life to readers.²¹

As Michael Cart pointed out, writing style had changed in the late sixties. The first-person narrative voice of young adult literature became common. Authors started writing about topics that were not typically written about in novels, for example self-acceptance of young adults and peer pressure.²² Literature became more direct, and controversial topics became a part of books. The life of teenagers was realistically depicted without any embellishing.²³

This change is also noticeable in the style of language in which the books are written, mostly colloquial language with many ungrammatical expressions. The simpler structures, a considerable amount of direct speech and a small number of characters are present in many books belonging to this genre these days. Other features are the chronological structure of the story or the first-person narrative from the main character's point of view.²⁴ These

¹⁸ Smith, "The Death of Genre: Why the Best YA Fiction Often Defies Classification," 34.

¹⁹ VanderStaay, "Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre," 48-49.

²⁰ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 27.

²¹ Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name . . . : Defining the Genre," 34 -35.

²² Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 30-49.

²³ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 310 - 311.

²⁴ Šárka Bubíková, "Who Reads This and Why? The Crossover Phenomenon in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction," *HRADEC KRÁLOVÉ JOURNAL OF ANGLOPHONE STUDIES* 2, no. 1, (2015): 13, http://pdf.uhk.cz/hkjas/pi/pdf/vol2nr1_2015.pdf.

linguistic devices are used for the sake of authenticity and an attempt to draw the readers into the plot. However, this also changes depending on time or the author and the style of writing. There are many titles which deviate and consist of complicated plots, shifts in time and perspective and other literary techniques.²⁵ Currently, multiple narrative perspectives, shifts forms and structure are very popular. Authors create more complex stories, use several narrators or switch the tense.²⁶

For the development and the very definition of this literature, it is necessary to mention Bildungsroman because young adult literature has evolved from it. These novels focus on the child protagonist's transition to adulthood. Along with coming of age, they also depict integration into society. This term first began to appear at the beginning of the 20th century. Themes such as the individual, society, ideals, reality, children, adults, development and adolescence are in the foreground, which are also part of young adult literature.²⁷

1.2 The definition

Young adult literature has not been completely defined because there is no single classification that encompasses it as a whole. It attempts to bridge the gap between children's literature and writing for adults. The classification of literature in this category is difficult as the explication is constantly changing.²⁸ Many approaches reach a deadlock, for example, the division based on the age of the target readers. Even if young adult literature is most often stated as anything read by readers aged approximately twelve to eighteen, the age given above varies because these books are read by a wide group of readers regardless of their age.²⁹ Therefore, the method of classification based on the age of the target reader is not a reliable approach. In addition, in one period this literature was published as a common fiction without any further specification.³⁰ Karen Coats, a professor of education and Director of the Centre for Research in Children's Literature at the University of Cambridge, draws attention to the insufficiently clear definition of young adult literature and asks where literature for children ends and literature for teenagers begins. This category has fairly loose

²⁵ Bubíková, "Who Reads This and Why? The Crossover Phenomenon in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction," 13.

²⁶ Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 74, 77.

²⁷ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 310.

²⁸ Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 73.

²⁹ Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 95.

³⁰ Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 96.

boundaries and blends with the other two areas that are middle-grade and new adult literature.³¹ As it was mentioned earlier this is largely influenced by marketing and partially also depends on the author's own perception of the work. Coats further states that a number of other factors such as topics, length, format or vocabulary can be taken into account when classifying books.³²

As Michael Cart mentioned, literary critics identified certain features and characteristics that can be established as the criteria for determining whether a text belongs to this label or not.³³ Several of the features are mentioned below. However, as already noted, approaches vary and many of these features are not recognised by some literary critics, but these are considered to be the most common and used.³⁴

A typical protagonist in a young adult novel is 15 to 18. If they attend secondary school the problems addressed in the book are related to that. The most common themes are searching for identity, first love and problematic relationships with their parents. In general, these are the topics that concern adolescents.³⁵ However the definition is inconsistent, as mentioned above. The question of where children's literature ends, and teen literature begins remains unclear. Sometimes this division is considered to be artificially created by publishing houses to attract the target reader. In this case it could be considered just a marketing tool. Because whether a novel gets the young adult label or adult fiction, or children's fiction is often a decision made by the publisher's marketing team, especially with a commercial genre like this. The purpose of this classification is only to increase profit and often the individual features of a novel are overlooked. Therefore, it is placed in a different category in the expectation of higher sales.³⁶

In recent years, the popularity of young adult literature has risen among adult readers which also interferes with defining the genre based on the age.³⁷ The shift in readership, which is referred to as a crossover, puts these books in the hands of adult readers. In today's world it is not only targeting teens but also a broader age audience, which is economically

³¹ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 322.

³² Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 322.

³³ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 69-70.

³⁴ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 180.

³⁵ Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name . . . : Defining the Genre," 34-35.

³⁶ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 322.

³⁷ Rachel Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 15.

viable for publishers and booksellers.³⁸ Among the most famous books that are included in this phenomenon is *Harry Potter*, written by J. K. Rowling in 1997.³⁹

1.3 The Purpose of YAL

Young adult literature supposedly tries to help teenagers with making sense of or understanding the self and the world. The stories are mainly realistic and focus on the human experience. Usually, in the centre of the story is the teenage protagonist, who must deal with various problems, and tries to find an answer or the right solution. The answers are not always present in the text, therefore the readers have to go beyond the scope of the text.⁴⁰

The stories are full of first experiences with love, death, and the consequences of choices and responsibilities. The main protagonist undergoes the transition from innocence to experience on various levels of personal life. These experiences form and change the character that will affect the main protagonist's future life.⁴¹

The authors use a different form of the depiction of protagonists' view of life in the story, the purpose of which could be to attract the readers or explain the perception of life. This reflects their attitudes, issues, thoughts or the real problems that adolescents face. Young adult literature can also fulfil the needs or interests of readers.⁴² However, it not only has artistic value but is also important for development. This literature can be helpful in the difficult period of adolescence and growth as children become adults because readers can identify with the characters and thus understand some of their problems.⁴³ This also applies to adults who are trying to understand the young.⁴⁴

1.4 Themes

Young adult literature contains many themes and motifs which reflect the needs and experiences of teenagers. They can also depict their problems and interests.⁴⁵ Through the stories, young readers can identify with teenage characters, who often experience situations

³⁸ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 322.

³⁹ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 395.

⁴⁰ Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 74.

⁴¹ Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 95.

⁴² Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 318.

⁴³ John H. Bushman & Shelley McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," *The ALAN Review* 32, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 63, <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v32i1.a.6>.

⁴⁴ Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 96.

⁴⁵ Jeffrey S. Kaplan, "Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century: Moving Beyond Traditional Constraints and Conventions," *The ALAN Review* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 11, <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v32i2.a.2>.

similar to their own.⁴⁶ Themes that predominantly appear in young adult literature have been changing over time, as society develops, and new issues appear.⁴⁷ Technology has come to the fore lately because it affects people's everyday life and interferes with human relationships,⁴⁸ which corresponds to the development of this theme in the literature. The world is more and more influenced by modern technologies and young adults do much of their communicating through social networks that have become an inseparable part of their lives. Face-to-face contact is often replaced by communication through social platforms, which have completely changed the way people communicate.⁴⁹

However, there are several recurring themes which include growing up, first love, finding one's identity and place in society or dealing with a variety of issues.⁵⁰ Others also involve mental health issues⁵¹ and feminism⁵² which focus more on self-acceptance and human status. Another group of themes is related to sex, violence and narcotics which are connected with the first experience with them.⁵³

Some themes are considered whether they should be described in this literature. These include, for example, abuse or violence⁵⁴ which are regarded as borderline. The books which contain such topics are perceived to be more for adults. Nevertheless, approaches and opinions about it differ greatly and there is no definite recommendation.

The period of adolescence is a phase of several years in which a young person undergoes significant changes both physically and psychologically.⁵⁵ It is a process where adolescents gradually become independent, take responsibility for their lives and prepare for adult life. Being independent from family and creating your own self and making decisions for yourself is a very important step for the main character. On the other hand, there are relationships

⁴⁶ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 15.

⁴⁷ Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 74.

⁴⁸ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 323.

⁴⁹ Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 73.

⁵⁰ Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 96.

⁵¹ Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, 38.

