



LINGERING SHADOWS AND APPROXIMATE GRIEF: A HAUNTOLOGICAL READING OF TRAUMA, LOSS AND ESCAPE IN ZUSAK'S *THE BOOK THIEF*

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Abstract

This study evaluates *The Book Thief* (2005) by Markus Zusak through the lens of Jacques Derrida's hauntology. The research examines how the traumatic past is affecting the present as a ghost. It depicts the inhumanized treatment of people, especially the Jews and the Germans under the control of Adolf Hitler. It portrays books as invisible companions that provide a reading cure for traumatized people. It clarifies the duality of literature as solace for some and a means of control for others, as in Liesel and Adolf Hitler. The novel's protagonist, a 9-year-old girl, embodies the traumatic effects of situations on childhood, shaping their identity and a transformation of a young girl afraid of nightmares, converting into the woman who is living while accepting and surviving all the losses she faced in losing her beloved ones, but still appears to be a mature woman living his life in Australia. It employs a qualitative approach, highlighting the characters' struggles, the ruler's oppression, survival during the holocaust, the atmosphere during WWII, and the experiences of the sufferers during these times. The methodology highlights the ghostly appearances of the lingering past in the present and its unvarnished effects on the upcoming future. Its critical analysis highlights all the traumatic past, the reading cure, and the inhumane treatment of people. This research contributes to the holocaust literature, trauma studies, German history in the context of WWII, and holocaust and narratology.

Keywords: *Hauntology, Inhumane, Inhumanized Treatment, Lingering, Narratology, Unvarnished*

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1. Introduction

The Book Thief (2005), a historical novel by Markus Zusak, is one of his bestsellers for Young Adults (YA), for which he won the Margaret A. Edwards Award (2014) from the American Library Association (ALA) for his writing for young adults. Zusak sets the story in the fictional town of Molching, Germany (Himmel Street). Zusak first thought of writing a modern story about a book thief in Sydney. Then, he changed the setting from Sydney to Nazi Germany, inspired by his family's experiences and by the stories his parents told him about growing up in Germany during WWII. The novel explores themes such as the impact of war, theft, survival, the power of literature, humanity, and mortality. Presenting a backdrop of fear and oppression, the novel depicts the ill conditions and experiences of German citizens, the treatment of Jewish people under the brutal rule of the Nazi government (one-party rule), during WWII, and portrays the affected or haunted lives of people by the past (memories, losses, failures, griefs...).

Nazi Germany, the state of Germany (1939-1945), was known as the German Reich. The past is not past in Nazi Germany, and that traumatic past is still haunting the present of the people. The weight of Nazi Germany is not just about the historical factors but also about the ghostly residues that are still affecting the memory, the real world, and people's identity. Nazi Germany tries to disrupt and end the ideologies that belong to survival through activities like book burning. Hauntological views on this are not about the absent things but about the presence of things as spectres. As Jacques Derrida's concept of trace describes, every "presence" contains a shadow of what it is not (Derrida, 1967). Mark Fisher's idea of "lost futures" focuses on the failure of a promising future to materialize. (Fisher, 2014). Zusak refers to the lost future of nazis by portraying the hidden figure of Max Vandenburg in the basement, who is neither entirely dead nor allowed to live, only because he was a Jew. Everything carries a trace of what came before and what is to come; nothing is pure here. (Derrida. 1967; Fisher 2014). Death is an unusual narrator who is presenting a way for readers to pay attention to the sufferings, losses, and griefs of the people during WWII, and the brutality inflicted on them by their government. Death is not a fully alive or entirely dead entity, as it presents the hauntological effects of human life. Death uses prolepsis, foreshadowing the exact moment of a character's death, which haunts the present. Death presents human-like emotions somewhere; it also plays the role of reversal, as the final line "Humans haunt me" shows that a supernatural force becomes the victim of human tragedy. (Zusak, 2005). Many researchers worked on the different aspects of these novels to highlight all the possible elements discussed in this novel, such as trauma, loss, escape, Nazis, and the role of literature in the lives of people through the lens of different theories, such as Marxism, Psychoanalytic theory, Critical theory, New-Historicism, Ethical criticism, and many more.

“Hauntology” the theory applied on this work is a philosophical notion by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his 1993 book *“Specters Of Marx”*, a combination of terms like “haunt(ing)” and “ontology (study of beings)”. It challenges the traditional notions of presence and absence, or being and non-being, by exploring the “ghosts” of things that are no longer or not yet present but still have agency and meaning. “The present is always haunted by things from the past (memories, unresolved histories, lost futures) and by the things from the future (expectations, hope, fear)”. (Derrida, 1993).

