

## THE REPRESENTATIONS OF LITERACY AS POWER MARKUS ZUSAK'S *THE BOOK THIEF*

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### **Abstract**

Literacy is traditionally understood as a set of cognitive ability to read or to write. New Literacy Studies opposes this traditional belief and see literacy as a set of social practice which involves in the activity of reading and writing. The theme of literacy in the literary works is often overlooked by any other themes as it is seen traditionally. Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* has the theme of the power of words and literacy. This study encounters how literacy in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* is represented through the activity of reading and writing and how this novel reveal the notions of power among the characters using New Literacy Studies and the study about literacy and power as the underlying theories. Therefore, the method used in this study is the textual analysis using library research. The results show that the literacy events in *The Book Thief* are represented as power in many aspects of the characters' lives. Each event manifests the notions of power in several features. First, in the Books Burning event, it is revealed that the Nazi who have dominant power can take control and have authority over the access to books and literatures. The second, the books thieveries by Liesel Meminger exposes the power a person gets from the culmination of fury generated from humiliation and betrayal by people of the ruling class. Third, a powerful book of propaganda, *Mein Kampf* is considered as a very influential one in the society. This novel depicts that such power carried by *Mein Kampf* not only invites the approval from one character to spread the propaganda but also invites the signs of resistance from another character.

**Keywords:** literacy, New Literacy Studies, power.

### **Abstrak**

Telah lama literasi dipahami sebagai seperangkat kemampuan kognitif membaca dan menulis. Kajian Literasi Baru menampik pemahaman lama ini dan melihat literasi sebagai seperangkat praktik sosial yang termasuk di dalam aktivitas membaca dan menulis. Tema literasi pada karya-karya sastra seringkali terabaikan oleh tema-tema lainnya karena hal ini dilihat dengan pemahaman lama. Novel *The Book Thief* oleh Markus Zusak bertemakan kekuatan kata kata dan literasi. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mencari bagaimana literasi di dalam novel Markus Zusak berjudul *The Book Thief* digambarkan melalui aktivitas membaca dan menulis dan bagaimana novel ini mengungkap konsep-konsep kekuatan diantara karakter-karakter menggunakan Kajian Literasi Baru, dan studi mengenai literasi dan kekuatan sebagai teori dasar. Dengan demikian, metode yang digunakan dalam studi ini adalah dengan analisis tekstual dengan penelitian kepustakaan. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa peristiwa literasi pada novel *The Book Thief* direpresentasikan sebagai kekuatan di banyak aspek kehidupan para karakter. Masing-masing dari peristiwa tersebut memperlihatkan konsep-konsep kekuatan pada beberapa fitur. Pertama, pada peristiwa Pembakaran Buku, terungkap bahwa Nazi, yang memiliki kekuasaan paling besar dapat mengontrol dan memiliki kekuasaan atas buku-buku dan literatur. Kedua, pencurian buku yang dilakukan oleh Liesel Meminger mengungkapkan adanya kekuatan yang didapat seseorang sebagai titik puncak dari kemarahan yang disebabkan oleh penghinaan dan pengkhianatan oleh orang-orang kelas atas. Ketiga, buku yang memiliki kekuatan seperti *Mein Kampf* dianggap sebagai buku yang sangat berpengaruh pada masyarakat sebab buku tersebut memiliki peran-peran dan arti-arti pada banyak orang. Novel ini menunjukkan bahwa kekuatan pada *Mein Kampf* tidak hanya mengundang dukungan dari sebagian orang untuk menyebar luaskan propaganda, namun juga mengundang tanda-tanda penolakan dari yang lainnya.

**Kata Kunci:** literasi, Kajian Literasi Baru, Kekuatan

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine that there is a war in the air. Planes are just in the sky above the heads, dropping bombs on random areas. Adults and children from one neighborhood are gathered in the basement, frightened of the air raids, hoping that their houses do not turn into ashes as they walk out the basement. Out of the terrifying images, there is only one girl reading aloud for all her neighbors to listen, removing all those frightening and terrifying sounds over their heads, as if the war had been moved to some other places; as if the book was more powerful than the war itself so that even when the air raid stops, the reading does not. The illustration above is taken from *The Book Thief*, a novel written by Markus Zusak, an Australian-German descendant. Published in 2006, *The Book Thief* is recognized by its awards including *Publishers Weekly Best Children's Book* of the Year in 2006 and Michael L. Printz Honor Book, an award given to the best book for teens in 2007. It is also recognized as a Young-Adult novel using World-War II and Holocaust as its setting, like some of the former Young-Adult novels by Anne Frank, John Boyne, or Lois Lowry. The stories and novels about Holocaust cover not only issues about humanity but also it is about witnessing a tragedy. Some of which are 'unspeakable'. In every literature about Holocaust, it is the issues which are focused upon, some of which take the Germans' point of view, and some others take the Jewish ones. However, a slight but significant difference between canon Young-Adult Holocaust literature that they wrote and *The Book Thief* is that this novel comes up with another theme which is as vivid as the World War II, even the Holocaust itself, which is, the power of words and literacy.

To support the theme, most of the characters in *The Book Thief* always participate in the activities which involve books. Each of the characters value books and texts differently. The protagonist, named Liesel Meminger, is a 12-year-old girl who is always eager to read; always strives for books. Despite the war around her, she is more immersed in literacy rather than anything else. In the hard times, Liesel meets Max Vandenburg, who turns out to be her best friend. He is a Jew by blood and origin, who also loves to read and write. Even the Nazis, as a party which controls over the country, they also value books and besides the war, some events involving them are addressed to literacy. Therefore, Markus Zusak, gives another color within the variety of novels about World-War and Holocaust throughout the pages of *The Book Thief*.