⁵² Jeffrey S. Kaplan, "New Perspectives in Young Adult Literature," *The ALAN Review* 31, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 6-8, <https://doi.org/10.21061/alan.v31i1.a.2>.

⁵³ Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, 38.

⁵⁴ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 141 -144.

⁵⁵ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 320.

with peers and friends where inclusion and maintaining relationships is crucial.⁵⁶ The main protagonists also sometimes deal with outsidership and feelings of inferiority.⁵⁷

Essentially, the importance of family ties for adolescents is diminishing, thus creating the space for forming bonds with close people of the same age. Protagonists experience a strong need of identification with a group, community or subculture of peers, and towards others.⁵⁸ This sense of belonging can happen through interests and hobbies, such as popular music or, technology,⁵⁹ that are shared with others. However, collectives can influence teenagers, especially at this young age, not only in a positive sense, but also in a negative one.⁶⁰ The protagonist can struggle to fit in and may face peer pressure.⁶¹ This pressure often influences the actions and behaviour of the character, which may lead to trouble.⁶² In this case the need for an adult person to whom the young person can look up to and on whom they can lean⁶³ may arise. This person can be represented by one of the parents or by anyone who appears in the main character's life.

It is also during this period that people encounter the first building of love relationships mainly between peers, which are extensively thematised.⁶⁴ Love relationships may take several forms which are also captured in connection with negative experiences. In *Seventeenth Summer*, which is considered the first novel belonging to young adult literature, a summer love between young people is depicted.⁶⁵ There are other forms of how love is portrayed, such as forbidden love,⁶⁶ hate to love romance, love triangle, slow burn romance, hard love, broken hearts, platonic or unfulfilled crushes.⁶⁷

Adolescence is also associated with first experiences both positive and negative. A big topic is the first experiences with addictive substances such as drugs, alcohol or cigarettes.⁶⁸

⁵⁶ Bushman & McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," 62.

⁵⁷ Bushman & McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," 63 - 66.

⁵⁸ VanderStaay, "Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre," 48-49.

⁵⁹ Kaplan, "Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century: Moving Beyond Traditional Constraints and Conventions," 18.

⁶⁰ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 157.

⁶¹ VanderStaay, "Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre," 49.

⁶² Bushman & McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," 65.

⁶³ Bushman & McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," 64.

⁶⁴ Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name . . . : Defining the Genre," 41.

⁶⁵ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 11 -12.

⁶⁶ Sandra L. Beckett, *Crossover Fiction Global and Historical Perspectives* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 123.

⁶⁷ Alice Trupe, *Thematic Guide to Young Adult Literature* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006), 59-67.

⁶⁸ Cart, "From Insider to Outsider: The Evolution of Young Adult Literature," 96.

In stories these experiences very often have negative consequences. However, they serve to help the protagonist move on with their life and thus learn lessons. On the other hand, there are also many positive first experiences in the stories, like true friendships.⁶⁹

Young adult literature reflects the life of the young. As their lives change, so do the themes in this literature. Topics such as the LGBT+ community, eating disorders⁷⁰ and ecology have become very popular these days and they are an important part of many stories.⁷¹

Young people can find themselves in many situations that are too difficult for them to cope with, which can lead to subsequent trauma. Novels whose main theme involves dealing with trauma are sometimes called problem novels, which depict issues such as abortion or death.⁷² Other themes can include bullying, sexual abuse, family problems, displacement, acceptance of difficult truths, discrimination, life changes, poverty or racism.⁷³

On the whole it is very difficult to develop one's own identity because there are many factors which influence this creation.⁷⁴ Adolescence is an important step towards self-awareness, to be able to assert one's opinions, attitudes or solve problems independently. The actions both towards peers and also adult authorities is very important in this period.⁷⁵ The degree to which a person succeeds influences his or her self-concept, self-evaluation and the formation of identity.⁷⁶ The themes presented above represent the formative factors that may shape the personality of the main character and the treatment of them is different in each story. The themes selected for this chapter by no means form a complete list. Moreover, each novel can consist of several themes, and while the dominant theme could be highlighted other themes may play an important role as well.

1.5 The significance of YAL

Because of its popularity, young adult literature is a highly debated topic. As mentioned above, the criticism of this literature is connected with some themes that are considered

⁶⁹ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 318 – 319.

⁷⁰ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 152, 321.

⁷¹ Beckett, *Crossover Fiction Global and Historical Perspectives*, 168.

⁷² Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 32 – 35.

⁷³ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 323.

⁷⁴ Bushman & McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," 65-66.

⁷⁵ VanderStaay, "*Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre*," 49-50.

⁷⁶ Bushman & McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," 62.

inappropriate because they are perceived as too adult.⁷⁷ Another issue relates to the phenomenon of crossover, where it is pointed out that the literature is not only read by the young readers for which it is originally intended. The books are thus read by older readers, which causes problems in classification and examination of books.⁷⁸ Falconer claims that increasing popularity of young adult literature among adult readers is connected with the fact that this genre can capture the variability of life. These books enable the understanding of adolescents by adult individuals, which may represent a form of escape from everyday life or allow them to reminisce about their younger years.⁷⁹ In addition, many books that are labelled as young adult literature are a combination of several genres.⁸⁰ For this reason, its value is worth considering.

However, according to Sandra Beckett, current young adult authors have a higher prestige than before thanks of the crossover phenomenon, which is related to, for example, the two-fold increase in the production of young adult literature in the USA between 2002 and 2012. Some writers addressing their works primarily to a young audience are aware of this trend and adapt their texts to adult demand, which is why young adult literature is often becoming more and more violent.⁸¹

A certain criticism is also connected with the change of this literature as a whole. Many of the books that are included in this genre do not match its features, which implies that the literature modifies its typical form, such as structure or other elements characteristic of it. On the other hand, many authors state that young adult literature is changing as society changes. This reflection of society perhaps causes a change of genre that is stretching its boundaries.⁸²

Another perspective on the change of the genre is the asset it has for readers. Because a more complex text and multiple narrators who have different points of view force them to develop their critical thinking and ability to synthesize information.⁸³ It also helps young readers form their own moral values, on the basis of which it will be easier for them to make

⁷⁷ Beckett, *Crossover Fiction Global and Historical Perspectives*, 262.

⁷⁸ Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, 7, 17.

⁷⁹ Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, 40-41.

⁸⁰ Smith, "The Death of Genre: Why the Best YA Fiction Often Defies Classification," 43.

⁸¹ Beckett, *Crossover Fiction Global and Historical Perspectives* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 25, 45, 209-210.

⁸² Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 77.

⁸³ Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 78.

decisions in real life. This genre also highlights various pressing issues that affect more than just society, and this can encourage young readers to support change in reality.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, if it conforms to classical features, it is considered by many to be too simple, appealing mainly to young girls, of little literary value, not educational, and largely influenced by marketing. Criticism is sometimes levelled at authors who are not as well respected. However, other critics try to include this literature in the list of classic reading.⁸⁵

As is quite evident, this genre of literature is very complicated to capture. Its definition, development, authors or value are not clear even according to literary critics. Among the advantages that are represented are its reach, ability to cover current topics, and attracting a wide audience of readers. The educational⁸⁶ and auxiliary function of this literature⁸⁷ is also very often mentioned. But what is perceived as a benefit on the one hand is seen as a negative on the other.

The most common considerations in evaluating this literature are the age and appearance of the main character, the place where the story takes place, the story, the main plot and author's use of language, for example, from which point of view the story is told. This is just one set of factors that is being looked at but there are many more. However, according to Stephens, even an examination of these factors cannot guarantee us that a given book has a certain value.⁸⁸

Despite the fact that young adult literature already differs considerably in many features from its beginnings, this should not be taken as an issue, rather it should be appreciated for an innovative approach that leads to the opening of new horizons for readers and not only for young readers.⁸⁹ Young adult literature has huge potential which can be seen in the fact that books of this genre are more and more becoming a part of the school curriculum.⁹⁰ Even though this classification is gradual and is preceded by approval that the information contained in the books is valuable, according to Kaplan, it only proves that this is the right way to approach this genre.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Bushman & McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," 62.

⁸⁵ Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name . . . : Defining the Genre," 34 -35.

