

Reading as a Means of Healing Trauma in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*¹

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Abstract

This research paper attempts to examine how reading books help for healing trauma of victim in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*. Liesel Meminger, the protagonist gains rational power from her learning of reading books that Hans taught when she started stealing books from grave yard and the markets. Indeed, this study highlights that her habit of passionate reading of books in the war period heals her psychological disorder by forgetting her past. Relying on the concepts of Dominic LaCapra's "Writing History, Writing Trauma", Cathy Caruth's "trauma as a wound", Herman's "the role of memory and narrative in the healing process", and Tedeschi and Calhoun's "posttraumatic growth", this paper gives emphasis to that Liesel gets healing from trauma through the process of reading that she ables to express her experience of witnessing. Furthermore, this study offers an ample examination of how reading becomes a vital tool for healing in the visage of adversity by delving into the intricate interplay between trauma, text, and toughness. Therefore, it can be concluded that reading can heal trauma however, it is difficult to root out that why the glimpses of memories can be seen inside the mind.

Keywords: Healing, Memory, Nightmares, Reading, Stagnancy, Trauma

Introduction

Reading becomes not only a form of escapism but also tool for emotional process of healing trauma. This research paper makes an attempt to unearth "Reading as a Means of Healing Trauma in Markus Zusak's (2005) *The Book Thief*" because it encompasses

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sufferings of Jews people predominantly of Liesel Meminger from invasions, threats and horrendous scenarios of genocide because of socio-political issues and clashes in relation to the world Wars of 1939 and 1942. Zusak has created this novel in the form of a fairy tale and fable as a children's literature to narrate on the perspective of Death who is himself a narrator and a significant character. He focuses on a German girl of nine years old in the beginning of the novel.

This novel is about upsetting the binary of German against Jews focusing on the time of hunger and joblessness caused by the war and also manipulates to the community with the feeling of hopelessness, guilt and depression that plagued the society of the time. In such a fearful situation of World War II people of Germany have shown their interest in reading books. Indeed, the reasons behind reading books are to be familiar with the dangerous attack of Nazi supporters and habit of reading becomes politics of reducing the amount of post traumatic disorder or traumatic condition of German people. While reading books they have benefitted by knowing the surrounding topsy-turvy of Nazi's activities against the Jews for their extermination and somehow get relief from pain till their involvement in reading.

Readers can realize about the traumatic condition of Jews characters who are suffering from nightmares, hallucination, fragmentation and melancholy and on the other hand, such realization of the readers revives in them the feeling of encountering with horrendous accidents. Such encounters with fearful genocide with readers provide them the ability to overcome from the traumatic condition to witness and the victims of world war. So, only through reading of traumatic fiction empowers them to not to have traumatized in fearful situation narrated by Death, a narrator of the novel.

The plot is set in Nazi Germany during World War II. It explores the profound impact of trauma on individuals and the transformative power of reading as a means of healing such trauma. Through the character of Liesel Meminger, the story delves into the challenges faced by victims of wartime atrocities and the ways in which literature provides solace, empowerment, and a sense of control amidst chaos and devastation. Trauma lurks as the heart of the novel, as Liesel's life is marked by a series of devastating events. The death of her younger brother and separation from her mother at the beginning of the novel set the stage for the traumatic experiences that follow. As Liesel's world becomes engulfed in the horrors of the Nazi regime, bombings, and the persecution of Jews, she confronts constant loss and uncertainty. These experiences

shape her understanding of the world and leave an indelible mark on her psychological well-being.

The story is the predicament of a nine years old girl Leisel Meminger whose brother dies on the way to Himmel Street of Germany. Furthermore, Liesel lives with foster family since her parents have been taken away to concentration camp. She is a Jew girl who adores her brother more than herself. After these events she has got into traumatic condition. Since it is the time of the Second World War and regime of Nazi ruler Hitler, all family of Jews are forced to leave their home and became isolated from their own relatives whom they love deeply and same consequences has to be faced by Liesel too. So, she has been taken to her foster family. She lives in a town called Molching which is close enough to its residents to see Jews being sent to the Dachau concentration camp nearby. Since Liesel is Luthran, she is not in any danger of sharing this fate although the effects of the war on Germans are strongly felt. The book thieving hunt is driven by the girl's need to pacify painful lively imagination and insatiable desire to recreate her brother's image as averagely as possible. At the same time, the girl grows away from her surviving loved ones, i.e. her father and mother. Whenever she feels frustrated, Liesel Lashes out at them. She throws her violent peevishness in front of her foster family and finally turns her anger towards herself in the form of self-chastiment. Liesel has frustrating account of thieving different books in the Himmel Street of Germany.