Exceptionally, Zusak makes the theme of literacy goes along, side by side with its setting of World War II and its Holocaust issues. As the novel use the theme of the power

of words and literacy, this thesis seeks for the answer of how literacy conveys the representations of power as it construct the story. New Literacy Studies actually has allowed the research in seeking power relations under the academic literacy. Street and Heath stated that NLS pays attention to the relationship between power-authority in the use of literacy practices within specific institutional settings including the Government (106). By noticing the events which involve literacy in governmental institution, in this novel's case the Nazi Germans, it can lead to which texts are available to show power, and what texts are considered as subversive others have significant roles and influence to drive the society as well as to drive the individuals. The forms of power relations that are shown in this novel are the effects of the interaction happens in the society amongst the Nazis, the Jews, and the Germans.

Regarding the illustration stated above, this study attempts to analyze the events which involve books presented in *The Book Thief* and how it can convey the representations of power. Literacy in this novel not only accommodates the knowledge about reading and writing activity, literacy in *The Book Thief* contains meanings in the characters' lives. The nature of events and characters' ways of treating books lies under the terms of 'Literacy events' or the activities involving texts and in line with participants interaction and interpretative processes (Heath and Street 104); and 'literacy practices' or the social process where the events involved in (Street). All of which are parts of New Literacy Studies (NLS). This study basically opposes the traditional view of literacy that is seen as a set of skill that makes a person can read and write and distinguish 'literate' and 'illiterate' merely on the judgment on skills. In a modern viewpoint, literacy is best explained as a social practice (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 7) which involves in daily relationships between people in both formal and informal environment (Hamilton 8). It involves values, roles of literacy in personal as well as in a community, and New Literacy Studies can be used to analyze how powerful a book is in a society. 'Literacy events' and 'literacy practices', thus, are used to determine the ideas brought by literacy activities, including reading, and writing. The use of literacy as social practice is widely known for its contribution to ethnographic studies where this theory is applicable to ethnographic investigation in researching literacy in the society (Street and Lefstein 41).

Through the New Literacy Studies, literacy in *The Book Thief* will reveal how the literacy events happen and how they portray roles in the characters' lives as well as how they value and perceive literacy. In other words, literacy is represented through the occurrences in the novel which involve any texts on each occurrence, and the way the characters deal with those texts is also accounted

for. This thesis is the expansion from the ethnographical nature in the field of literacy, and the New Literacy Studies is used to analyze the novel without neglecting the sociocultural aspect. Williams and Zenger has conducted the study of the representations of literacy in movies. They have revealed some of literacy representations such as literacy as power; literacy as individualism; literacy as danger; and literacy as salvation and commodity. Therefore, their study becomes the reference to conduct this thesis and their study gives insights about how literacy is represented.

What makes literacy in *The Book Thief* is best approached with New Literacy Studies perspective is that this novel brings out the strength of words and books in the middle of catastrophe, in this novel's case, takes place between Second World War and the Holocaust so the issues about these events are brought up to the surface as themes. Those two themes along with literacy create a new different perspective as they influence one another. When other novels about wars, and Holocaust are common to be written as memoirs or biographies, exposing struggles, pains and sufferings side of the tragedy, this novel, on the contrary, brings out literacy that makes this novel seems to see the other side of war and Holocaust, that is just as powerful as the war and Holocaust themselves.

## **METHOD**

Regarding the organization of this study, this study falls under the umbrella of literacy criticism. Therefore, textual analysis a literary work is used for this study and is elaborated as follows:

### **1. Data**

The main source of this study is a novel entitled *The Book Thief* written by Markus Zusak, published in 2006 by Random House Children Publishers. The data served in this study are mainly in the form of dialogues, quotations which are related to literacy events.

### **2. Data Collection**

The theory of New Literacy Studies is used as the underlying theory of this study to reveal the literacy events and literacy practices performed in the novel. The study about the representations of literacy is also important to analyze the values and beliefs as the literacy events and practices revealed which leads to the notions of power. Since the novel's setting is in Germany during the World War II, it will be necessary to have supportive study about the holocaust literature to make a good understanding about the historical background taken place in the novel. Supporting references are taken from the studies related to the event and online references.

### **3. Data Analysis**

First, to collect the raw data, the novel is read closely in order to gain as much as dialogues, monologues, narrations, or phrases that are related to the performance of literacy events. Next, the intention is changed into data classification, distributed and divided into the characters as the object of the analysis which indicates the characters' attitudes, values and beliefs to investigating literacy practices and to reveal the notions of power in *The Book Thief*.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **New Literacy Studies**

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars who mostly supported in ethnographic perspective composed a study named New Literacy Studies to encounter what literacy is really about, beyond the realm of cognitive skills, it aims the emphasis on sociocultural context that is rooted in literacy practices. As proposed by Brian Street in 1985, the nature of literacy is not focused on how the skill is acquired as a main approach toward literacy but rather a way to think of it as a social practice (Street). James Paul Gee added in "*A Situated Sociocultural Approach to Literacy and Technology*" that literacy is also engaged in cultural practices as readers and writers are involved in the "activity of reading and writing integrated with various ways of oral language use; various ways of acting and interacting; various ways of knowing, valuing, and believing; and various use of tools and technologies (Baker 172)".

Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic stated that there are six propositions about the nature of literacy. This study only takes three propositions which are related to the analysis. First, "*Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices. These can be inferred from events which are mediated by written text*" in their six propositions about the nature of literacy. It is about the importance of texts as the object of the analysis on literacy besides the analysis on the social practices. The study of texts and how the texts are produced and used are a part of literacy study. The elaboration of analysis on events, practices, and texts provide in this proposition. Thus, it can be said that the study of literacy comprises the study of texts, representing what people do with texts and what these activities mean to them. Second, "*Literacy is historically situated*". It is how "Literacy is seen like a fluid, dynamic and changing as it lives" (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 14). Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic argue that a historical approach is necessary in order to understand about certain ideologies, culture and traditions in the practices (Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic, 14) A person's practices can also be situated in their own history of literacy by using a life history approach, history observation within the person's life. This may happen due to several reasons that people are



able to make changes in their lives by using literacy. Because of the 'changing demands, available resources and the possibilities', literacy practices enable individual to undergo changes in lifetime (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 14). Third, *Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationship, and some literacies are more dominant visible and influential than others* explains that education, as a 'socially powerful institution' is more likely to support dominant practices as seen in the process of the formation of the discourse, and literacy with its configuration of power and knowledge as it presents in social relationship (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 13).