⁸⁶ Bushman & McNerny, "Moral Choices: Building a Bridge between YA Literature and Life," 62.

⁸⁷ Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 79.

⁸⁸ Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name . . . : Defining the Genre," 35, 41.

⁸⁹ Smith, "The Death of Genre: Why the Best YA Fiction Often Defies Classification," 43, 49.

⁹⁰ Koss, "Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature," 78.

⁹¹ Kaplan, "New Perspectives in Young Adult Literature," 6.

2 MARKUS ZUSAK

Nowadays, Markus Zusak belongs to a group of well-known authors and his works are appreciated for his straightforward grasp of themes, beautiful work with language and ability to draw the reader into the story.⁹² However, several years ago, he was an unfamiliar author because his first works did not meet with great response. The novel that brought him to the attention of readers was *I Am the Messenger*, which was also appreciated by critics.⁹³ Nevertheless, he became famous mainly thanks to the novel *The Book Thief* which is still considered his most successful book. Over the last few years, he has become a renowned author, his works are currently among the bestsellers⁹⁴ and have won numerous awards.⁹⁵

Markus Frank Zusak was born on June 23, 1975, in Sydney. His mother, Elisabeth originally comes from Germany, and his father, Helmut, was born in Austria. They emigrated to Australia in 1975, where they decided to stay. Zusak is the youngest of four siblings, with two sisters and one brother. At this time, he still lives in Sydney with his wife and two children.⁹⁶

Even though he started writing at the age of 16, none of his earlier works have ever been published. He published his first book at the age of 24.⁹⁷ Zusak claims to have a strong passion for language and literature, which lead him to studying English and history at university earning him a degree in humanities and teaching. However, he worked as a teacher for only a short period of time, during which he also wrote his first published novels. Once he gained recognition as an author, he became a full-time writer.⁹⁸

His works are similar in some aspects and very different in others. There are several recurring themes that are contained in his works such as growing up or searching for identity. Although Zusak's books are by no means autobiographical, he admits that in some ways, his novels have been influenced by his life. Probably his most famous book, *The Book Thief*, is

⁹² Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 80, 106.

⁹³ Tim Elliot, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again'." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 5, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/markus-zusak-i-was-just-failing-and-failing-over-and-over-again-20181001-p5071j.html>.

⁹⁴ Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, 15.

⁹⁵ "Markus Zusak," American Library Association, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/markus-zusak>.

⁹⁶ Elliott, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again'."

⁹⁷ Elliott, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again'."

⁹⁸ "Markus Zusak." Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau, accessed April 25, 2022, <https://www.prhspeakers.com/speaker/markus-zusak>.

inspired by stories that he heard from his parents who are post-war immigrants.⁹⁹ Their decision to emigrate was influenced by World War II because they wanted a different life that would not be affected by the conflict. Even though the war was over, it was not easy to live with the consequences of the war being a part of everyday life. The economic impact and the general way of life for ordinary people was shaped by what had happened in the previous years. Australia offered his parents opportunities which they couldn't find in their home country. Zusak himself says that by his parents emigrating they gave him a huge gift of greater freedom and many opportunities which he had not been aware of until he started writing the novel *The Book Thief*.¹⁰⁰

In almost all of his books, the main protagonist is a teenage person. The inspiration in these cases comes from his own adolescence, but also from the experience he had gained as a teacher over the years. He noticed that the problems and situations which young people have to go through and deal with are similar and in many cases even the same. Of course, not every young person is identical, and their attitudes differ.¹⁰¹ However, Zusak, as an author, is able to present his point of view in the stories, because it is naturally in his power what each individual character decides and what he or she does in a particular situation. As a result, he can shape the thoughts of young readers, for example, how to behave in certain situations or display consequences of acts which he uses very often.¹⁰²

He is the author of five books. His first three books include *The Underdog* (1999), *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* (2000) and *When Dogs Cry* (2001) which were translated in many foreign languages, and they found their target audience. However, his journey to being a published author was not easy, as it took 7 years to publish his first book. As he himself admitted, it was not successful, and writing was not easy for him.¹⁰³ His first three books are a trilogy in which there is a male main character who finds himself in the adult world. He has to deal with family and love problems, in the course of which he has a problem with his own identity, morals and feelings of inferiority. The author is not afraid to tackle the topics

⁹⁹ Susan Wyndham, "Your Family Story," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 7, 2013, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/your-family-story-20131205-2yrko.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Elliott, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again!'"

¹⁰¹ "Markus Zusak Biography," Chicago Public Library, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.chipublib.org/markus-zusak-biography/>.

¹⁰² Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore, "Markus Zusak on How Bridge of Clay Left Him 'Beaten up and Bruised,'" *The Guardian*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/dec/17/markus-zusak-on-how-bridge-of-clay-left-him-beaten-up-and-bruised>.

¹⁰³ Elliott, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again!'"

such as financial problems, crime and drugs. It is very interesting how the author deals with the theme of women's status, behaviour towards women and love in the trilogy. All three of these books also deal with the themes of sibling rivalry, love, physical violence and self-discovery.¹⁰⁴

In 2002, Zusak published the book *I Am the Messenger*. The main character is again a young man who is lost in the world and struggling with his life. The given tasks helped and guided him in this journey of understanding his life. With this book Markus Zusak became known to readers and won numerous awards. The book contains similar themes as the previously mentioned trilogy, but the author deals with the themes differently. The life of the protagonist in the previous works is affected by events that are part of life and it is necessary to react to them. However, in this book these events are created by tasks which are prepared by an unknown group of people. This influences his life but not naturally as it was in previous books, the main character is basically in some way forced to act.¹⁰⁵

His most well-known work, *The Book Thief*, was published in 2005 and has been translated into more than 30 languages and 16 million copies have been sold.¹⁰⁶ It is also his only book so far that was made into a film. This is the most successful novel written by this author, which despite being young adult literature has reached a wider audience. The most prominent theme apart from the usual themes associated with young adult literature is death, which plays a significant role in the book. This is due to the fact that the book describes the hardships of World War II.¹⁰⁷

Zusak's most recent book is called *Bridge of Clay* (2018), the story revolves around five brothers coping with their father's disappearance and mother's death. They live by their own rules and yet they clash with the realities of the real world. Even though it is a complex story full of unexpected twists and turns, thanks to the author's great work with language, the book manages to affect the reader's thinking and perception. Readers are drawn into the plot but not overwhelmed by it.¹⁰⁸ Markus Zusak is not afraid to expand the story into several hundreds of pages, for example, *Bridge of Clay* and *The Book Thief* both have more than 560 pages, which surprised even literary critics. Such a book's scope is not very typical for

¹⁰⁴ "Markus Zusak." Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau.

¹⁰⁵ Elliott, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again!'"

¹⁰⁶ Elliott, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again!'"

¹⁰⁷ Sebag-Montefiore, "Markus Zusak on How Bridge of Clay Left Him 'Beaten up and Bruised!'"

¹⁰⁸ Elliott, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again!'"

young adult literature, and many authors are afraid of such a length of a book as it might discourage future readers.¹⁰⁹

The books published by Zusak won numerous awards, except for his first book. The books *I Am the Messenger*, and *The Book Thief* are the most awarded. His book *I Am the Messenger* received the most awards for example the Printz Award Honor Book or NSW Premier's Literary Award (Ethel Turner Prize).¹¹⁰ *The Book Thief* took first place on the Amazon.com and New York Times bestseller lists after its publication in 2006, and it was also a bestseller in Brazil, Ireland, and Taiwan. The novel was among the top five sellers in the UK, Spain, Israel, and South Korea.¹¹¹ In 2006, it won the Kathleen Mitchell Award, Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis, the Ena Noel Award and also finished second in the Michael L. Printz Award.¹¹²

Zusak is perceived to be one of the successful contemporary authors of young adult literature.¹¹³ His works contain themes typical of this style of literature, but he is not limited to those only. In addition, they have an unconventional form. The books do not always meet all the criteria for young adult literature.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, they are considered full-fledged novels belonging usually to this genre. His stories are told through the perspective of mostly the main protagonist except for *The Book Thief*.¹¹⁵

Young adult literature blurs the lines between genres, and Markus Zusak's books appear to be following this trend. Although this author's novels are regarded as primarily belonging to this genre they are also known as a crossover.¹¹⁶ As was mentioned before, the crossover phenomenon affects young adult literature often and Markus Zusak's works are a good example. Sometimes his works are included in young adult literature, whereas sometimes they are labelled as a crossover, and it varies in the country or publishing house where they are published. For example, in Australia, *The Book Thief* has been classified as a crossover or adult novel but in the US as young adult literature.¹¹⁷ Falconer adds that the

¹⁰⁹ "The Book Thief by Markus Zusak – Review." *The Guardian*, March 17, 2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/mar/17/review-the-book-thief-markus-zusak>.