1.1. Research Objectives

The main objectives for this research are

- To portray trauma as a ghost that continuously haunts the characters.
- To depict the inhumanized treatment of people that still haunts them.
- To portray how the novel becomes an invisible companion, providing a reading cure for traumatized people.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How does the novel portray trauma as a ghost that continuously haunts the characters?
2. How does the novel depict the inhumanized treatment of people that still haunts them?
3. How does the novel become an invisible companion to provide a reading cure for traumatized people?

1.3. Problem Statement

Many researchers present *The Book Thief* through unique concepts (trauma, loss, memory, escapism) and draw on different theoretical frameworks, yet it has not been explored through a Hauntological perspective. The main problems in this novel (like trauma, loss, and finding solace) during the Nazi’s brutal rule and during WWII are presented not just as historical issues but as a lingering presence that is continuously haunting the lives of people. Through a hauntological reading (Derrida’s notion of the spectral) of this novel, we can explore how trauma and loss are always with people through spectrality (ghosts). Different characters in this novel (Liesel, Max, and Liesel’s foster mother) are presented as seeking ways to escape collective and individual suffering, suggesting that these sufferings and losses are always with them as shadow-like memories. This study (novel through a hauntological approach) will help us analyze the novel as a non-fictional work, as in our lives, we are also unable to overcome some of our memories that affect our present, and we are somehow in search of an escape from them. This fictional work will be analyzed through a nonfictional perspective, offering readers the best way to understand it.

1.4. Research Significance

The Book Thief (2005) by Markus Zusak depicts the miserable conditions faced by people after World War II and under the cruel rule of Nazi Germany. Many researchers have studied this novel and highlighted its various aspects using different theoretical frameworks. Every researcher presented this novel with other ideas, but no one elaborated it through the lens of Hauntology by Jacques Derrida. While covering the main ideas of this novel, like loss, suffering, and trauma, this theory highlights how loss and grief are not fully resolved but linger as shadows that shape our memory and upbringing. By reading it through a hauntological aspect, the study finds out that trauma and loss are not just past events, they are haunting our present and also have an effect on our future, as Max painted the main Kampf to write his own story, which depicts that the original text of Nazi's remains hidden but as a ghostly appearance. We are not entirely free from the events or losses we faced in our past; they are part of our past, present, and future; they are like ghosts, not fully here or completely gone. This research highlights that we are bound to the past as the literature shapes our memory and identity through history. This research will be beneficial for future researchers, as no one has explored this novel through a hauntological lens; this work will provide a fresh perspective.

2. Literature Review

The chapter provides a critical evaluation and analysis of the existing works related to this research topic. It helps create the background of the research and provides essential findings and the importance of existing studies. This helps identify gaps, discover our knowledge, and provide context on specific topics. It is not about presenting a summary but about a discussion that allows us to establish concepts and essential features that underpin your research and provide the foundation for our study. Overall, it gives a straightforward way to present our current research by identifying its key aspects and contributions to this field. Book burning in *The Book Thief* is a powerful event that symbolizes the control, destruction, and Nazi's censorship. This element represents the duality of the books, as it has the power to oppress and liberate. Nur Adyanti (2016) highlights the book-burning ceremony in the novel *The Book Thief*. It was considered that a few books in Germany should be erased or removed, and as a result, a book-burning ceremony was held (by fire). It is believed that real-life events may have inspired this event. Adyanti argues that the reason behind this is unknown, but may be that the burnt books were considered neither good literature nor valid, or even immoral, or that they wanted to stop them from influencing Germany as a nation. Moreover, we can feel that Hitler doesn't want to keep the books that are against his rule, or they belong to other cultures, languages, especially Jews, which they don't want to keep. During Hitler's rule, their primary focus was to destroy Jewish and communist books, and at that time, a large number of people participated in this event. The book burning was considered a

purification ritual, with the primary focus on burning other books (in different languages or cultures). Adyanti explored this article through the character Liesel, who was also part of the crowd. After hearing *Kommunisten*, she remembers how her family was a victim of the Nazi. She felt that the event was painful for her. Resistance and power dominance are shown in Adyanti's work as a Nazi, who maintains dominance by restricting books, whereas for Liesel, books are precious (Adyanti, 2016).