### **Literacy Events and Literacy Practices**

The field of NLS also encounters some other terms to be put in order to approach literacy as it demands the analysis of the activities. The practitioners in literacy have developed the concepts of *literacy practices* and *literacy events*. Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (9) see literacy events as "activities where literacy has a role" with the perception that some literacy events are regular, repeated actions as to be used in underlying a research about literacy. Brian Street composed the phrase 'literacy practices' as to 'focusing upon the social practices and understandings of reading and writing' (79). Janks stated that literacy practices are "the underlying, regulated, patterned and culture-specific ways of using literacy that are not visible" (118). Another practitioner, Schmidt, in this way said that practices are linked to power relations. the notion of literacy practices can offer a powerful link between the activities of reading and writing, which is visible through different events, and the social structures in which they are embedded (4). At the same time literacy practices depend on social institutions so that they are not only aspects of culture, but also of power relations and structures (Schmidt 4)

### **Literacy and Power**

The analysis of power is a compulsory in New Literacy Studies. As Brian Street claims, New Literacy Studies aware of any notions about "whose literacies" are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant, along with other underlying category of NLS about how literacy and social practices are associated, and problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place (1). Heath and Street composed the term of academic literacy where the skills on literacy and academic socialization models. It "pays attention to the relationships of power and authority to meaning making and identity that are implicit in the use of literacy practices within specific institutional setting such as government, business, university, bureaucracy, etc (106)."

Hillary Janks, a theorist in power in literacy claims that power is linked to domination, access, diversity, and

design as power is reproduced by how the power see the notions of the language, symbolic forms, and discourse in practices As the texts is deconstructed, it increases the choices that the writer or speaker has made. Every choice emphasizes on what are selected and hidden, what should be muted (24). To search for certain domination contributes in practices is by using "critical thinking about why the writer or speaker makes the choices, whose interests they serve, and who becomes empowered or disempowered by the choices. (24)". Janks argues that dominant forms can be seen from how one provides *access* to dominant forms, while at the same time valuing and promoting the different languages and literacies (24)."

To maintain the dominance forms, she adds, one can give access to the dominant forms, and to marginalize, one must do the other way, or deny the access to it (24). For *diversities*, its relation with power is linked with how the differences of culture and social values in everyday life point to hierarchies can create "domination and conflict, as to change and innovation" (25). Whilst *Design*, involves in productive power (25). It will get into human creativity and will generate numbers of new meanings. Literacy is believed to have ability to reveal how is the quality of the readers as well as the readers' intelligence, their taste, and if possible the connection to the culture of the elite (Williams and Zenger). Therefore, concerning the power relations available in the study of representation of literacy, literacy can be seen as power.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Books Burning Night**

The term books burning refer to the destruction by fire of books or any other written materials. The burning of books represents the censorship and usually snatched from a cultural, religious, or political opposition. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, book burning become a celebration of the German. Young scholars and the Nazis in particular see that there are variety of dangerous books must be diminished so that their people will not be 'contaminated'. Matthew Fishburn, the writer of *Burning Books: A Chronicle of the Phenomenon through the Ages* in 2008 stated that the event is to "calling for the 'cleansing' of Germany from foreign influence...demanding that the German students have the will to cleanse the German language of its impurities"(32). The books' burning was held on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1933. "That night, and over the next week, similar events were held in university cities across Germany, most of which explicitly followed the model of Berlin by including marching parades, torches and speeches (Fishburn, 31)."

Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic have stated that literacy is historically situated (14), thus the books burning event

in *The Book Thief* may be derived from the real event which involves changing and it can be traced through the historical approach. Moreover, quoting Hall from the previous chapter, how the material world conveys meaning does not matter, but the system in the language does in order to reveal the representations. Nevertheless, in *The Book Thief*, the event and the participants' reactions are described clearly so that the story will not be decreasing in its meaning in order to reenact the real event in 1933.

Regarding the opening ritual of the ceremony, the novel reenacted a speech on page 119. However, it is a "Nazi leader in shiny brown uniform" who is in charge for the event held in Munich Town Square.

"Today is a beautiful day," he continued. "Not only is it our great leader's birthday—but we also stop our enemies once again. We stop them reaching into our minds. . . ."

... "We put an end to the disease that has been spread through Germany for the last twenty years, if not more!" He was performing now what is called a *Schreierei*—a consummate exhibition of passionate shouting—warning the crowd to be watchful, to be vigilant, to seek out and destroy the evil machinations plotting to infect the mother-land with its deplorable ways. "The immoral! The Kommunisten!" That word again. That old word. Dark rooms. Suit-wearing men. "Die Juden—the Jews!"

From the quotation above, lies some information that can be inferred about the event represented in the book thief: first, the books burnt are the books and literatures of the enemies. Second, those books are considered as trash which causes diseases so that they need to be destroyed by fire. Third those books are the books written by the Immoral, Jews and the Communists. Fourth, the main purpose of the event is to avoid those books to influence German as a nation.

The Nazi's position in this event is higher than anyone else who participate in the event. As the executor and the ruler of the event, they can control over the texts. It can be seen from how they want any books and texts from the enemies to be burnt. According to the Nazi leader, Communist's and Jewish' books are dangerous for their nation. It can pass through people's mind and influence them. Moreover, on page 120, the Nazi leader says, "And now we say goodbye to this trash, this poison." Those books are metaphorically called as poison for German's mind that must be demolished.