¹¹⁰ "I Am the Messenger," American Library Association, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/content/i-am-messenger>.

¹¹¹ "Markus Zusak." Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau.

¹¹² "The Book Thief," American Library Association, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/content/book-thief-3>.

¹¹³ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 115.

¹¹⁴ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 327-328.

¹¹⁵ Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name . . . : Defining the Genre," 40 – 41.

¹¹⁶ Beckett, *Crossover Fiction Global and Historical Perspectives*, 191 -192.

¹¹⁷ Beckett, *Crossover Fiction Global and Historical Perspectives*, 192.

aforementioned novel is essentially a realist children's fiction book which appeared on adult bestseller lists.¹¹⁸ The author himself admitted that with this book they considered for a long time whether it was suitable for a young audience.¹¹⁹ In addition to their predominantly crossover character, his books contain a certain seriousness, cynicism and occasional sentiment at the same time.¹²⁰

The way he composes the stories in his books is more complex. It is worth mentioning that the narrator in the book *The Book Thief* is Death however it is not the main character of this story, which is how the author differs from the typical form of young adult literature.¹²¹ Besides, the structure of his stories is not always linear, following a chronological timeline but containing many flashbacks. However, there are several features that correspond with this genre, even if only partially. The main character goes through a transition, a child or teenager becomes an adult. Since this transformation is the main theme of the books, it is emphasized throughout the stories. In addition, there are other themes and some language techniques that are compatible with young adult literature.¹²²

Zusak as an author is very open and does not avoid some topics or describing reality even though it is not pleasant. He confronts readers with the issues directly. However, the presentation of these topics is linguistically processed in such a way that it is very well accepted by the reader, even though they consist of difficult themes such as death, violence, war or the Holocaust.¹²³ He is able to mitigate disagreeable truth with his great use of words. In novels it is noticeable his realization of the power of words which he takes advantage of because the words can help but also hurt. From his writing is evident a certain sensitivity and the skill with which he deals with difficult topics. This author also stands out with his very good style of description. Besides, the literature and spoken language play an important role in his stories as one of the themes that helps the main characters in their struggle, which is not common for this genre.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, 15.

¹¹⁹ Sara Grochowski, "A Conversation with Markus Zusak," *Publishers Weekly*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/78201-q-a-with-markus-zusak.html>.

¹²⁰ Elliott, "Markus Zusak: 'I Was Just Failing and Failing, over and over Again'."

¹²¹ Falconer, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, 15.

¹²² Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 328.

¹²³ Beckett, *Crossover Fiction Global and Historical Perspectives*, 263.

¹²⁴ Smith, "The Death of Genre: Why the Best YA Fiction Often Defies Classification," 46 – 49.

As an author he is largely original, and his works are not easy to describe. In addition, he himself has admitted several times that he probably wouldn't be able to classify himself and his books into a certain genre. He said that he is simply trying to write a good book and it doesn't matter to him whether it is subsequently read by adults, teenagers or children. He also pointed out that very often it is only a marketing strategy that he has no awareness or understanding of.¹²⁵ In addition, as an author he likes it if books can go beyond where they are classified, and he doesn't think about categories. Thanks to this, his books can often bring much more to the reader.¹²⁶

Several literary critics agree with his assertion about his classification. Scot Smith, a member of the selection committee for the Book Award in YA division, admits that his favourite title of Zusak's, *The Book Thief*, does not fit into the category. Even he himself points out that it is impossible to clearly determine the genre in which the author or the book could be classified. For example, *The Book Thief* could easily be classified as historical fiction, however, it is not so simple for Smith. He claims that the author plays with grasping of the genre.¹²⁷ Michael Cart is also inclined to classify the novel *The Book Thief* as historical fiction, but he proves that it is also a cross market book.¹²⁸ He points to the complexity of the themes presented by Zusak that influence our understanding of actions and their morality which he sees as the greatest contribution of his works.¹²⁹ In addition to the thematic content, he highlights his work with language and the structure of his novels.¹³⁰

Karen Coats is also in agreement with it. Furthermore, she adds to the appreciation of this author by pointing out, in addition to the richness of the main characters, the work with language, the depth of the themes, but above all the cultural value of the text. For this reason, the pedagogical potential of his books is also mentioned.¹³¹ In his works, he points out the history, the society and the importance of literature.¹³² Coats also emphasizes that his books display philosophical and ethical standpoints that make the reader think.¹³³

¹²⁵ Stephens, "Young Adult: A Book by Any Other Name . . . : Defining the Genre," 40 - 41.

¹²⁶ Grochowski, "A Conversation with Markus Zusak."

¹²⁷ Smith, "The Death of Genre: Why the Best YA Fiction Often Defies Classification," 46 - 49.

¹²⁸ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 115.

¹²⁹ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 106.

¹³⁰ Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, 80.

¹³¹ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 317.

¹³² Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 347.

¹³³ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 321.

Markus Zusak's positive attitude towards young adult literature is evident, without which he admits he would not have become a writer. Even he says that writing only for the young adult audience can be very challenging. Also, he expresses disappointment that young adult literature, in which he is partly included, is undervalued. The quality of these books and the stories contained in them is the same as in other genres.¹³⁴ His works are proof of this because, as mentioned above, Zusak is perceived as a stunning author.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 330.

¹³⁵ Wolf, *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, 315.

3 THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Among the most famous books which were written by Markus Zusak are *The Book Thief* and *I Am the Messenger*. Each of these books is unique and yet they have something significant in common. An important link between the two books is the main character who undergoes several changes. This transformation of the main characters is caused by their own decision or by external factors. The stories reflect everything the main characters go through. The novels also share some themes, for example family, death, or friendship. The social, family or economic environment is also shown in the lives of the main characters, but the transformations of each are both unique and similar in some ways.

3.1 The Book Thief

The main protagonist is nine-year-old Liesel Meminger who lives in Nazi Germany in 1939 and World War II affects the lives of all the characters. The narrator, however, is not Liesel herself, but Death.

Death meets Liesel for the first time during her brother's funeral on their way to Liesel's foster parents and from then on, he follows her, as he is fascinated by her. At the funeral, Liesel stole the undertaker's manual, by which she is intrigued, even though she cannot read or write.

Afterwards, Liesel arrives at the foster home. Despite her initial embarrassment and uncertainty, she forms a bond with her new parents, Hans, and Rosa Hubermann. In addition, Hans teaches her to read and write. She also makes friends with several people from the street, especially the boy Rudy Steiner, who comes to represent a tentative romantic interest of Liesel's as the story develops.

Liesel's love for books is unbreakable. She often visits the library of the mayor's house with permission from his wife Ilsa, who mourns the loss of her son. Liesel's close friend Max Vandenburg, a Jew she concealed in the basement with her foster parents, found comfort in her visits when he fell ill.

When the Nazis arrive in Molching, Liesel fakes an injury to alert her foster parents in time to hide Max. However, later in the story, Max decides to leave on his own in order not to endanger them with his presence. During the passing of a convoy of Jews, Liesel spots Max and insists on joining him but is brutally beaten.

Liesel begins writing "The Book Thief" and later endures the destruction of her home and loss of her loved ones. Death saves her book from the rubble, and Liesel moves in with the mayor and his wife. Later she meets Max again, who is one of the few survivors of the

concentration camp. In the end, Liesel settles in Australia, where she has a family and is eventually reunited with her lost notebook which is returned to her by Death himself. They meet together for the last time, and this time they leave together as friends.

3.2 I Am the Messenger

The novel *I Am the Messenger* follows 19-year-old taxi driver Ed Kennedy whose life, suddenly changes when mysterious cards with various tasks start arriving in his mailbox. The main theme of the story is the development of a young boy into a man. The entire narrative is enriched with humorous and apt comments by the author.