Angel Kushmi (2024) examines how reading books helps heal the trauma of a victim in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* through the lens of trauma theory, as the novel depicts the deep trauma endured by Liesel and other characters during World War II. Liesel's suffering begins with the death of her brother and the loss of her parents, leaving her haunted by memories and nightmares. She feels isolated, even with her foster parents. To overcome this, she turns to book-stealing and reading them to find solace, though only for a short time. Her foster father, Hans, teaches her to read, and through this bond of support and love, she begins to heal. Kushmi argues that books are not just about stories but also symbolize hope, escape, and resistance against the Nazi regime. Her friendship with Max, a Jewish man hiding in their basement, shows how sharing stories can connect people and bring comfort while suffering. Although Liesel and others never fully recovered from trauma, at that time, love, friendship, and literature gave them strength. The novel highlights how words and storytelling can help people survive, resist oppression, and find meaning even in times of significant loss and fear. Kushmi concludes that Liesel's transformation from a traumatized child to a resilient woman highlights the transformative potential of reading, as it allows her to find meaning in her experiences and build a sense of personal and cultural identity amid the backdrop of war and devastation (Kushmi, 2024).

Rizka Merdifa (2018) analyzed *The Book Thief* by Zusak using Sigmund Freud's psychological approach. Merdifa describes the loss, emptiness, and suffering through the perspective of the main character, Liesel Meminger, who loses her entire family. She lost her father, brother, and even her mother, but about her mother, she knows about her sickness, nothing else, and by this, she feels abandonment. She thinks that her brother never leaves her, but he also dies without warning. Merdifa highlights that this story is not only about a girl who stole books and read them during Nazi rule, but a young girl who tries to deal with his life after losses at such a young age. Merdifa says that Smith considered that the trauma had significant effects on children, too. Liesel's traumatic stresses were explored through some acts. Firstly, she saw nightmares, second, her anxiousness on the way to meet her new parents, third, emotional sufferings, or guilt of what happened. She misses her brother at night and in the days as well. Liesel feels alone and not loved as a result of loneliness and abandonment. She feels unworthy of love, but after foster parents, there is hope of being loved by someone; still, she is too young (to

think so by this point). The other experiences by Liesel also make her feel empty as she lost the most important people in her life, who were her family (Merdifa, 2018).

Ho Ella May (2019) depicts the contestation of power by exploring Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*. He highlights that a single group does not own power but exists in relationships, as Michel Foucault explains. The novel is set in Nazi Germany, where the Nazi regime uses discipline and control to shape the lives of citizens and to oppress Jews. Power is exerted through tools like book burning, propagandistic parties, and the creation of fear. Still, small acts of resistance, like Liesel stealing books or the Hubermanns hiding Max, show that power can be challenged and reshaped. May have an example of Foucault's idea of biopower, where governments control life and death, providing help to explain how the Nazis treated Jews as less than human in a better way. He also describes Agamben's ideas on death, highlighting how survival and existence become political. Another essential part of the novel is its narrator, Death. Though he seems all-powerful and omniscient, Death admits to being limited and even caught up in Hitler's influence, and death is something that everyone must face. This creates a struggle over narrating power: how much control Death has over the story and how he presents it to the reader. Drawing on Barthes and Bal, it can be seen that Death asserts his authority to cover his insecurities. May concludes that the contestation of power is visibly seen and felt between the characters and death, who is presented as an influential figure in itself, and that the novel explores power as something constantly questioned, whether politically, socially, or narratively (May, 2019).

Shankar Rimal (2016) shows that Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* offers a unique representation of Holocaust history through the unusual narration of Death. Instead of presenting the Holocaust directly, Zusak presents it through the experiences of ordinary German citizens, particularly Liesel Meminger, a young girl surviving in Nazi Germany, based on the stories his parents used to tell him. Rimal describes that holocaust history begins with the rise of Adolf Hitler, where Hitler created the propaganda ministry to increase his power. Through this research, it is proven that *The Book Thief* is historical Holocaust fiction, as it depicts the same place and time during World War II. Zusak uses metaphors and imagery to show Hitler's power and the aggressiveness of Jews respectively. Rimal discusses the reality depicted by Zusak, including life in Moloch, the effectiveness of war, and the conditions of war. By using literary techniques such as allusion, foreshadowing, and personification, Zusak conveyed the horrors of the era without overwhelming the reader. Rimal describes the holocaust as a German word that means "sacrifice by fire". And according to him, the best way to understand the holocaust is not only to focus on the Perpetrators but also on the victims and the people who survived. The novel offers a powerful lens on Holocaust memory, blending history with storytelling to question how such tragedies are remembered and how much they are conveyed to be

understood, and it is also to remember that after 1945, death never returns from its unending task (Rimal, 2016).