Similarly Memmet (2006, p.5) states:

Liesel is 10 when she moves in with foster parents Rosa and Hans Hebermann in early 1940s. She and her younger brother have been separated from their mother, who has been branded a communist. Liesel's brother dies on the way to Molching near Munich and she is left on her own. She, of course is the book thief of the title and the book her brother is buried from a Nazi bonier and from the mayor's library symbolic of her struggle to understand the horrors of war....

Memmet explains the horror and terror of war; because of this fear the characters are choosing isolation. They are becoming a victim of trauma. They cannot escape away from the chaotic atmosphere. He views that when her family members are abused to be communist against Nazi forced to live loneliness life away from loved ones. Liesel in this situation gets traumatized and put herself under the act of theft. So, this narrative is invested in the notion of Trauma Liesel believes the act of thievery will solve all the

problems that's why she searches for many books. Through Liesel's search of many books it can be seen the acting out or overcome one's trouble and sharing experience which is possible way to get relief from the burden of the trauma. The novelist Markus Zusak does not only give the story of Liesel but he also presents evidence of trauma that is not possible of its complete healing. Liesel's trauma is enacted similar to the fragmented story of Max, a Jewish fist fighter with whom she loves. His life also has been deserted by the people of Hitler. He is forcefully taken to the war so his life is traumatized. The three Jews who suffer from trauma in the novel are Liesel Meminger, Max Venderberg and Hans Hubermann more or less to adhere to overcome or acting out trauma and they share their memory differently with the others by sharing and visiting to those who have suffered and narrating the horrible events that becomes the process of suffering from trauma due to the culture and history of their people.

In discussing about the traumatic condition of a German girl and consequences of war time, Branon (2006) in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* reviews that the book is about some images of war through the narration of Death. He further analyzes:

The Book Thief is set in the bleakest of circumstances but it is surprisingly hopeful story about the atrocities that occurred during the years of Nazi regime in Germany. The narrator, Death is both sarcastic and poignant and the imagery is surreal and the stunning. The Book thief provides the unique testament to the Holocaust and while in doing so, it forces the reader to reflect on what it means to be human because of its depth artistry and sophistication it could provide enrichment to any holocaust unit.

As Branon says in his article about the Nazi regime, the context is giving the highlight on the children's literature which narrates the psychological condition of Jews people. Among them, Liesel is one of the main victims who is struggling to know the reason behind such psychological disorder that Jews suffer from in the time of World War II. On such a similar concern Caruth (1996, p.2) illustrates, "[t]he experience of . . .faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffer this sight in a numbed state, only to relieve it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century". When Liesel sees her brother's death and finds herself isolated from her real parents and she gets into psychological disorder. To get out from the trauma she inhabits into the habit of reading books and it somehow helps her to forget their loved ones and this takes her to be aware from the war of the time in Germany.

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The psychological effects of trauma, including feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and a loss of control, are vividly portrayed throughout the novel. Leisel's innocence is shattered as she witnesses the destruction and brutality of war. The trauma she endures takes a toll on her emotional well-being and challenges her ability to navigate the complexities of her circumstances. Zusak skillfully captures the psychological impact of trauma, allowing readers to empathize with Leisel's struggles and the profound weight that trauma places on her young shoulders.

However, amidst the darkness and despair, reading emerges as a powerful tool of empowerment for Leisel. As she discovers stolen books and learns to read with the help of her foster father, Hans, literature becomes her refuge and a means of reclaiming agency within her traumatic reality. The act of reading allows Leisel to escape the horrors of her world, providing temporary respite from the strife that surrounds her. Through the written word, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery, finding solace and inspiration within the pages of the stolen books.