Ed is a young man who lives a not-so-successful life. He is a taxi driver by profession and spends his free time with his dog, or friends. His father died, and he's not on the best of terms with his mother and siblings. He floats through his life without any effort to change or improve and accepts that this is the life he should have.

His life begins to change when Ed and his friends find themselves in the middle of a bank robbery and he saves the day. Afterward he receives mysterious messages on cards which represent people who are struggling. Ed thus enters the lives of people with difficult fates and must find a way to help them. His ordinary life changes with each card which he receives because he is basically forced to act. He never set out to do anything, and now he is forced to change his behaviour, opinions, and actions. Ed begins to realize the meaning of life and his own life becomes fulfilled as well. Relationships between people and society as a whole are depicted at the forefront of the story.

His actions included helping with solitude, lack of self-confidence, violence, bad relationships, poverty but also less severe problems. The last message is for his friends and himself. In the course of the story, he takes responsibility and begins to find direction and value in his own life.

Among the more pressing issues he has to deal with is domestic violence and rape. In this problem, he is faced with a decision over the life or death of a person which is in his hands. At the end of the book, Ed is confronted with everything he has done, and it makes him reflect on the life he had and the life he has now. The story shows the power of decision and action. The protagonist realizes that he has his life in his hands, and it is up to him what he does with it. Often small actions make a big change in everyone's life, as in this story.

3.3 The Transformation throughout the Story

A young person is shaped by a number of factors. It is no different in the stories contained in the two books mentioned above. Probably the first thing that influences a person is the family environment. Liesel's family does not play a key role in her life as there is no mention of her father, and her mother only appears at the beginning of the story. Nevertheless, she is still very much affected by this fact. The absence of one parent and the subsequent loss of the other, in her case her mother, who is forced to leave her for her safety, is very hard on her. Liesel feels alone because she has no one to lean on and this only makes her more determined to withdraw into herself. The love she has for her mother is subsequently damaged by this step, but even so, she would rather return to her at some point in the story. "Sometimes she would whisper the word Mama and see her mother's face a hundred times in a single afternoon."¹³⁶ Also, when they have to write a letter at school, she knows immediately who to write it to, despite what happened. Liesel asks: "Would I be able to write a letter to Mama?"¹³⁷ Her mother often tells her that she loves her, but Liesel can't understand that the proof of that love is that she leaves her behind. She has only one thought in her head: "If her mother loved her, why leave her on someone else's doorstep? Why? Why?"¹³⁸ This builds a kind of mistrust in people and establishing relationships is impossible for her at first which is evident when she meets her foster parents or Max.

In book *I Am the Messenger*, the situation is similar. Ed's family is incomplete, his father's death has affected him greatly and he does not have a good relationship with his mother. His parents did not have a happy marriage, his mother has a long-term relationship with another man. He tends to his father, and his mother sees in him similar traits that his father had and so she does not treat him well. Ed does not meet with support or understanding from her side. Ed asks: "Why do you hate me so much?"¹³⁹ She answers: "Because Ed – you remind me of him."¹⁴⁰ She perceives him as an incompetent person who has not achieved anything and will not.¹⁴¹ "According to her, all her kids have done quite well except him."¹⁴² This only reinforces his lack of confidence. It turns out that she just wants him to do

¹³⁶ Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief* (London: Black Swan, 2013), 45.

¹³⁷ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 101.

¹³⁸ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 38-39.

¹³⁹ Markus Zusak, *I Am the Messenger* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 243.

¹⁴⁰ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 243.

¹⁴¹ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 245.

¹⁴² Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 24.

something with himself since he can be just as good as the rest of his siblings. She adds: “Believe it or not – it takes a lot of love to hate you like this.”¹⁴³ In addition, he regularly asks himself what he has achieved in his nineteen years, and the answer is nothing.¹⁴⁴ It is only through the tasks on the cards that Ed sees the model of a real family, when he meets the loving parents and five happy children of the Tatupu family.

Both Ed and Liesel are fully aware that there is an empty place in their lives regardless of how well or poorly they manage to deal with it. For Liesel, the situation is initially worse because she is younger and neither of her parents are present and one of them has even left her voluntarily. However, the parents’ place is subsequently taken by foster parents and as a result, she is better able to cope with the situation. In Ed’s case, his mother is still present in his life even though their relationship is very bad. Reconciling the relationship with his mother and coming to terms with the death of his father is one of the most important and challenging tasks he has to deal with during his transformation into an adult, but he gets through it eventually. In the case of the father, he visits his grave and he says: “I am sorry, Dad.”¹⁴⁵ This helps him get over his death.

Family does not always mean only parents, but also siblings. In the case of Liesel, the character of her younger brother appears only briefly, but perhaps all the more intensely. She loves her brother very much and so she is deeply affected by his death on the way to their foster parents. She says: “He couldn’t be dead. He couldn’t be dead.”¹⁴⁶ Liesel can't believe that her brother is dead, and she even starts digging in the ground where he is buried and leaves the place screaming. Her heart is broken into two pieces.¹⁴⁷ For her, this represents the first confrontation with death, which plays a significant role in the course of her story. This event could be considered the first thing that affects her childish soul, and she begins to change from a child to a more mature person. The first encounter with death is a significant for her, but it is not the last time death enters her life. However, death takes a different form each time throughout the story.

Ed is also not an only child, as he has two sisters and a brother, but he does not have a strong bond with any of them. His mother always sees them as more successful than he is. Only by external circumstances, in his case, the mysterious cards with tasks, is he forced to

¹⁴³ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 245.

¹⁴⁴ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 277.

¹⁴⁶ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 31.

¹⁴⁷ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 31.

repair his relations with his siblings. In the story itself, this is taken as the last step to realizing who he is, and it helps him find the meaning of life.

Relationships in general have a big impact on who a person is. It's not just about family relationships, but also friendships. For Liesel, any relationship creation from the beginning is unimaginable, after her mother left her. The first with whom she is forced to establish a relationship are her foster parents. Complete strangers suddenly have gained an important place in her life. Hans Hubermann, her foster father, is the first to whom she can open up. His approach changes her perspective on the perception of relationships. Hans treats her with dedication, kindness and patience and he also tries to protect her and teach her about life. Every time she has nightmares, she knows that "he'd always appear mid - scream, and he would not leave"¹⁴⁸ because of this, her confidence is built. He is able to listen to her and empathize with how she is feeling. The understanding she finds in him is important to her and thanks to this, she is then able to open up to other people and establish new relationships with her foster mother, Rudy, Max or with other people in city. The support she has in him affects her in other aspects of life. She can do things thanks to it that she thought she would never be able to do, even if it may seem like a small thing like reading or writing. Following this, she discovers strength, self-confidence, and determination, which are especially important in the wake of other events in her life. Hans represents a role model in her life that she looks up to. He accepts her as she is, even with the mistakes she makes such as thefts. The first moment they meet, he's the one who gives her a helping hand, literally, when he holds her hand as she enters her new home ¹⁴⁹ and from then, their relationship gradually develops. As the story progresses, his importance in Liesel's life is reinforced. The moments her foster mother is strict with her, and she is starving for a non-existent hand to offer her at least some form of support, Hans appears and says: "Leave her alone, leave her on me."¹⁵⁰ Later they spend a lot of time together, not only reading and writing but also playing the accordion. Liesel writes later in her book: "Who else would do some painting for the price of half a cigarette? That was Papa, that was typical, and I loved him."¹⁵¹ One of the most difficult moments that affects their relationship is when Hans goes to war. Liesel begs him: "Don't go, Papa. Please."¹⁵² Liesel loves her foster father most of all, which she realises

¹⁴⁸ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 43.

¹⁴⁹ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 36.

¹⁵⁰ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 40.

¹⁵¹ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 362.

¹⁵² Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 429.

when she loses him. She says: “Goodbye, Papa, you saved me.”¹⁵³ It is evident from the story that he is the character who most influences her development as a person, her behaviour, thinking and perception of the world around her. He contributed greatly to the overall transformation of her personality.