To calling other people's book as poison and trash, someone must be in the top of hierarchical power and have certain authorities over the others. Referring to Williams and Zenger, the one who can control literacy is

the government and institution (44). The Nazis, as the powerful party in German at that time, with their authority can hold such a great event to demolishing other people's books. In addition, to reveal that the books burning event is also a great one in the reality, there are some examples proved by Fishburn, regarding the books which are written by the immoral, Jews and the Communists, "Marx and Karl Kautsky, for example, were burned because of their emphasis on 'class war and materialism'; Heinrich Mann, Ernst Glaeser and Erich Kastner as emblems of decadence and moral decline (33)."

To understand about the situation during the event, the narrator explains;

"Books and paper and other material would slide or tumble down, only to be thrown back onto the pile. 118)..."

"There were well in excess of a thousand people, on the ground, on the town hall steps, on the rooftops that surrounded the square (118)..."

"A collection of men walked from a platform and surrounded the heap, igniting it, much to the approval of everyone. Voices climbed over shoulders and the smell of pure German sweat struggled at first, then poured out. It rounded corner after corner, till they were all swimming in it. The words, the sweat. And smiling. Let's not forget the smiling (120)."

The narrator has revealed about how the people will react on the books burning night on the next chapter beforehand; "They enjoyed a good book burning all right (90)." And more commentary about the people's behavior falls on page 119. "The crowd was itself. There was no swaying it, squeezing through or reasoning with it. You breathed with it and you sang its songs. You waited for its fire." The people have been absorbed in the events just like what happened in 1933 where all the students group with Nazi Stormtroopers are unified become one to burn the books.

Regarding the quotations above there are some points that can be noted. The books 'sacrificed' for the purification ritual is not just executed in symbolical event with some representative books but it is really a massive destruction of books. The crowds throw them back to the fire as if they did not want to miss any books from burning. Thousands of people come to the Square to participate and they are happy for that. The enthusiasm of the crowds and their smiling faces create a meaning that on the behalf of the Germans, this event is not only a ritual of purification but also a celebration to get into the new era without poisonous books of the Un-German authors. The Germans believe in what they hear from the leader so that they enjoy the event, and they perceive the books burning event as a right thing to do.

Despite the Nazis and the German's attitudes toward the event, other perspectives come from Liesel Meminger. Liesel is one of the Hitler Youth members who march along with other members (117). She feels proud of it as the people clapped the parade on (117). When she arrives, the fire has been lit and she sulks by thinking "They've started without me! (118)" Although she is proud of herself being a participant of the event, she still thinks that it is wrong to burn books, deep inside. "...something told her that this was a crime – after all, her three books were the most precious items she owned (118)." From the quotation above, it is obvious that Liesel cannot accept the way the books are treated. She still values books as precious things, whatever they are all about, whoever wrote them, she appreciates them.

Soon after, she begins to value the books burning night as she listens to the word "Kommunisten" in the speech by the Nazi leader.

"Halfway through the speech, Liesel surrendered. As the word *communist* seized her, the remainder of the Nazi recital swept by, either side, lost somewhere in the German feet around her. Waterfalls of words. A girl treading water. She thought it again. *Kommunisten...* She had to get out. In front of her, a head with parted blond hair and pigtails sat absolutely still on its shoulders. Staring into it, Liesel revisited those dark rooms of her past and her mother answering questions made up of one word. She saw it all so clearly. Her starving mother, her missing father. *Kommunisten*. Her dead brother. (119)"

To Liesel, the flame, the burning is not what the event is all about. It is the *Kommunisten* which is all about. She hates the fact that the Nazi had seized her family apart, and making them as one of the bully victims all along with other German enemies in the form of texts and books which ends up in burning flames. Now that she is just a child, she can escape being taken away like her father, but she has known the truth. The book burning night, for Liesel Meminger is pain. "...Liesel pivoted with nausea to exit the crowd... (120)" It is really not the event which involves books, in which she has always liked.

Liesel's reaction, of course is an antithesis of the event's success rate. In the real event, the groups of students who march along to the venue are portrayed as the most supportive members of the event, while in Liesel's case, she turns against it for she positions herself as the victims as she belong to her family. From seeing the crowds ambience portrayed in the novel, Liesel is also on the other side. While the crowds are gathered, Liesel makes her way off the crowds. The novel, thus, presents Liesel's position as the oppressed victim of the dominant

power. Liesel feels pain, rejection, in disbelief that the parents are actually the victims of the Nazi. It is shown in how Liesel gets off the crowds because she does not belong to them.

The notions of power in this literacy event can be observed by examining the relationships among the systems that produce it. According to Janks, power and literacy can be noticed by seeing the domination and access (23). These two elements are useful to explain about the notions of power in literacy as they are connected to each other. First, to seek for certain domination in the event is to see the reason of the participant who makes the action, for whom they do the event, and who becomes empowered or disempowered. In this event the dominance formation that shapes this restriction creates a new form, which is seen from the Nazi's way to value the text and the people's reaction. Therefore, Janks' theory cannot be applied to explain the power relations between the Nazis and the Germans because the Germans do not show any sign of disappointment for the books restriction by the Nazis. Instead, they enjoy and feel elated during the books burning night rather than disagreeing, protesting or boycotting the event.

However, if the books burning event is seen from the power relations between Liesel Meminger and the Nazi, there is someone who is marginalized. As the Nazi is maintaining dominant form by restricting the books, Liesel Meminger feels that something is wrong with the event because she values every book as a precious thing. Moreover, when the Nazi leader mentions the *Kommunist* word and Liesel gets angry, she is officially marginalized. Liesel belongs to the group whose books are the burning materials. The position of Liesel Meminger here is on the subordinate where, first, she cannot get access to the books because the Nazi restricts the access to them; second, she feels different from any other people who enjoy the books burning, and she takes her own access to the event because her family is implicitly addressed as the communists by taking herself out of the crowds. Then, Janks' theory about dominant form can be applied in Liesel's case – a person who is marginalized is the one whose access is denied to the dominant forms which is maintained in the community.