Moreover, reading becomes not only a form of escapism for Leisel but also a tool for emotional processing and healing. The abstract exploration of different perspectives and moral dilemmas presented in the stolen books challenges Liesel understands on the world and provides her with a framework to make sense of the chaos. The act of reading aloud to others, such as her fellow citizens sheltering from bombings, allows Liesel to tap into the transformative power of storytelling. Through her narration, she not only forms connections with those around her but also finds a way to process her own traumatic experiences and embrace her own narrative.

This research paper examines the profound impact of trauma on Liesel's life and underscores the empowering role that reading plays in her journey of healing and resilience. Through literature and storytelling, she transcends the confines of her traumatic circumstances, finding solace, empowerment, and a renewed sense of purpose. The transformative power of reading serves as a testament to the ability of literature to alleviate suffering and shape our understanding of the world amidst the harshest of circumstances.

Methodology

This qualitative research paper is based on desk reviews applies theoretical insight of trauma theory as a framework for understanding the novel's rendering of reading as a means of healing from traumatic experiences.

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Trauma theory provides a comprehensive lens through which to examine the psychological and emotional impact of traumatic events, as well as the mechanisms by which individuals navigate and overcome the aftermath of such experiences. This theoretical framework encompasses a range of concepts and perspectives, including the notion of “trauma as a wound” (Caruth, 1996), “writing history, writing trauma” (LaCapra, 2014), the role of memory and narrative in the healing process (Herman, 1992), and the concept of “posttraumatic growth” (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004).

In the context of this study, trauma theory is utilized to analyze the protagonist, Liesel Meminger’s journey of healing and the ways in which her engagement with reading and storytelling serve as a means of confronting and healing the trauma she experiences throughout the narrative. The analysis draws upon the key tenets of trauma theory, such as the impact of traumatic events on an individual’s sense of self, the importance of narrative and meaning-making in the healing process, and the potential for personal growth and transformation in the aftermath of trauma.

The methodological approach involves a close textual analysis of the novel, focusing on the narrative’s representation of Liesel’s psychological and emotional responses to the various traumatic events she encounters, as well as her relations with these interactions facilitate her healing and personal development. The analysis also considers the novel’s broader social and historical context, particularly the impact of World War II on the characters and their experiences.

By applying trauma theory this study aims to elucidate the novel’s nuanced and insightful exploration of the transformative power of reading and storytelling in the face of trauma and seeks to uncover the ways in which the text engages with the complex dynamics of trauma, memory, and the restorative potential of the written word.

Textual Analysis

This research paper explores the traumatic experiences of the protagonist Liesel. The main cause of her traumatic suffering is death of her brother and loss of her father and mother since the violence invites destruction of her consciousness from the impact of the war. Liesel then haunted by the memories of her brother's death so she acts out as if she has mental disorder. Later, she begins to learn to read and she could speak for sharing her experiences and pain to others but neither she is unable to keep distance from it nor she gets complete relief from her traumatic situation. Liesel's process of coping with her trauma has been suspicious from the beginning of the novel. She cannot forget her

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brother's struggle against the Nazi ruler, Hitler for the rights and protection of Jews in Germany and acts out her trauma by stealing books. Though the other characters like Max and Hans attempt to overcome from their trauma in different way but cannot get complete relief too. They try to have new life and engage in present life's condition but their attempt never materialize their course for getting out of traumatic life. In attempting to forget their life's problem, Max overcome from it by imagining the dream of fighting against the Nazi regime.

Zusak in *The Book Thief* attempts to portray traumatic experiences of the characters presenting the story of victims of the World War II and the corrupt regime of Nazi ruler, Hitler. In the same way, Yovara (2007, p.55) in "Magical Realism and Eco-criticism" puts her argument "Death is the only the unreal character in the otherwise realistic novel..." She means to say that Liesel's brother who died on the way to home is not real character but there are three characters Liesel, Max and Hans who are the victims of same and some different events are real character's struggling to overcome their psychological problems. They all act out and overcome from their traumatic experiences but do not get complete relief from it although they would be able to express to others and they take help through books to reduce such trauma because engaging with books provide momentarily relief from pity and difficulty that they get from remembering their own people.