Julie Dohmen (2017) highlights how escapism is used in three novels, *The Book Thief*, *Gretel and the Dark*, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by using the theory of escapism to show how characters deal with the realities of World War II. In the very first chapter, he defines escapism, discusses its use in these novels, and explains how it is employed. In the second chapter, Dohmen discusses how reading and stealing books were a Source Of Escape For Liesel and Max, And He Describes The Power Of Words, as Hitler's Words can both destroy and protect. In *Gretel and the Dark*, described by Dohmen in the third chapter, the story highlights the power of imagination, showing how the protagonist and her friend use it to escape reality. At the same time, while underscoring the escape, he also highlighted its negative impact, as it began to blur the line between fact and fiction. No doubt Krysta was distracting herself by forming stories and starting to believe she was living a fairy tale. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, this portrayal of escape is different: imagination and books were not needed; the children physically escaped to Narnia, a land far from the war. This escapism also describes a form of escapism as he wrote Narnia as a utopian city that explores his wishes for escapism and peace. Overall, this article shows that different writers use escapism to escape the environment created by WWII (Dohmen, 2017).

Antenet Blessy (2025) compares two novels: one by Bapsi Sidhwa and the other by Markus Zusak. *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak and *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa both explore themes of war, trauma, memory, and resilience. Blessy states that war zones are unfair in their approach to many innocent souls, who are burdened with dreams and flying colours in their lives. Researchers view that *The Book Thief* is a representation of silenced voices; it represents the struggles of ordinary people during the Holocaust. It indirectly belongs to Holocaust literature that talks about the hidden pain, guilt, and difficult survival of citizens that ultimately leads to the deaths of six million jews. Similarly, *Ice-Candy Man* represents the postcolonial struggles, identity crises, and the grief of Partition in India. In both these novels, memory plays a central role, either for healing or for continuing suffering. Blessy cites the work of Elisabeth Krimmer, which emphasizes that WWII literature is not about the battlefield; it explores the struggles, suffering, and losses highlighted in these works. War not only disturbed the lives but also changed them. Characters are seen presenting courage in dealing with those conditions. Blessy further notes that Elizabeth H. Cottrell, in her review of *The Book Thief*, writes that sadness coexists with extraordinary bravery and integrity. Books and storytelling provide readers with tools to improve their lives by helping them overcome their losses and grief, as Elie Wiesel argued: literature based on war not only shows the hardships of war but also the timeless motivations of those who survived it (Blessy, 2025).

Catherine Emma Green (2017) explores hauntology, Jacques Derrida's idea that the past continues to live in the present as a ghostly appearance, through the lens of literature. Greece argues that ghosts in the novels symbolize unresolved histories, slavery, racial injustice, and national trauma. These ghosts do not simply represent death or loss; they show the invisible labour, suffering, and resistance that create modern identity. By "carrying ghosts across time," readers and writers engage in an ethical act of remembrance that transforms sorrows into action. Greece suggests that hauntology reveals how absence becomes presence, how previous losses continue to shape the present. The novels in this article, including *Kindred*, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, and *Specimen Days*, depict ghosts as sources of memory who resist what is forgotten. Their spectral existence blurs the line between life and death, past and present, and incomplete histories. According to Greece, it is precisely through the spectre that we begin to imagine fragmented time and ways of being that centralize subversion and postulate Derrida's dream of finally learning to live. Greece tries to tell us that we must first understand what came before us and how we can build on it. Hauntology is used both as a method of critique and as a form of moral witnessing (Green, 2017).

Sheryl Alexander (2022) explains the concept of Hauntology and its appearance in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Alexander states that the spectres of the past and the future are the hauntology of the text. He explains the term Hauntology, created by Jacques Derrida, combines "haunting" and "ontology" (the study of being). It suggests that the past and the future constantly "haunt" the present, meaning the present is never pure or independent. According to Alexander, ghosts of history, memory, and future possibilities affect the lives of characters like Antoinette and Rochester, as well as the story itself. The article argues that *Wide Sargasso Sea* shows how the past (colonial trauma, slavery, memory) and the future (uncertain identity, madness) shape the present moment. These "spectres" appear through the story's spaces, symbols, and repetitions, creating a mysterious sense of time overlapping. Alexander argues that Hauntology is not about the supernatural but about how history and memory linger. It connects to fields such as trauma, postcolonial, and cultural studies, helping readers explore how forgotten or silenced voices still influence the present. Alexander concludes that a hauntological reading of the text acknowledges the absent presence of the past and the future, and seeks to peel the layers of the text and recover how they manifest in the events, space where time, identity, and culture constantly echo and reappear (Alexander, 2022).