#### **Books Thievery by Liesel Meminger**

Liesel's first thievery happens on April 20<sup>th</sup>, on the Führer's birthday (110). The Nazi Germany held the books burning all night in the town hall of Munich (110) aiming to cleanse German people's minds from the enemies' influence through books (119). This thievery is very risky and thrilling. Liesel decides to snatch a banned book which is dangerous to be read by a German. As stated on the previous sub-chapter, Liesel has been



burdened with the idea of “*Kommunist*” in the event which eventually makes her to find a link between the word “*Kommunist*” and her missing dad and mysterious mother who left her. Then, she reached a culmination where she thinks about the only causal factor of her crumbled family.

“...She was making calculations...

A Small Addition

The word *communist* + a large bonfire + a collection of dead letters + the suffering of her mother + the death of her brother = the Führer” (124)

Eventually, Liesel takes one book from the pile of ashes entitled ‘*The Shoulder Shrug*’. As for the natural feeling that one person may have after stealing things is the thrill, and Liesel feels it. Nevertheless, she is showered with the thrill of not being ignored (130). Thievery is still considered as wrongdoing. Moreover, the thing stolen is a book which the government has told not to read, but, rather than feeling guilty, Liesel is rushing thrill of not being seen. Some men are still around, to scoop the ashes, but now that Liesel is ignored, she feels triumphant now after stealing, not guilty (130).

After her first thievery, Liesel takes a leap by herself in order to get a better access to books, which is in a positive way: free-reading in Ilsa Hermann’s library, but at the same time, her willingness to read does not stop her to read only in the library but to make some books as her own properties by stealing them. Liesel then eventually becomes a young criminal, who commits books thievery in Ilsa Hermann’s library. At first place, she takes Ilsa’s book, “*The Whistler*” as the protest to her for stop hiring her mother. “She wouldn’t tolerate having it given to her by a lonely, pathetic old woman. Stealing it, in a sick kind of sense was like earning it (309).”

Liesel has already connected with Ilsa and the library. Moreover, the Hermanns is the last customer of Rosa (281). Even though Ilsa tries to ‘bribe’ her with something she likes, she does not want to take it, instead, she ends up explodes saying that she does not need Ilsa’s pity; calling her pathetic for grieving over her dead son; swearing in front of her.

“You think,” she said, “you can buy me off with this book?” Her voice, though shaken, hooked at the woman’s throat. The glittering anger was thick and unnerving, but she toiled through it. She worked herself up even further, to the point where she needed to wipe the tears from her eyes. “You give me this *Saumensch* of a book and think it’ll make everything good when I go and tell my mama that we’ve just lost our last one? While you sit here in your mansion?” (283)

“This book,” she went on. She shoved the boy down the steps, making him fall. “I don’t want it.” The words were quieter now, but still just as hot. She threw *The Whistler* at the woman’s slipped feet, hearing the clack of it as it landed on the cement. “I don’t want your miserable book. . . .” (284)

Liesel had made up her mind to express her anger to Ilsa. Now she does not think about what she likes; she does not think about herself, but the family. Book is not the proper thing to substitute money that her family at home needs most to make a living. That is the first time Liesel says that she does not want things, even a book, from anyone who feels pity for her, and ends up throwing the book on the floor, making Ilsa to pick up. “After a miscarried pause, the mayor’s wife edged forward and picked up the book. She was battered and beaten up, and not from smiling this time (284).”

In Liesel’s thought, she has been humiliated and it hurts her dignity as a human, not someone who belongs to the lower class anymore. The image of Ilsa picking up the thrown book even makes the power gap between those two classes disappear. Words and language as a medium to transfer Liesel’s willingness to be treated in the way she wants to, eventually takes her to get what she wants. Liesel and her family need money, after all, not just a book to make a living. The quotation below is the excerpt of how Liesel’s words can have a power to beat Ilsa’s power:

“She was battered and beaten up, and not from smiling this time. Liesel could see it on her face. Blood leaked from her nose and licked at her lips. Her eyes had blackened. Cuts had opened up and a series of wounds were rising to the surface of her skin. All from the words. From Liesel’s words (284).”

In fact, Liesel cannot release the book just by throwing it back again to Ilsa. She has already fixed her eyes on the book which Ilsa attempted to give. There is a difference between the previous stealing in the night of book burning and this stealing which is the thrill that has already gone. Liesel thinks that she deserves the book than the ‘pathetic’ old woman Ilsa and she believes that stealing is more acceptable way to earn it (309). Thus, with anger lies in her and the need to revenge for what Ilsa has done to the Hubermann’s family.

Liesel’s case can be seen through two different approaches to reveal the representations. The first approach involves the type of text she steals, and the second involves how Liesel’s feelings, motifs and attitude

while stealing books. First, if seen from the kind of text she steals, especially with one from the books burning night, is the forbidden book the Nazi leader has called it poison (128). That is a dangerous act, stealing a banned book. She may be sentenced for doing a crime if she gets caught. It is also a crime too for stealing in Ilsa Hermann's library. She actually does not have access to own those books. In Ilsa's library case, she has got the access to read it, not to have it. Whilst the book she snatch from the Books Burning event is definitely restricted without anything else to be compromised.

In Williams and Zenger's study, practicing literacy can be potentially dangerous. First, literacy is dangerous if the readers fail to interpret the text and then it leads to failure actions or even fatal blunders (105). The second is when the readers read forbidden documents that lead to some dangerous effects (111). The last is a fraud author, who makes up stories, plagiarizes other authors, and causes havoc to the readers (112). The danger of Liesel Meminger is because she does not have access to own the books while she has no right to do such thing. The dangerous texts may lead her to a very serious problem.

From seeing through the motifs of each thievery takes place in both the venue of book burning night, and Ilsa Hermann's library, there is a thread that links both of them as one. When Liesel gets the first thrill of stealing, The Nazi leader lets her down. On the venue of books burning event, Liesel is really angry because she is humiliated. A Nazi indirectly addresses her parents as he says communist while he burns the trace of the books of the "Un-German" groups which the *Kommunist* also belongs in. She even gets nausea for thinking about it. With Ilsa Hermann, she feels the humiliation once again, even cumulated with the feeling of betrayal.