Liesel is a victim of post traumatic psychological disorder. As Liesel does not gain recovery from psychological disorder, she acts out or overcomes her trauma by recalling her brother's image time and again. Although Liesel gets the company of her foster parents she feels isolated from her own life. She also gets the company of a boy named Rudy Steiner. Rudy and Liesel have conducted many activities and both read in the same school. They share their experiences as they become very close friends. Zusak shows Liesel is being involved in every activities which can be taken as her struggle to reduce her trauma but she cannot rather she maximizes it by recalling her past inviting it in the form of ghost of her brother. She always commemorates her dead brother and her missing father and mother. The more Liesel tries to forget them the more their memory comes into hr in the form of ghosts. As a result, Liesel cannot distinguish what is wrong and what should be done. In fact she cannot create a kind of critical distance between her and her problem. So, she is compelled to have submissive in front of her traumatic sufferings.

In the middle of the damage of the war, death and loss have caused Liesel and the other characters to have traumatized in the novel and love of family and friends is seen as an agent of change and freedom. Liesel overcomes her traumas by learning to love and to be loved by foster family and her friends. In the beginning of the novel, Liesel is traumatized not only death of her brother and separation of her family, but also as a result of the larger regarding destruction of war by the Nazi regime of Hitler. Gradually, her foster father develops a relationship with her as a result healing in her traumatic condition and her physical growth also can be seen. The same kinds of pattern are reflected in the relational dynamic between Hubermann's family and Max. In the middle of government policies that reflect love and acceptance is valuable in the time of psychological disorder. Further the love that Max and Liesel develop through their friendship creates a strong contrast to the hate that is one of the prominent motifs of this novel. The love which works as medicine to cure trauma through love also intertwines to the reading process because all these tools are for achieving freedom and power within such a chaotic consequences of war control all the people of Germany. Maslin (2019, p.6) enumerates that:

The dominoes lined up on its cover are compared to falling bodies. The book thief of the title is a schoolgirl named Liesel Meminger, and meaning of her stealing is not left unexplained. She has been robbed of a brother who dies at the start of the book. Her mother disappears, and then Liesel is left in foster care. A great deal has been taken away from her .She steals books to settle the score.

As Maslin says her habit of stealing has a meaning which she does for overcoming trauma or getting some relief from trauma that she trapped by reading books. Gradually Liesel's learning to read and write and Hans's attachment towards her emerges on her feeling of support and create feeling of love. This process of feeling security and love from her foster father support her to be able to read and eliminate the traumatic feelings that she had after her brother's death. In this very concern Caruth (1996, p.185) writes that historical memory that has put on disorder could misrepresent the truth. Further, she explains, ". . . by suggesting that historical memory, or Jewish historical memory at least, is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic repression, which makes the event available at best indirectly". Further, she opines that reality of dangerous events brings trauma on victims but the fiction books give them some reliefs while reading it. The fictional stories cannot be as dangerous as

vast reality so it both makes them aware of danger and provide them recuperation from the traumatic situation. That's why, after her gain of knowledge that books has power of words she began to involve and spend more time in reading books to forget scratching events occurred in her life.

Similarly, Liesel's trauma of illiteracy and troublesome mind can be seen when she steal book from Nazi bonfires. In the same time in Germany, the birthday of Hitler had been celebrated by burning the books, but Liesel proves herself as daring girl who steals books from the place of Nazi's book burning commemoration. Then after, her father taught her to read and write, it helps her in order to understand and realize the power of words. Then, Liesel writes letter many times to her missing father and mother but she does not get any response of those letters that causes her trauma severely. She thinks that her parents are still alive and hoes to be return to her. But, her anticipation for parent's returning goes in vain that brings her into the mourning. The narrator, Death avers:

Against hopelessness, Liesel checked the letter box each afternoon . . . This was despite an Itrans-requested visit from Frau Heinrich, who explained to Hubermanns that the foster care office had lost contact completely with Paula Meminger. Still, the girl persisted, and as you might expect, each day when she searched the mail, there was nothing. (p.107)