3. Theoretical Framework

This study revolves around the novel *The Book Thief* (2005) by the German-Australian writer Markus Zusak. This novel is one of his best-selling works, based on the experiences of German citizens under Nazi rule and during WWII. The main objectives of this research are to examine how trauma is portrayed as a ghost that continuously haunts

the characters and to show that the trauma they faced in their lives continues to affect them. All the events and longings belong to the past, but they are also a part of their present in a ghostly presence. Another objective for this study is to see the inhumanized treatment of people that still haunts them; it depicts that the sufferings, losses, and all the inhumane treatment they faced in the past are still haunting them. They are not freed from their traumatic past. And to see the novel as an invisible companion providing a reading cure for people, this aims to show how people of that time used books for their comfort; they found solace in them, and literature was like a way of escape for them. Although occasions like book burning occur with nazi's, book reading was a way to escape from the chaotic reality of life. This study aims to highlight the inhumane treatment of people, books as a reading cure for sufferers, and the ghostly appearance of the past that lingers like a shadow in their present through a hauntological lens.

This research is a qualitative approach because there is no need to analyze it through a quantitative perspective. As this research is analyzed by the novel's text, like its themes, characters, and by the narrator's view, all these create a hauntological lingering effect. This research is not based on surveys or other quantitative data, so there is no need to present it in numbers. According to the research's essential features, a qualitative approach is best suited to this work. Moreover, this chapter examines how this research is being conducted, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. The primary resource used for this research is Markus Zusak's novel *The Book Thief*, as it fully explores the thoughts, ideologies, and data presented in the story. It is explored through a hauntological perspective, and the secondary resources for this research include external materials, such as the theoretical lens through which it is analyzed. Previous scholarly works on this novel describe how others present their point of view and the extent of prior work on it.

The theoretical framework for this novel is Hauntology. This term was coined by the philosopher Jacques Derrida; it is a combination of the terms "haunt(ing)" and "ontology," where haunting refers to something absent at present, and ontology refers to the study of beings. Hauntology is a concept that shows that: "The present is always haunted by the things from the past (memories, unresolved histories) and by the things from the future (expectations, hopes, fear)". Derrida introduced this term in his 1993 book *Spectres of Marx* (hauntology appears only 3 times in this book). Initially, he used this term to show how Marxist ideas after the fall of the Soviet Union (1991) and the rise of neoliberalism are still haunting the present, as he says, "a spectre is haunting Europe, Europe, Europe, Europe, Europe_the spectre of communism." Hauntology is connected to ontology, as ontology is a "metaphysics of presence." Still, in hauntology it is used as a "metaphysics of absence." Hauntology focuses on "what is not here," but it is not disappeared. He also used Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as an example to clarify his concept (the murdered father's ghost appearing, which affects the son's present and provokes him to

take action for revenge). He argues that even the Marxist idea has failed, yet it still affects our present and, somehow, our future. Hauntology focuses on the ghostly presence of things that are absent yet still have an effect. Many other theorists explored the same ideas, but they didn't use this term; different terms were used by various theorists, like Christine Brooke-Rose, who used the term Dehauntological in his work *Amalgamemnon* (1984), Nicolas Abraham & Maria Torok used the concept of Panthom. Still, they were not philosophical concepts like Derrida.

No doubt Derrida coined this term but cultural theorist Mark Fisher popularized this term in 2000s who used this term in book (ghosts of my life), music(Burial, The Caretaker and on Ghost Box label) and film (Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, in which characters repeat past can be shown as an example of hauntological themes) to describe the depressive state of nostalgia of "lost futures" Simon Reynolds helped in popularizing this term with FISHER in music journalism by applying it to a range of music genres and different artists. This concept is explored in culture, art, and philosophy to evoke cultural memories and nostalgia for futures that never came to pass. Moreover, hauntological studies also examine key concepts such as "Time is messy," "time is not a straight line," and the idea that we don't live only in the present; the past and future are always mixed. It highlights "spectres of the past": old ideas, promises, and failures influence our present. It depicts the "future that never came", dreaming of what will happen next or what could be, but that never happens. Sometimes these spectres are regarded as our "ethical responsibilities" that we should respect (remember or acknowledge). This hauntological concept by Derrida still matters, as we all feel haunted by personal memories, regrets, and some dreams we were unable to fulfill. This concept also challenges the idea of "now," as we are not living in a clear now; parts of our past haunt us, and most of us plan a lot about the future, whether it has to come or not, we don't even know. Hauntology refers to the concept of ghosts or spectres; they are neither fully here nor entirely gone. Derrida uses them to show that some people, ideas, events, and even ideologies don't disappear even when they end (dead people, history, etc.) (Fisher, 2000).