The foster mother, Rosa, also plays an important role in her life, although not as big as the foster father. Later on, her foster parents become her real parents. Nevertheless, her foster mother's expression of love for Liesel is different from her foster father's because she is a very wilful woman, so she expresses love in a different way. This is evident in the frequent addressing of Liesel as “filthy pig.”¹⁵⁴ “But she did love Liesel Meminger. Her way of showing it just happened to be strange. It involved bashing her with a wooden spoon and words at various intervals.”¹⁵⁵ Thanks to both of them, she understands what it's like to like someone, she sees selfishness in behaviour and actions. Subsequently, she herself is capable of such behaviour, both towards Max and Rudy. The family plays a significant role in shaping the main characters because it influences their everyday lives, hence it is frequently the main theme in the genre. The main character is exposed to certain values, beliefs, traditions or norms that are common to the family. The author places great emphasis on family in both works, even though it takes a different form in each.

As mentioned above, the other two people with whom Liesel has a strong relationship are Rudy and Max, both of whom change her life in different ways. Rudy is the boy next door and even though they are not instant friends at first this transforms over time. They spend a lot of time together and come up with various mischiefs. “In fairness, there were many things that brought Rudy and Liesel together, but it was the stealing that cemented their friendship completely.”¹⁵⁶ Eventually there is a strong bond between them, Rudy proves his friendship and that she can trust him through several acts, such as when he pulls a book out of the icy river because he knows that it is very important to her. Rudy is always close to her when Liesel cries, he is with her and when she gets hurt, he takes care of her.¹⁵⁷ Also, he defends Liesel from other kids who don't treat her nicely and tease her because she is not exactly one of the brightest students at school. Rudy always advises and supports her:

¹⁵³ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 542.

¹⁵⁴ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 39.

¹⁵⁵ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 41.

¹⁵⁶ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 155- 156.

¹⁵⁷ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 85.

“come on, Liesel,”¹⁵⁸ even if she doesn't always like to hear it. In the cases where Liesel risks her life, he saves her, like when she won't leave Max. When there are bombing raids, they hold hands and wait for the end. At the end of the story their relationship turns into childhood love, Rudy has always had these feelings for her. For example, when they decide to have a race, Rudy is quick to suggest, “if I beat you, I get to kiss you.”¹⁵⁹ Liesel realizes at one point in the story that “perhaps it was the sudden bumpiness of love she felt for him or had she always loved him.”¹⁶⁰ Hints of mutual affection are evident earlier in the story, however, later on it is shown more directly when she loses him as he dies, which she proves by kissing him on the lips. Liesel says the last words to him: “Rudy, please, wake up, God damn it, wake up, I love you. Come on, Rudy, come on, Jesse Owens, don't you know I love you, wake up, wake up, wake up. . . .”¹⁶¹ The author captures here a love that is portrayed as pure and childlike without any hints of sexuality, thus going beyond the usual depiction of love in this genre. There is no physical love described in Liesel's story, except for the last kiss.

Another important person with whom Liesel has a strong relationship is Max, but since he is Jewish the whole friendship is much more complicated. Initially there is strong mistrust on both sides as he is afraid that she might give him away. The first thing that brings them together is the nightmares they both have to face. However, it turns out they have more in common than they expected such as a positive attitude towards books but also towards fights. When Liesel asks: “Is it—good?”¹⁶² to the book Max has in his hand, everything starts to change. She then listens regularly to his stories about his life, and they begin to grow closer and spend time together. A major turning point comes when Liesel hugs him because he wishes her a happy birthday. They have a lot of fun together too, like when building a snowman in the basement. Their friendship, unlike Rudy's, goes through many trials, for example when Liesel takes care of Max when he is sick and, on the verge of death. She is with him and whispers: “Please, Max, just don't die.”¹⁶³ In addition, Liesel even hurts herself on purpose for Max because in the city the cellars of houses are searched for their use as shelters during the bombing. Since Max is hidden in the basement, he is in danger of being

¹⁵⁸ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 82.

¹⁵⁹ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 59.

¹⁶⁰ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 522.

¹⁶¹ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 539.

¹⁶² Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 224.

¹⁶³ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 325.

exposed. This is the first time she's sacrificed herself to keep someone else safe. Every time she must leave Max in their basement because of bombing raids, while they go to a safer one it is so hard for her. Liesel is willing to risk much more for Max when she sees him marching into Dachau with the other Jews, she is determined not to leave him. Max says: "You have to let go of me, Liesel."¹⁶⁴ but she doesn't give up and she's beaten. At the end of the story when she sees Max alive, she is at a loss for words, so she just cries and hugs him. Thanks to Max and Rudy, Liesel sees what true friendship can be, and this allows her to be more open to sharing her feelings and thoughts with others. They both do a lot for her, and she does a lot for them, and they are there for each other in good times but also in bad times. They help and support each other and that's what the author tries to highlight. However, not every main character is as lucky to have friends as Liesel, regardless of whether the friendship is portrayed positively or negatively it is one of the common themes in young adult literature and the author is no different in his approach.

Ed's relationships are completely different. After the loss of his father, he lacks a role model and has no one around him who represents someone he can look up to and lean on. Even though his father was not exactly a role model, for example because he had a problem with excessive drinking¹⁶⁵, he was someone who followed certain character traits that Ed admired. "He was so kind, generous and gentle."¹⁶⁶ When he was a child, his father was a "hero not a human"¹⁶⁷ to him. Nevertheless, there is no one in his life to help shape his personality after his death because his mother is a mostly negative influence on him, and he has almost no relationship with his siblings. Thus, Ed shapes his personality on his own through the tasks on the cards, to which he must respond with his actions. Every decision he has to take into his own hands helps him find who he really is. At the beginning, he is a young man who doesn't have high expectations of life, lives from day to day and doesn't try to achieve anything. However, he gradually matures and realizes that life has more meaning and value. He starts to be someone "better."¹⁶⁸

The only important relationships Ed has in his life are with his friends Marv, Ritchie, and Audrey. However, it is important to consider whether these are true friendships. In this case, it is a very superficial friendship at first that only deepens as the story progresses. From

¹⁶⁴ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 514.

¹⁶⁵ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 240.

¹⁶⁷ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 240.

¹⁶⁸ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 231-232.

the beginning Ed has no idea of his friends' problems and they are not supportive of each other. For example, he doesn't know that one of his closest friends, Marv, has a big secret in the form of a child that he can't relate to due to circumstances. Marv says: "I have been living with it for three years."¹⁶⁹ They spend time together, play cards but never address personal issues, such as what is bothering them. However, this changes when he is forced to face his friends' problems because of a task. He discovers the meaning of true friendship, which includes being there for his friends even in their difficult moments. In Marv's case, it is at a time when he is trying to establish a relationship with his child and ex-girlfriend despite the disapproval of her parents. Ed supports him and goes with him to her. He also confronts Ritchie with the uncomfortable truth that he is an embarrassment to himself and deserves better, which takes him completely by surprise. He says: "Ritchie – you are an absolute disgrace to yourself."¹⁷⁰ Thanks to this, Ritchie realizes the reality of his life and starts with change. Ed changes into a person who is able to have real relationships with friends which contributes to his overall transformation into an adult. Friendship is an important element of many novels discussed in young adult literature and these books are no exception. Although there is sort of substitution of family for friends in Ed's life.

A person is able, not only to have positive relationships with other people but also with a things or activities. Liesel loves books and the determination she shows when she tries to read or get a book is unbelievable. She is willing to steal and take great risks to get a book and stays up late into the night to read. Liesel even steals a book that is to be burned by the regime because it is deemed inappropriate and therefore banned. This same determination will become part of her and will help her overcome many obstacles in other events. Besides, this positive relationship with books even helps others. When everyone is hiding in the basement from bombing raids, Liesel reads, and it makes them forget what's going on outside, for which the people are grateful. Ed, like Liesel, is very fond of books. He claims: "I was always reading books when I should have been doing math and the rest of it."¹⁷¹ Ed also has a great love inside him that he doesn't even know he is capable of, and at first, he is very surprised by it. His dog, the Doorman, which he inherits from his father is the first one he has a really strong relationship with. This is evident when his dog is stolen or when he is afraid that someone wants to hurt him.

¹⁶⁹ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 319.

¹⁷⁰ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 302.

¹⁷¹ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 17.