"Grimly, she realized that clocks don't make a sound that even remotely resembles ticking, tocking. It was more the sound of a hammer, upside down, hacking methodically at the earth. It was the sound of a grave. If only mine was ready now, she thought—because Liesel Meminger, at that moment, wanted to die. When the others had canceled, it hadn't hurt so much. There was always the mayor, his library, and her connection with his wife. Also, this was the last one, the last hope, gone. This time, it felt like the greatest betrayal. (281)"

Both at Ilsa's library and at the venue of books burning event, Liesel has got the power to do the thieveries because of the oppression, from the humiliation by the authorities who take control over people like her. Feeling ashamed and humiliated, Liesel engage in the phase of humiliation fury, a form of rage happens after the shame. Liesel has done the fury to Ilsa Hermann, however, she is helpless to do such a thing to the Nazi regime, but she feels triumphant after the stealing. The

humiliation fury, according to a practitioner in humiliation studies can "distort reality and lead to counterproductive actions, such as searching for scapegoats (Lacey 34)."

Another humiliation practitioner states that "The next stage is likely to involve rage and a desire to lash out and seek revenge (Leask 136)." Reaction that Liesel gives to certain problems related to the humiliation leads her to find scapegoats and revenge. When Liesel gets fury, she humiliates Ilsa back. As she thinks again, she seeks for revenge. It is such a relief that Liesel is empowered from the furies and she runs to books stealing rather than to any other malice that may bring her to more thrilling difficulties. When Rudy Steiner asks Liesel about how she feels when stealing books, Liesel does not answer it. "If he wanted an answer, he'd have to come back and he did. 'Well?' But again, it was Rudy who answered, before Liesel could even open her mouth. 'It feels good, doesn't it? To steal something back (513)."

From the quotation above, Rudy's answer is therefore the truth of what Liesel has been through all the years of humiliation, pain, and her motifs in thievery has already revealed. From the beginning, all of her family members have been taken away from her and she automatically becomes the only survival. She gets the first humiliation back then when she was an illiterate person; the second is from the Nazi, and Hitler as the ruler; and the third is from Ilsa Hermann who cuts her foster parents' income by stop hiring Rosa, stop giving them money they need the most in the hard time during the years of war. Stealing books, for Liesel Meminger, is not merely to steal something back, more than that; it is also because of the power she gains from every humiliation she gets from her surroundings. Thus, the acts that Liesel Meminger do after knowing the causes and her reactions, and how she turns to books rather than doing any other act of destruction, it is certain that Liesel has already empowered with her immersion in literacy.

According to Stromquist (2), empowerment in literacy is understood as 'the set of feelings, knowledge, and skills that produce the ability to participate in one's social environment.' Empowerment, she added, is assessed indirectly by 'documenting feelings and perceptions, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy'. Liesel has always been aware of any kinds of humiliation that makes her to push herself, up to the turning point of Liesel's power which is to bring Ilsa down. Through Liesel's point of view she understands that humiliation and betrayal must be counter-attacked no matter what class her opponent belongs to, or what the position of her opponent is. If seen from Liesel's position, she is supposed to be in the lower class than Ilsa Hermann. However, as she gains power from the humiliation released in the form of humiliated fury, she can feel that the power of Ilsa



Hermann as a higher class member is nothing. She has already absorbed the power from her self-esteem and self-confidence, knowing that her identity as someone in the lower class has nothing to do with her dignity as a human.

### Mein Kampf and its Representations

*Mein Kampf* is considered as a powerful book, ideologically strong, and consists of the goals and aims of German as a country and nation. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is influential. By 1939 it has been sold for five million copies (Caspar 7). It is so powerful while many other books are banned and burnt as they are considered as dangerous to read by the Germans. Baldur Von Schirach, a Nazi poet, declared that "there was only one essential book, *Mein Kampf*, from which all strength would flow for the struggle for Germany (Bendersky 117)." *Mein Kampf* itself is also considered dangerous. Hitler personally speaks his thoughts straightforwardly and it is also filled with propagandas (Pauley 112; Stout 2). Hitler's propaganda is considered dangerous because it is preserved under the power of authority. Stanley argued that there is an official ministry of propaganda for totalitarianism society, thus it has to be taken seriously (Stanley 47).

In the society where the authority works and takes control, it is impossible to not granting it as an ideology that everyone should obey. The danger of not obeying the propaganda, thus, is a serious matter in that society. Moreover, Hitler's propaganda is spread through all aspects of German's people's life. It is firmly organized as a massive action in order to control the public, especially public's media and entertainment, including the journalism, film, film censorship, music, fine arts and people's culture (Stout 13). The aim of Hitler and his Nazis propaganda is to exterminate the Jews from Europe (Herf 1). The authorship and power that let Hitler to control German people's lives is also reflected in the story, bringing up with several events which are remarkable and related to *Mein Kampf* and the characters as the sample of society in *The Book Thief*.

The characters in *The Book Thief* see *Mein Kampf* in different perspectives. It is obviously can be recognized by how the characters deals with the book. There are two characters which have different identity, and live their lives as a Nazi soldier and a Jew. Each character has different roles, and each of them belongs to different social position. The power gap between those two characters is huge, considering one person is embracing and serving the dominant authority while the other is a powerless, marginalized Jew. First, on page 113 the novel brings up *Mein Kampf* as the topic where there is also the first Nazi character appears, with Liesel and Hans Hubermann. Still, the main character which is going to be

analyzed is the Nazi soldier. The character is Hans Junior, the only son of Hans Hubermann. Hans Junior's devotion to Nazi party is the strongest in the Hubermann's family. He does not acknowledge his father, despising him for not being a Nazi just like him.