The present study attempts to explore the novel *The Book Thief* through the concepts of hauntology by Derrida. According to the ideas Derrida outlined above, this novel also possesses hauntological effects, as evidenced by the characters and events that continue to affect our present. This novel clearly shows that our past does not entirely escape us: the people we lost, the events we endured, and the difficulties we faced are not fully resolved; they linger like shadows with us. The things we lost in the past, the time that was either difficult or not, is passed, but still they linger with us like ghosts; we are bound to our past. Events like WWII shape our history; in history, they are still acknowledged. The traumas of the past are not only part of our present but also affect our future; the traumas are always with people, haunting them as spectres. By exploring this

novel through a hauntological approach, we will learn that, in reality, our lives are also shaped by the griefs, regrets, losses, and sufferings of our past that haunt our present and will shape our future. This study explores how clearly Zusak explains the ghostly appearances of the past in our present or in our upcoming lives. Somehow, we will find a way of escape by finding solace in other things, by making ourselves busy, but our past and future can't adequately free us; we are not in a clear present, but in a haunted present with shadow-like memories.

This chapter studies that how the lens of hauntological approach is conducting this research by describing all the aspects of this theory by Derrida, that our past lingers like shadow, our present is not free it is haunted (time is messy), lost futures (for which we reams for), unfinished business (ghostly appearances when something is not appropriately resolved that includes unfulfilled promises, injustices, traumas), no purity in time, mixed with ghosts of past and future. This research follows strict ethical guidelines to protect all participants. The participation was voluntary. *The Book Thief* is a work of fiction. Still, all the characters and ideas presented in this work are based entirely on the experiences of the people in the book, and all personal information related to the author is confidential. The right characters and their sufferings are used directly from the transcript. This work is not copied and pasted, as all references used to support key facts and essential concepts are cited. Research seems limited, as this is studied through a hauntological perspective, which refers to something ghostly or hidden meanings, and this research is based on my personal interpretation of the text. Haunting and ghosts might reflect the past differently. General hauntological theory is used to build this study's framework, as there are no existing hauntological works for this novel. One of the main limitations is the unreliable narrator "death," who is not human. Hence, it feels challenging to separate death's feelings about being "haunted by humans" from the historical perspective. While this research is delimited strictly to Zusak's novel *The Book Thief*, any other adaptations are entirely restricted to stay focused on the text. Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology is used regardless of whether one reads any other ghost story. Research focuses on the events and experiences in the novel rather than presenting a detailed Holocaust view or a deep study of WWII, such as in a film or other references to broader supernatural elements. This study focuses on describing the haunted experiences of the main characters; not everyone is included.

4. Analysis & Discussion

This research explores trauma, loss, escape, and the spectres of the past that continuously haunt the present in *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. This study focuses on the brutal rule of Nazi Germany and WWII. This research addresses the suffering and losses of people during those conditions and how they found reading as a means of escape. This research provides a hauntological analysis of the ghosts of things that are no longer

present but still have agency and meaning. The primary data source includes *The Book Thief* by MARKUS ZUSAK, and secondary resources include scholarly articles and relevant research. The methodology draws on a hauntological approach that analyses the effects of war and the suffering of characters within the country. The first aim of this study is to portray trauma as a ghost still haunting the characters. This question deals with the everlasting effects of trauma that the people were facing, even though the leading causes or even the trauma itself no longer exist. However, it still haunts the characters and affects them; the protagonist, Liesel Meminger, is one of the most vivid examples of this representation. She was not even able to sleep well due to her past sufferings. Narrative portrays the impact of trauma on an innocent child's mind, which is still not healed. After her parents, her brother was the only one with her for whom he demanded never to leave her, but he died on the journey towards their foster parents. Her brother was her only companion in the new, strange house, and after his death, she never healed through his death, as the narrator depicts.

She would wake up, swimming in her bed, screaming and drowning in the flood of sheets. On the other side of the room, the bed that was meant for her brother floated boat-like in the darkness. Slowly, with the arrival of consciousness, it sank, seemingly to the floor (Zusak, 2005, p.37).

The past haunts the young girl, who is only 9 years old; her brother appears in her dreams after his death. He causes unconsciousness after nightmares, as Sheryl Alexander (2022) also wrote in his work that the impending presence of the spectres of past and future still haunts (Alexander, 2022). The main events that caused suffering are World War II and the behaviour of nazi Germany towards its own nation. The Führers were not even fair to their people during the war, as was the case at the time. The mayor's wife, who was seen as a quiet lady, was also under trauma due to her son, who was killed a long time ago, but she can't get over her son's memory, as she told Liesel, "He got killed! He got strangled and cut up more than twenty years ago! Or did he freeze to death! Either way, he is dead! He's dead! And it's pathetic that you sit here, shivering in your own house, suffering for it. You think you are the only one? (Zusak, 2005, p. 284). Trauma was not only a ghost for the young but also for the older ones who lost their loved ones. At the end of the novel, everyone felt disappointed and dead once again, and the young girl survives, with a lot to face. This novel begins with deaths, losses, sufferings and traumas, but also ends with the losses, only a few sufferers; all the other died, leaving their loved ones again alone.