Both protagonists are shaped by love, even if it is not always represented only by positive events. They gradually build other strong bonds with other people. Like Liesel, Ed becomes a determined and selfless person to ensure that the people he likes are okay. It is an element that turns them into selfless, helpful and warm-hearted people who care more about others than themselves. Both of them risk injury and their own lives to save and help the other. For example, in Ed's case when he defends his friend Marv, and Liesel is literally risking her life because of helping Max. Although they are both very closed to the outside world, love helps them to realize what is really important and they are then able to open their hearts to others. In Ed's case, love is even depicted in a slightly different way than in Liesel's. The first one to show him "what is to love someone"¹⁷² is the old woman who has an undying love for her late husband. He only meets this old lady because of the task on the card. As the story progresses there are other people he relates to and likes, such as Sophie or the Tatupu family, which are associated with his tasks.

In addition, Ed has been in love with Audrey for years.¹⁷³ He has strong feelings for her, but they are largely platonic until the end of the story when their nature changes. In the beginning, he is unable to express how he feels about her, but he dares to kiss her. Nevertheless, she says: "You are my best friend, Ed."¹⁷⁴ "She doesn't want to love him, but she doesn't want to lose him either."¹⁷⁵ In this case the author also captures the expressions of physical love. Audrey rejects love in any way, but she loves Ed. In the end there is great love between them. Many people experience their first romantic relationships during adolescence, young adult literature has consistently featured love as a major theme. In these two novels the author chooses two approaches to this theme, in the case of Liesel it is childlike love but in the case of Ed sexual attraction and sexual desire are already captured.

The society in which a person lives influences them and changes who they are. The main characters live in very different and at the same time in somewhat similar societies. Liesel's story takes place during World War II in Germany. Society is greatly affected and divided during this period of war. Liesel sees a division in society between those who support the war and those who oppose it. She is confronted with an unpleasant reality and the consequences of war every day. The society makes her choose where she belongs, even

¹⁷² Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 56.

¹⁷³ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 16.

¹⁷⁴ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 120.

¹⁷⁵ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 232.

though she is still a child and doesn't understand many things. Basically, she is forced by circumstances to make a decision that is not easy even for an adult. An example is her joining the Hitler Youth, which she opposes, or general behaviour towards Jews, which is unacceptable to her despite the opinion of the regime. Even though she's young, she's aware of how much evil war brings. It is also necessary to point out the division of the people in Nazi Germany and the singling out of the Jews as an inferior human race. This is something she doesn't understand, she doesn't see any differences between people, which is noticeable based on her acts. Max, a Jew, is her best friend and she, as an adult, is aware of what that might mean. She is faced with the decision that she could expose him because he is Jewish, she helps hide him, which could have great consequences for her as it did for anyone who chose to do so at the time. Moreover, when she sees him in a convoy of Jews going to a concentration camp, she does not want to leave him and is determined to go with him. However, Liesel realizes that she is part of this society and after one bombing raid she sees a cloud of ash. She asks her foster mother: "Should I go out? To see if they need help where the bombs dropped?"¹⁷⁶ This just proves how she changes in the course of the story.

Ed lives in a society which is also divided. He perceives it even just on the division of the city in which he lives into "good and bad parts."¹⁷⁷ Ed stresses all problems of the society such as unemployment, problems with drugs or poverty.¹⁷⁸ He tries to help by buying Christmas lights for a poor family or ice cream for a single mother. He mentions: "It is not a big thing, but I guess it is true – big things are often just small things that are noticed." He doesn't like how society works and tries to change it, and he approaches its problems like an adult. Society is commonly depicted in this genre as every main character is a part of it.¹⁷⁹

Liesel's life is affected by the ideology that was omnipresent at that time, which played a big role in people's lives and thus in the whole society. Those who agree with it and support it have a better position in society, better opportunities and a better financial situation. Liesel realizes this right from the beginning of the story. Poverty shapes her life, marginalizing her in the wealthy part of society, often humiliating and hurting her. Children make fun of her because of what she's wearing, for example, and adults despise her. However, she approaches it like an adult and tries to work and contribute financially so that the family can function.

¹⁷⁶ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 390.

¹⁷⁷ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 17.

¹⁷⁹ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 221.

Basically, she is happy to have something to eat. Ideology is not commonly portrayed in this genre and the author only uses this theme in one story because of the time period in which it is set, whereas Ed's life is not related with any form of ideology.

The concept of belonging or inclusion is also associated with society. Mostly the need to fit in is often portrayed in young adult literature and the main character usually struggles to achieve this. However, in neither of these stories does the author bring this to the forefront of the story. Neither Liesel nor Ed are trying to be popular or respected, they have their own minds which only proves their transformation through the story. Being someone like an outsider is something they are okay with. Ed only mentions that he feels "no respect in the community."¹⁸⁰ In addition, the author points out that it is not necessary to be part of the group, moreover, non-integration is presented as more beneficial for the main characters. Ed is led by tasks to people who somehow don't fit in, who sometimes even stand out for who they are, what they do or what they struggle with. For example, it could be a girl named Sophie who doesn't run in shoes, a pastor who is trying to improve the situation in a poor neighbourhood or the family Tatupu who have a low standard of living but are a model of loving family life. Thanks to contact with these people, Ed broadens his horizons and sees differences in society and learns to accept them. Every person is unique, and culture, race or belief differs. Prejudices that Ed has at the beginning fade away during the process of coping with differences. The father of the Polynesian Tatupu family says: "You know, Ed, we have been living here close to a year now, and nobody- absolute nobody – has ever lifted a finger to help us or make us feel welcome."¹⁸¹ It makes him realize what it's like to be different. As well as the story of Liesel, who, for example, perceives that her foster family is not fully integrated because her father is not in the party, but this non-inclusion has a positive character in the book. He says: "I've made many mistakes in my life, but not joining the Nazi Party isn't one of them."¹⁸²

They both learn to accept things or people as they are. Nevertheless, they learn to show disagreement if something is against their beliefs. Standing up for your opinion, even though it is not supported by those around you or by the majority is very difficult. In her story, Liesel is acting almost heroically when she decides to help a person who is Jewish several times, which at the time represents a great risk. She subsequently bears the consequences of her

¹⁸⁰ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 15.

¹⁸¹ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 225.

¹⁸² Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 110.

decision as the adult she is becoming. Liesel sees the consequences also because of the action of Hans who decides to help one Jew who marches to Dachau. He then asks her: “Oh my God, Liesel, what have I done?”¹⁸³ On the basis of his actions, which do not agree with the regime of the time, Max is forced to leave, and Hans enlists in the army. Nevertheless, Liesel answers him: “Papa, you did nothing wrong.”¹⁸⁴ The same applies to Ed every time he receives a card with a task, he must then find the courage to act. Each card shows him a different problem such as violence, rape, poverty, loneliness, or self-doubt. Each time a new topic is shown to him, and he begins to understand the world around him much more in its complexity. These tasks turn him into a person who is aware of what is happening around him and that sometimes it is enough to take one single step, and everything can be different. However, in situations where he fails to complete one task on a card, he feels the consequences of his decision, just like Liesel, as he is beaten. For a person who avoided responsibility or any act, this is a completely new subject which changes his point of view on life. He asks himself: “How people live like this? How they survive?”¹⁸⁵ Then he realizes that maybe they can't go on living like this and therefore he should act and make a change. They both learn that they are responsible for their own decisions.

Change can be caused by an act, but not always, sometimes coincidence is enough. In Liesel's life, change is represented by Max, who appears out of nowhere in front of the door of their house. Max changes her way of looking at the world, and partly also who she is. Unfortunately, there are a number of unpleasant incidents that have the same effect on her such as the moment when she almost loses everyone, she likes due to the bombing of the city. Ed's biggest milestone is the moment when he and his friends find themselves in the middle of a bank robbery. Ed saves the situation when he takes the robber's gun and has him arrested by the local police. This event completely changes his life, and he must change as well. People start to treat him differently because they see him as a hero. However, what he did in the robbery even he himself doesn't understand.¹⁸⁶ He changes through a combination of courage and fear of what would happen if he did nothing. Before this act, “the anti-achievement gave structure to his life.”¹⁸⁷ Later, he becomes aware of his own

¹⁸³ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 402.

¹⁸⁴ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 407.

¹⁸⁵ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 43.

¹⁸⁶ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 10.