"In the opinion of Hans Junior, his father was part of an old, decrepit Germany—one that allowed everyone else to take it for the proverbial ride while its own people suffered. As a teenager, he was aware that his father had been called "Der Fuden Maler"—the Jew painter—for painting Jewish houses...Everyone knew you weren't supposed to paint over slurs written on a Jewish shop front. Such behavior was bad for Germany, and it was bad for the transgressor (112)."

His mindset about the nation has always been different with his father since he was a teenager. Now that he has already been a Nazi, he becomes fanatic. When he takes a look at Liesel reading her books, he says, "And what trash is this girl reading? She should be reading '*Mein Kampf*' (113)." When Hans shows a signal that he is disagree with him, Hans Junior answers back, "You're either for the Führer or against him—and I can see that you're against him. You always have been...It's pathetic—how a man can stand by and do nothing as a whole nation cleans out the garbage and makes itself great."

What can be understood from Hans Junior's perspective is that, he does not value books, except *Mein Kampf*. Others are just at the same position as trash. Related to the type of the texts appear on the event, 'trash' and '*Mein Kampf*' carry meaning that there is a power gap between the two, in which *Mein Kampf* is more powerful than the others. Hans Junior's attitude towards those books is also noted here. As someone who stands for a party, exaggerating about the organization and of course influencing others to have the same perspective are the proper behavior. Besides, according to the history, it is a must to have loyalty, and many of those who are devoted in his Nazism "had an almost religious devotion to and faith in the *Führer* they came to regard as their savior (Bendersky 36)." Regarding its connection with the literacy event above is that Hans Junior, with his knowledge and his ideology of Nazism, recommends *Mein Kampf* for an eleven year-old girl.

Moreover, Hans Junior also attempts to spread the propaganda, a tool Hitler do as well to raise the power of Nazi through. Since Hans Junior promotes the book of propaganda, it means that he accepts it as propaganda. According to Stout, paraphrasing Hitler in '*Mein Kampf*', propaganda should be used in order to control the population as the mass media conveys propaganda messages for people to easily accept, respond, demonizing German's enemies and offering loyalty to Hitler (2). Stout added that the propaganda is used to "maintain public

morale and to maintain the troops' morale" (4). One of the morale maintaining examples is stated in Stout's thesis. "Propaganda played its role in holding the soldiers together, instilling a hatred for the Russians that fostered solidarity in the ranks (4)." It conveys meaning that for a Nazi troop to hate those who stand against Hitler is a part of the propaganda that Hitler's spread during the Second World War. Hans Junior, as a Nazi conveys the result of morale maintaining in the house by standing against his father, he recommends Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and, as to maintain public hatred, he calls other books as trash. However, based on what Stout has claimed, elaborated with how Hans perceives *Mein Kampf* is that the propaganda in *Mein Kampf* is used to spread power over the Germans.

Max carries Hitler's "*Mein Kampf*" He brings it from Stuttgart (171) to Himmel Street, as if he were an ordinary German with the book. Actually, Max uses the book to undercover. "It was November 3, and the floor of the train held on to his feet. In front of him, he read from the copy of *Mein Kampf*. His savior (170)... For most of the journey, he made his way through the book, trying never to look up (173)." The book is actually a gift from Hans Hubermann for him in a hope that the book can make his journey from Stuttgart to Himmel Street in Munich safe, and it works for him. Despite *Mein Kampf*'s role as a savior, Max's attitude toward it is complicated. First, Max happens to taste a bitter truth about him and the book. Hitler and his Nazi corps force Max and his people to diminish from the country, but ironically, it is also Hitler himself who keeps him safe, through his book. "The words lolled about in his mouth... strangely, as he turned the pages and progressed through the chapters, it was only two words he ever tasted...*Mein Kampf*. Of all the things to safe him (173)."

Max thinks that reading *Mein Kampf* on the moving train is ironic. But, in the Hubermann's basement, he reads it as his identity is accepted in the family. Although the motif is not clear, whether Max reads for killing the time, or he just reads it because he wants to, or any other motifs beyond that, the narrator tells about how Max is seen reading it, which turns out to be five times after his arrival. It is a great number of readings by someone who hates a book in particular. In the beginning, Max cannot bear its appearance around in his life, but as the time goes by, he can do nothing but accept it as the way it is for the book is the only hope he can have to pass the risky journey from Stuttgart to Munich at least to cover his true identity as a Jew. It is more than just luck for a Jew who can surpass the dangerous German streets just by carrying *Mein Kampf*.

However, despite Max's acceptance, '*Mein Kampf*' eventually transforms into sketchbook in Max's hand.

Max covers Hitler's writings with a layer of paint so that he can write about his random thoughts (299). In the novel, it is stated that "it was writing and painting itself into the life of Max Vandenburg. In his loneliest moments in the basement, the words started piling up around him (299)." He writes stories "about everything that had happened to him—all that had led him into Himmel Street basement (299)" and ends up becoming "a collection of random thoughts and he chose to embrace them (299)." "The desecrated pages of *Mein Kampf* were becoming a series of sketches, page after page, which to him summed up the events that had swapped his former life for another (300)."

In the power relations between Max and *Mein Kampf*, there is trace of shift of *Mein Kampf*'s power in the process. It is all started from Max carries *Mein Kampf* in order to disguise himself. The power of *Mein Kampf* is still absolute that he just can get through the high-risk journey safely only by reading it and he change his identity as an ordinary German man who read *Mein Kampf*. Despite Max's perspective about the book, he actually gains power as his identity as a Jew is accepted in the Hubermanns' household, means that he feels safe and does not feel threatened. By initiating the painting of *Mein Kampf*, it should have meanings beyond it. By putting a layer of white paint on each page, it means that Max resists all the words of the Führer, all the ideologies, and of course all the thoughts of Hitler. This is a symbol that Max wants to stand against it. His people are accused for being the disease of the country, and he himself shows his anger towards the Führer. Therefore, he despises it, and he replaces all those words into his sketches and his random thoughts. In this case, Max is resisting the existence of *Mein Kampf* by changing its content. In power relations, resistance is known as the companion, juxtaposed with the existence of power itself. Michel Foucault emphasizes that "where is power, there is resistance (Falzon, O'Leary and Sawicki 309)."