The second research question is to present a novel as an invisible companion that provides a reading cure for traumatized people, highlighting the importance of book reading during tough times and the ways people find peace in books. The main character of this novel also represents finding solace in books. As for Liesel, after her fosterfather gave her the books, they were the ones who gave her peace. The series began when her

father first saw her stolen book and, instead of scolding her, he started reading, showing that her foster father wanted to read it too. “A black book with silver writing on it came hurtling out and landed on the floor, between the tall man’s feet. He looked down at it. He looked at the girl, who timidly shrugged. Then he read the title, with concentration, aloud: *The Gravedigger’s Handbook*” (Zusak, 2005, p. 66). After every nightmare, her foster father patiently read to her and helped her overcome her fears. As Dohmen (2017) describes, reading and stealing books served as a source of escape in comparing three novels. He highlights the escapism, either by the help of books, whether by stealing them, and also in the imagination, as imaginary worlds are also a source of some time, far from real life. While showing the positive effects, he also describes the negative impacts. In September, when Moloch was again listed for a raid, Liesel started reading in the basement to avoid the surroundings as “She didn’t dare to look up, but she could feel their frightened eyes hanging on to her as she hauled the words in and breathed them out. A voice played the notes inside her. This, it said, is your accordion” (Dohmen, 2017; Zusak, 2005, p. 408).

At that time, she was only focusing on finding peace in reading a book; she did not want to indulge herself in the external, deadly environment. Her primary focus was only on the book; she didn’t want to look at the toxic environment, and she didn’t care what people thought of her. Reading was like a cure for everyone; age doesn’t matter. A lady who everyone considers rude or cruel also seeks solace in books. After reading a book at the shelter, Liesel, who was entirely absorbed in it, feels that the outside world doesn’t matter. As she says, “I liked that book you read in the shelter.’ No. You’re not getting it. Liesel was convinced of that.’ Yes?’ I was hoping to hear the rest of it in the shelter. Still, it looks like we’re safe for now”(Zusak, 2005, p. 414). Reading is a healing cure for everyone, as writers try to convey through their characters. Such as Dohman (2017). In the second chapter of his article, Dohman (2017) describes imagination and reading as a vital part of escapism, saying, “the most important form of escapism for Liesel was the stealing and reading of books, which ultimately saved her life.” Kushmi (2024) also portrays that Liesel moves towards reading books and stealing them to find solace and overcome the trauma faced during tough times. At the end, after the deaths and all decays, reading once again proved as a source of escape and healing as Liesel writes in her diary and thanks her father for saving him as he taught her reading. She lost her foster parents at the end, just like her real parents. Still, as compared to her birth mother who never wrote letters to her and it was also unknown to her that either she is alive or not, her foster father taught her to read and write so, she was thankful to him for providing her a way to find a way for solace when she feels low or the traumatic side tries to haunt her again (Kushmi, 2024; Dohman, 2017; Zusak, 2005, pp. 414-573).

The third objective for this research is to explore the inhumanized treatment of people that still lingers with them. This highlights the inhuman treatment of Germans by

Nazi Germany, even when they were suffering from the disasters of WWII. The nazi party was also a sufferer of WWII, but they caused difficulties for the sufferers also. It describes the ill treatment the people were facing during that time, especially with jews who were the primary victims, only because they were black, for the others, they were considered inferior, it was considered embarrassing to be Jewish. When Rudy wants to paint himself black, and his papa denies saying that “Because you shouldn’t want to be black people or Jewish people or anyone who is not us ‘because they will take you away” (Zusak, 2005, p. 62). The treatment of jews was very inhumane, and no one wanted to be a part of them. Besides the sufferings of WWII, people were suffering under the rule of Hitler, the nazi party suggested punishments without reason, even when others who did not belong to the nazi party were mistaken or not, such as

On the ration cards of nazi Germany, there was no listing for punishment, but everyone had to take their turn. For some, it was death in a foreign country during the war. For others, it was poverty and guilt after the war, when six million discoveries were made throughout Europe. Many people have seen their punishment coming, but only a small percentage welcomed it (Zusak, 2005, p. 442).

It was not their choice as they wanted to be a part of war in foreign countries or to join it of their own will, it was controlled by the nazi’s, and the ordinary people had only to follow the orders. Jews were the ones who suffered the most, faced the most, as when they arrived in Moloch, it is described that how brutally the jews were treated as they were not human or did not have the right to live. They were also human, and without any fault or mistake, they were dragged through the streets of Molching. Their only mistake was being Jews. Rimal (2016) also provides a clear lens on Holocaust history by describing the book as Holocaust fiction, as it takes place in the same time and place during WWII, and by highlighting its literary techniques. Overall, in this novel, except for the Germans, Jews were the people who had no rights only because they were Jews (Rimal, 2016; Zusak, 2005).