¹⁸⁷ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 16.

transformation and tells himself that he wants to be a better person. He points out that it is not the place that matters but the people if they want to change.¹⁸⁸

In these stories, the main characters are not affected only by the crimes that others do, but also by those that they themselves commit. Ed's actions are not always in accordance with the law, but he does so according to his judgment to help someone. Each character is exposed to questioning if evil done for the sake of good is still evil. Acceptance of moral ambiguity of culpability and crime is a mark of adulthood. Liesel and Ed have to avoid simplistic explanations of responsibility, guilt and innocence. For example, Liesel, besides helping to hide a Jew, which is against the law, steals books for her own pleasure. Later she herself realizes "Liesel Meminger is a criminal."¹⁸⁹ In addition, when she's then forced to read to one lady she thinks "this is my punishment for all that stealing, and it's finally caught up with me."¹⁹⁰ Her feelings are a combination of joy and guilt at the deed, but it's a different feeling than when she hides Max because she doesn't see it as a crime. Ed commits a minor fraud by changing his age to work as a taxi driver.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless for one of his tasks, Ed is faced with the decision whether to kill a man who rapes his wife. He asks him: "You feel like dying? You deserve it, I can tell you that much."¹⁹² This is one of the moments that shows the complexity of deciding what is right and what is wrong. He has to make a decision like an adult, and he thinks to himself: "I will kill this man and also die myself, inside."¹⁹³ His final decision is not to kill him. Crime, change caused by coincidence, the art of acceptance, or the expression of disapproval often appear in young adult literature. The main character may encounter all this during adolescence, however, each time the author works with these themes differently.

A very interesting formative factor depicted in both stories is literature and the spoken language. In Liesel's story, they have a significant role that influences life and changes a person and the same goes for Ed's. As she later writes in her book: "I would soon learn that words and writing actually saved his life once. Or at least, words and a man who taught him the accordion . . ." ¹⁹⁴ This is also shown when Liesel sees a classmate from school, who was

¹⁸⁸ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 283.

¹⁸⁹ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 378.

¹⁹⁰ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 394.

¹⁹¹ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 16.

¹⁹² Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 88.

¹⁹³ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 89.

¹⁹⁴ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 69.

mean to her and now he is injured. She doesn't think long and immediately helps him because he begs her. Words like please, excuse me or thank you can make a lot of difference. Liesel's life is also influenced by the words given by her foster father. When Max comes to him and asks him: "Are you a man who likes to keep a promise?"¹⁹⁵ . It is clear that one word, one promise transforms everyone's life. Based on Hans' promise, Liesel must also promise not to tell anyone about Max. Literature is additionally at the forefront of the story. "The point is, it didn't really matter what that book was about. It was what it meant that was more important."¹⁹⁶ The books in these stories have a deeper meaning than just their content, they serve as an auxiliary element used by the main characters in difficult situations. The author is distinguished by this theme as its depiction in this genre because it is not very typical, and it usually does not have such an important position in the lives of the main characters. The power of words is also depicted in the book he receives from Max, who writes about Liesel in it. "She was renowned as the best word shaker of her region because she knew how powerless a person could be WITHOUT words."¹⁹⁷ In addition, words basically save her life in the last bombing as she reads in the basement and survives because of it. "She was holding desperately on to the words who had saved her life."¹⁹⁸ Liesel even destroys one book when she gets angry after realizing the power words can have. The last line in her book expresses her attitude. "I have hated the words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right."¹⁹⁹

Ed also realizes how meaningful words can be as the story progresses. He tries to use the right words at the right time. When he says: "you have got a beauty,"²⁰⁰ to a girl who doubts herself a lot, that's exactly what she needs to hear. Words also help him when he's defending his best friend. Ed says: "If you were him, would you have been able to do the same? Would you have to faced you?"²⁰¹ Every person he meets through mysterious cards shows him how important words are. It doesn't matter if it's an old woman, a little girl, a priest, a young man or his own friends and family. Often one word they need to hear at a

¹⁹⁵ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 191.

¹⁹⁶ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 45.

¹⁹⁷ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 452.

¹⁹⁸ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 503.

¹⁹⁹ Zusak, *The Book Thief*, 532.

²⁰⁰ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 74.

²⁰¹ Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 325.

given moment affects their whole life. Moreover, the books even help him find these people to whom he should help.

All of these factors influence them and create who they are. The process of transformation through story is not simple and easy, however the result shows that in both cases, young people became incredible adults. The author summarizes this journey in one sentence in his novel *The Book Thief*. “It’s much easier, she realized, to be on the verge of something than to actually be it.” Even though they both became adults in the book *I Am the Messenger* there is a sentence where the main character points out that he is “just another stupid human.”²⁰² In this way the author points to the humility towards life itself in all its phases, not only towards adolescence and the related transformation which is the main content of these novels.

²⁰² Zusak, *I Am the Messenger*, 74.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this bachelor thesis was to analyse the transformation of the main characters of Markus Zusak's novels *I Am the Messenger* and *The Book Thief* and to compare and contrast the development these protagonists undergo.

When it comes to Zusak's most successful novel *The Book Thief* the main character is a young girl Liesel who lives in Nazi Germany during World War II. In the second novel the main character is 19 years old Ed who lives in Australia and works as a taxi driver. However, even if these protagonists seem very different from one another, there is a number of similarities that they share. There are also several recurring themes in both books, some of which are typical for young adult literature, while the others deviate from the genre.

Both main characters undergo a significant transformation as the story progresses and they become adults. Even though they are very different people, what they go through is in many ways similar. Their lives are influenced by both internal and external factors to which they are forced to respond, and those consequently shape their personality.

Liesel and Ed are influenced by the family they come from, which is a common theme in young adult literature. Their families shape their views of relationships, love and their behaviour towards the others. The author puts a lot of emphasis on this theme in both novels, but he handles it differently in each, because Liesel grows up with foster parents and Ed basically alone. However, what both novels share is the absence of the biological family.

Friendship is another theme that plays a significant role in both stories. In Liesel's case, it is something unimaginable at first, but she eventually creates strong bonds with both Max and Rudy. In *I Am the Messenger*, Ed has three friends initially, but their friendship changes and deepens throughout the story. The lives of both are also influenced by love. *The Book Thief* mainly depicts Liesel's love for her foster parents, especially to Hans. Liesel forms a strong bond with Max, who becomes like a brother to her, and Rudy, who represents an innocent love interest as the friendship between them develops into a childhood love by the end of the story. On the other hand, Ed feels love for Audrey and their bond is different from Rudy's and Liesel's, because physical attraction and desire play a role here.

The people who come into their lives, whether they are parents, friends, or lovers, contribute to the transformation of these main characters. They change their world view, their behaviour, thinking and consequently their actions. Also, both protagonists mature because of the loss represented by the death of a loved one. They become strong,

responsible, confident, selfless and warm-hearted people. Throughout the stories, they find meaning of life and their own values.

Ed and Liesel are also influenced by the society they live in, they perceive the divisions of society and the problems. In addition, ideology has significant impact in Liesel's case on society because of the time in which she lives. Thanks to this they also recognize the differences and learn to accept them or express their disagreement. Their lives are interfered by coincidences. In Liesel's life, Max appears at their door and everything changes. In Ed case, there are mysterious cards with tasks that have major influence on his life because he has to face, and act based on them.

The themes mentioned above correspond with common themes that appear in young adult literature, however, the author deviates from a typical young adult literature by engaging the themes of literature and spoken language which is not common. He points to the power of literature and words to completely change anyone's life and subsequently also their actions. Both main characters become aware of this, and they try to use words rightly to have positive impact. This is especially evident in situations where they try to help or influence situation.

All the aforementioned factors in the protagonists' lives influence the process of their transformation and help them find out who they really are. Extensive numbers of similarities have been found between the main adolescent characters in these two novels. The most significant is their overall transformation which is at the forefront of the story. This transformation is not easy for the main characters, but the difficulty is related to the period of adolescence they go through. During this period, both internal and external influences affect them, and the main characters are directly exposed to them however their experience varies. Their personality changes and they become mature people with different character, behaviour and thinking. Even though, Zusak's work differs from this genre, the transformation of the main characters evident in aforementioned novels is the main connecting element between him and young adult literature.

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