Liesel as a trauma victim does not want to forget her missing parents. At least she wants to develop the link through which she can mourn on her loved ones. Therefore, the victims are being haunted by the memory of her missing parents. So, she uses reading of books as a means of overcoming trauma that she suffers from nightmares and roaming in search of books for stealing. Throughout the novel, reading and language are symbolically presented as the means of expression Liesel's feelings, desires and freedom. These language and reading process provide identity and personal libration to those characters who have gained the power of literacy or it can be said that the power of words. They provide a framework to Liesel for overcoming the trauma or it can be said post traumatic disorder. She, at the beginning of the novel, would not able to reads and after her brother's death and after her parents missing she learns to read and write from her foster parents. In this similar matter LaCapra (2014, p.74) explains, "[i]n discussing the Holocaust, for example, it makes a difference – at least an initial difference- whether the historian is a survivor, a Jew. . . a German, a child of Perpetrators, someone born

later, and so forth with some distinctions and variations that it would take very long even to touch upon". He claims that the traumatic condition of the beginning gets some reduction to make different and bring the ability to overcome to those survivors either Jews, German or child of a perpetrators. As Liesel, she initially, has contracted with trauma but later gets ability to overcome all symptoms of psychological problems. On the same way, Liesel has got cure not completely but some relief that makes her better and makes away from the haunted memories of her lost parents and the died brother in the war.

Hence, Liesel a protagonist has suffered from trauma that she is haunted by the nightmares as the image of her died brothers and this traumatic condition makes her to theft activities. And another important thing happened on her is that she is showing her interest in learning. She has achieved knowledge of importance of love and the war while she started learning to read and write from her foster parents. There is also beginning of relationship of good father and a daughter between Liesel and Hans and all this happened activities are caused her to forget about the Nazi atrocities and her isolation from her own loved ones. It also shows that her traumatic fears, nightmares are disappearing from her life because of the reading habits and this habit also her to solve her problems. She has become able to get ability from the words that Hitler used to use for suppressing Jews because of it. So, the literacy of a person can be very importance to be powerful as Liesel has been able to express her feeling towards those fearful experiences of her life.

Similarly, Lee (2015, p.9) writes:

In the same way literacy plays a significant role in the definition of a Jew during and after the Holocaust by giving the Jews a way to speak, to resist against the Nazis, and a way to remember, literacy in *The Book Thief* gives those who are suppressed and powerless a way to stand for themselves and against the culture of Nazi Germany. Literacy's power to enable is exemplified by the way it affects Liesel's perspective on place, her coping with her emotional trauma, and defying Nazi culture during her short years in Molching.

As Lee expresses that literacy empowers Liesel to share her narratives, giving her a voice to witness against the culture of Nazi Germany at the rule of Hitler. Thus, literacy transforms Liesel to become a rhetorical Jew as it gives her a way to stand up for herself when she is powerless and suppressed, especially when we see her circumstances in parallel with Max's circumstances. Both Liesel and Max are victimized by the danger

and fearful incidences of those heart-rending genocidal activities of Nazi people. Thus, LaCapra (2014, p.48) recites:

One might justifiably criticize a work of art on historical as well as aesthetic and normative grounds if it is treated [. . .] in a manner that excluded or marginalized the Nazi genocide or even addressed the latter in terms of harmonizing narrative that provided the reader or viewer with an unwanted sense of spiritual uplift.

In Lacapra's sense that Jews were marginalized and treated to be suppressed and excluded from in Hitler's regime of Germany. Although, a Character like Liesel could be able to uplift herself in such a bad situation through her reading habit and harmony among Jews. Max with Liesel is able to be same for healing trauma because of their closeness with each other.

At the outset of the novel, Liesel is introduced as a young girl grappling with the devastating loss of her biological mother and the subsequent trauma of being separated from her family and placed in a foster home. Trauma theory emphasizes the profound impact of such events on an individual's sense of self and their ability to navigate the world (Herman, 1992). Liesel's initial response to her trauma is a profound sense of disconnection and an inability to find solace in language, as evidenced by her recurring nightmares and her struggle to read the first book she acquires.

However, Liesel's encounter with the written word gradually becomes a means of confronting and processing her trauma. As she begins to read and engage with books, the narrative suggests that the act of reading serves as a form of "bibliotherapy," enabling her to find a safe space to confront her fears and emotions (Oatley, 1999). This is particularly evident in her interactions with the book, which allows her to "dive into the story" and temporarily escape the harsh realities of her wartime existence.