In this research, we will discuss how the environment affects people's memory and their suffering under such miserable conditions. This research explores trauma as a ghost that is continuously haunting their lives; their present is not free from the past, the past haunts it, and the past is like a shadow that is haunting their lives. All the trauma and losses are like ghostly appearances, never appearing to the eyes but present around. Similarly, the past is past; it has gone, but it isn't completely gone; it affects our present and lingers in our future. This study highlights that the sufferers were not only the adult ones, but also the children were victims of this war and inhumanized treatment under the rule of nazi Germany. All the events lead to a haunted memory for children as they lost their loved ones. The protagonist of this novel, Liesel Meminger, is the first highlighted victim in

losing loved ones as she first loses her birth parents, then her brother, and at the end, she even loses her foster parents. The brutality was particularly shown with Jews as they were treated as non-beings, they all were enslaved, they were dragged in the streets with chains, they were not allowed to gain the rights they deserved. They were treated as if they had no rights to live, they only had to suffer because they were Jews, except they had no other identity, they were only known as Jews, even though their name did not call them. Those who have a soft corner for Jews were also not considered good as they favour Jews, not Adolf Hitler, who was the only power during the tough times. Adolf Hitler had the power of words; he knew how to control the Germans, and everyone was afraid of him. As literature was providing some measure of peace in devastated behaviour, the power of words was enough for Hitler to control people. But besides all the difficulties and losses, they found only books as their good companions to escape that reality or to live in that critical environment. Reading slowly became a source of escape for everyone. As they didn't have the means to purchase them, they started stealing them to overcome the traumatic effects. Some were keen on reading books from their childhood, and others began reading and listening to them after seeing others find peace in them. The protagonist is also shown as a stealer, and her best friend gave her the title of *The Book Thief*. Books were a source of happiness, a way to pass the time, and a way to make yourself comfortable in the harsh conditions. Her foster father taught her to read. This was the reason he thanked her father at his death because she found a way to find peace in hard times and to overcome the ghostly appearance of her past that lingers with her like shadows.

This research shows the haunting presence of people by the events, losses, and sufferings they faced in the past or at some point in life. Though everyone is living after surviving the tough days, their memory haunts them; their present is not free from the trauma they once faced. Their lives are still under the traumatizing and haunting effect of Nazi Germany and WWII. The writer tries to show us the conditions of people through the characters and the background he chooses. People once survived the conditions, but they are not free; their past haunts them like a shadow, which is always with a man. Similarly, the life they spent will always haunt them, whether it was good or not.

5. Conclusion

This research highlights the suffering of people, the losses they endured, and their struggles to escape the harsh realities of war and government. This research highlights the power of words in two ways. It describes the people who find peace in words, and for some, the ashes of ideology were peace, as Adolf Hitler organized a book-burning ceremony. However, the protagonist, Liesel, stole them too, even though the burnt books were hurting her; she still chose to carry them, which later brought her solace. By choosing personification of death to describe this thought, Zusak represents that one should find meaning in their own action before their soul is carried away, as humans also haunt death.

Death itself is a hauntological figure that revolves throughout the novel. Liesel's whole life is presented as living with the ghosts of the past, though she survived both times; her past always lingers, like shadows, haunting her. The environment also had a dual nature; for Max, it was a place to hide. Still, the Moloch itself was destroyed by bombing just as Max was living in the basement, but was a ghost to nazi; he was present, alive but still invisible to the Nazi; his absence was like a ghostly presence. Liesel's nightmares belong to her brother while representing her vanished or dead past, but are still shaping her identity. This study describes the traumatic effects of the past on people's present lives. Germans have nothing to do but face the realities, the oppression by rulers, and live according to their will, the one and the only thing they can do, and what they are doing is to find peace for themselves in some work or in any activity, and from childhood to adulthood, they choose books as their companion and to survive the traumatic conditions. Books are a source of comfort, an escape, a way to overcome nightmares, and a good way to understand the world properly.

Overall, this novel is a complete model for understanding the underlying hauntological effects of the past and the future. By evaluating this novel through the lens of hauntology, we can relate it to our own lives, as we all face and suffer from experiences from the past that still linger with us, as portrayed by Zusak. Death is a hauntological figure who is present everywhere and witnesses everything, seeing humans as living beings till collecting their souls. It can be concluded that the past we are thinking of is fixed and that the past, not vanished, has a hauntological presence in its absence. The ending of this novel not only depicts a close ending but also an open one, in which the past haunts the present and will linger in our future.

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