Foucault does not guarantee that the resistance is the solution to win, even though there are always confrontations to power, it is a strategy in the conditions where there are power relations (309). In Max case, his resistance is used against the power that is embedded in *Mein Kampf* by expanding his thoughts into creative writings. Falzon, O'Leary and Sawicki added that, Foucault extended the practice of resistance as a practice to freedom (315). Those writings and sketches during his loneliness inside the basement tell that Max wants to be free from what secluded him from the world. Seen from the first sketches where he thinks about changing the Führer's salutation addressed to Nazis to the salutation before conducting a band. The second is scarier than the first. Max imagination creates a visualization of Nazi

troops defeated by him and Liesel. Another sign that Max's sketchbook is a manifestation of his wanting to be free is that he wants to "give it to Liesel, when she was old enough and, hopefully, when all this nonsense was over (300)."

Max's resistance is a success, at least in the eyes of Liesel Meminger. He eventually can give the book to Liesel when he leaves the house (473). *The Word Shaker* is a sign of Max's resistance which successfully influences Liesel Meminger. His imagination of the tree of friendship planted by a girl who befriends a Jewish young man, "a young man who was despised by her homeland even though he was born in it (476)," makes a long-lasting impression to Liesel because the tree destroys the Führer words of hatred. Even though the word choices are not as fierce as in '*Mein Kampf*', it can be very persuasive for a twelve year-old girl to perceive Hitler's position, because the story is about the girl and the young man, against The Führer.

The first time Liesel reads the story, "she dreamed about the tree (481)." The more and more she reads, the more she understands that words can be so powerful if it is used in some ways. She even comes to a conclusion that "...without words, the Führer is nothing. There would be no limping prisoners, no need for consolation or wordly tricks to make us feel better (553)." It is obvious that the 'wordly tricks' means is the propaganda that Hitler spreads, in which '*Mein Kampf*' is one of the medias he used. Liesel has understood the way Hitler thinks, and after she reads '*The Words Shaker*' she is more aware of the words and how words can be powerful either be used to make people feel better or to bring destruction to some people.

## CONCLUSION

Literacy in '*The Book Thief*' distinguishes the attitudes of different characters with various types of texts which can be perceived by the readers as it offers various representations that address power. The result is that '*The Book Thief*', with its *Power of Words* distributes the notions of power in different forms depicted in each of the literacy event as well as the notions about who are in the dominant position or who are in the subordinate. This chapter is going to reveal the answers to the problems stated on the first chapter of this study: First, what are the literacy events in *The Book Thief* and second, how are those literacy events represented as power. As both of the problems are closely related, each of the events is elaborated with the answer of the latter problem.

In the first event, books burning night, the notion of power deals with several participants, the Nazi Germans – the books – Liesel Meminger. The dominant authority is the Nazi German which is the executant of burning event;

the crowds are the supporting participants of the event; whilst Liesel Meminger is in the subordinate position. The notions of power in this event are analyzed by Janks' theory on domination and access. The Nazi who have authority restricts the access to the books burnt in order to maintain the dominant form, instead of giving access because the Nazis value the books as trash the Germans perspective toward the books burning event is not about marginalization of the access but as the sign to celebrate the new era of Germany. The marginalized one is Liesel Meminger whose access to the dominant form is restricted as she identifies herself as the enemy for she is the daughter of a communist father.

The power that is carried by the Nazi turns out to take control over someone who loves book, Liesel Meminger, through humiliation that is addressed to her *kommunist* parents. However, it does not stop Liesel Meminger to merely accept the humiliation. She digests the words of the Nazi leader on the event, and then when it ends, she executes her anger toward Hitler and manifested in the first book thievery she has ever committed. Liesel snatch a damped book under the ashes as she is still angry with Hitler who torn her family apart.

The reason of the risky behavior of Liesel Meminger is explained as humiliated fury, where someone is able to go beyond their capacity to have a scapegoat, or to take revenge post-humiliation. That humiliated fury empowers Liesel to go beyond the rules and snatch a book. Liesel then involves in book thieveries, which also happens as the manifestation of humiliated fury which empowers her. Liesel never gets the temptation to snatch any books until the day she is humiliated by Ilsa Hermann. The condition is similar to the previous thievery, but here she can even flip the power gap between the two as Liesel can counterattack the humiliation, with the power of words.

The third events are related to the events which involve *Mein Kampf* as the artefact, or the text used in the literacy events. The result of the analysis reveals how the text can give several interpretations of power relations by different characters. First is the Nazi's attitude towards *Mein Kampf*. As the Nazi has been devoted to Hitler, they make Hitler as the only one who has absolute power, and they must blow on the propaganda. In the *Book Thief* *Mein Kampf* also becomes the powerful one in the novel.

There is one Nazi character which part is adequate to observe. In his opinion, '*Mein Kampf*' should be read by an eleven year-old, and for the less powerful ones, he calls them as trash. Max Vandenburg, which position belongs to the subordinate, he sees *Mein Kampf* as a dangerous propaganda. However, it turns out that this powerful ideology carried by the book not only invites the approval from some others as it is spread as propaganda, but also invites the signs of resistance from the other. In this novel,



the obvious resistance comes from Max Vandenburg as explained below.

For the last analysis is about the literacy event happens between Max Vandenburg and *Mein Kampf*. In the beginning, Max, without any other option, endures himself to disguise, with *Mein Kampf* as the 'mask'. For days, Max reads it. He slowly can accept its existence around him. As the story unfolds, the power of *Mein Kampf* continuously fades away as Max covers page by page with white paints, removing all those hatred words away. *Mein Kampf*'s power has totally dissolved as Max resists all powers, ideologies, and propaganda of the Führer by writing on the pages of the former *Mein Kampf* with his own random thoughts and story.

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