The transformative power of reading is further highlighted through Liesel's relationship with Max Vandenberg, a Jewish man hiding in the Hubermanns' basement. As Liesel shares her books and stories with Max, the narrative suggests that the act of storytelling not only provides a means of connecting with others but also serves as a tool for self-expression and the reclamation of personal agency (Caruth, 1996). Through these interactions, Liesel and Max are able to navigate their respective traumas and find solace in the shared experience of engaging with the written word.

Liesel's development as a reader and a storyteller is further emphasized through her role as the "book thief," a moniker that underscores her defiant and resilient spirit in

the face of the oppressive Nazi regime. The narrative's portrayal of Liesel's acts of book-stealing and book-sharing suggests that the written word becomes a means of resistance, a way for her to assert her individuality and find empowerment amidst the backdrop of war and devastation (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004).

Liesel despite her losses she grows to love her gentle foster father, Hans Hubermann, and to tolerate her hot tempered foster mother who addresses Liesel only in foul mouth imprecations. She also makes a firm friend in fleshy but very loyal classmate Rudy Steiner. Hans Hubermann himself is a laboring reader helps Liesel to read by helping her sort out the world of her book's words and the book that is her only connection, save her from nightmares of her lost brother. She finds power in words, especially words in the book that she steals from the bottom of a conflagration of unacceptable books the town people are burning, from the library of mayor's wife. Her family is committing a bigger crime that they are hiding a Jew, the son of the man who saved Hans's life in the World War I. They hid Max in the basement, where he becomes reliant on Liesel for his small glimpses of the outside world. And, she is in turn becomes reliant on him as something precious that has been saved where others have been lost because of the World War and atrocities done by the Nazi people in Hitlerian regime. In this regard Nilson & et al. (2007, p.100) elaborate that:

The Book Thief is about Death and all the people it folds so kindly unto itself in World War II. It's about some decent people that Liesel learns to love. It's about bad (and some evil) people that Liesel learns to fear. It's about the profane Rosa Hubermann and her love for Liesel. It's about Hans Hubermann and his unquestioning love for Liesel. It's about Rudy Steiner and his desire to kiss Liesel. It's about the horrors of war and the terrors of bombs raining down. It's about cruelty and anti-Semitism gone mad. It's about Liesel and her love of books.

Nilson is elaborating both the cause of Liesel's suffering from psychological disorder is on the one way and another way is, he is providing the clues overcoming which gives her healing from her that problem. This is about her fear and horror of World War II because of which she has contracted by bad habit of stealing books and same books through her emergence of reading habit gave her way to live a life freedom and fight against the current circumstances of Nazi Germany. All this kinds of power of speaking to protest against Nazi like her father she has got only from the books after reading and another thing is her love toward family and friends and friends and foster parents love for her in

such a traumatic situation of her life. She through readings of stolen books is trying to find meanings of life. The environment of war is also one of the content in her life that made her to have experience of hardships, love and happiness.

Lastly, the story offers a profound portrayal of trauma and its psychological impact of the characters. Through Liesel's journey, the story showcases the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of storytelling and literature in navigating and overcoming traumatic experiences. Zusak's exploration of trauma underscores the significance of coping mechanisms, the preservation of memory, and the cathartic role of narratives in fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

Conclusions

Through the lens of trauma theory this research paper reveals the profound role of reading and storytelling in the process of healing from traumatic experiences. The central protagonist of the narrative, Liesel Meminger, grapples with the devastating impact of war and loss, which manifests in her psychological and emotional struggles. However, her discovery of the power of words and the transformative act of reading becomes a means of navigating and healing her trauma.

This research paper concludes that reading and the act of storytelling can serve as a therapeutic tool for individuals who have endured traumatic events. Liesel's journey demonstrates that the engagement with literature and the written word can provide a safe space for processing and expressing emotions, as well as a pathway towards self-discovery and resilience. This research paper underscores the notion that the act of reading can be a form of "bibliotherapy", enabling individuals to confront their fears, find solace, and ultimately, embark on a journey of healing and personal growth.

Through the employment of trauma theory, this research paper reveals the intricate play between the individual's psychological responses to trauma and the redemptive power of the written word in the novel. Liesel's transformation from a traumatized child to a resilient young woman highlights the transformative potential of reading, as it allows her to reclaim her agency, find meaning in her experiences, and build a sense of personal and cultural identity amidst the backdrop of war and devastation.

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