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COLOR SYMBOLISM AND ITS LINGUISTIC REALIZATION IN MARKUS ZUSAK'S NOVEL "THE BOOK THIEF"

The relevance of this study is influenced by the growing interest in modern linguistics and literary studies in the interpretation of literary texts in the context of symbolism as a key means of expressing the author's intention. Markus Zusak's novel "The Book Thief" stands as one of the most significant works of contemporary world literature, however, despite its wide academic recognition, the novel's symbolic system and the means of its linguistic realization remain insufficiently explored.

The purpose of the research is to analyze the color symbolism in Markus Zusak's novel "The Book Thief" and its linguistic expression in the text, as well as to determine the role of colors in conveying the narrator's perception and the emotional atmosphere of the novel.

Markus Zusak is an Australian writer, the author who is famous for his bestsellers "The Book Thief", "The Messenger". In "The Book Thief", the events take place in Nazi Germany between 1939 and 1943, centering on the life of a teenage girl, Liesel Meminger, who was transferred to the foster family of Hans and Rosa Hubermann after the loss of her family. Published in 2005, the novel tells the story about "a girl, some words, an accordionist, some fanatical Germans, a Jewish fist-fighter and quite a lot of thievery" [3, p. 6].

The unique feature of this novel is the choice of the narrator, Death, being not only a metaphorical creature, but also an observer with a synesthetic worldview. It describes people through complex system of different colors, tastes, and sounds. Synesthesia is a

stylistic device that combines or mixes different sensory images, allowing one sense to be described in terms of another [2]. Linguistically, this image is realized through metaphors that de-heroize Death, presenting it as an overworked entity, “*haunted by humans*” [3, p. 584]. The readers see it as a vulnerable creature getting tired of its endless job, especially in the times of World War II.

One of the most distinctive features of the novel is the use of color metaphors that function as a psychological mechanism for the narrator. Metaphor denotes expressive renaming based on likeness, similarity or affinity (real or imaginary) of some features of two different objects [1, p. 97-98]. At the beginning of the story, Death starts its narrative using colors as an element of distraction from its tragic work and routine: “*First the colors. Then the humans. That’s usually how I see things*” [3, p. 3]. The narrator further emphasizes on how he copes with the capturing of human’s souls by saying: “*I holiday in increments. In colors*” [3, p. 5]. Moreover, colors are not only descriptive elements, but also a way for Death to distance itself from the burden of witnessing death.

Each of the episodes in the Prologue is associated with a dominant color that has a symbolic meaning. For example, in the episode “Death and Chocolate”, we see how Markus Zusak combines metaphors with antithesis. Antithesis is the expression of opposing or contrasting ideas laid out in a parallel structure [1, p. 118]. Death says: “*Personally, I like a **chocolate-colored** sky. Dark, dark **chocolate***” [3, p. 4] which immediately emphasizes the contrast between death (a tragic event), and the chocolate (something sweet that brings joy to people). Moreover, it refers to the moments of calmness and inner harmony of Death.

The author uses synesthesia, when colors description is not entirely visual, but also contains texture, action, and mood, for example, “*A single hour can consist of thousands of different colors. Waxy **yellows**, cloud-spat blues. Murky darknesses. In my line of work, I make it a point to notice them*” [3, p. 5].

When Death is carrying the soul of Liesel’s little brother, the sky is described as “*First up is something **white**. Of the blinding kind*” [3, p. 7] and “*I studied the blinding, **white-snow** sky who stood at the window of the moving train*” [3, p. 8]. White represents the innocence of Liesel’s brother and the shock of his death during the train ride.

Further in the text, after the fall of the American pilot, the sky “*was beginning to **charcoal***” [3, p. 11] meaning that Death was in the doom and darkness because of mass loss of people. The “*signature **black***”, “*the **darkest** moment before the dawn*” [3, p. 10] represent death and last moments of life. Another example from the text, “*What was left of the **blackness** above was nothing now but a scribble, and disappearing fast*” [3, p. 11] emphasizes instability and disintegration caused by war.

While describing the fallen men, the narrator uses color-based metaphors and similes to point out dehumanization and the proximity to death. For example, phrases like “*the color of bone*” and “*skeleton-colored skin*” [3, p. 11] directly encourage to associate the man with the death, to make readers think about him as a lifeless object, not as a human. The author uses simile to describe the state of an American pilot, his

emptiness, and dullness: “*His eyes were cold and **brown** – like coffee stains and the last scrawl from above formed what, to me, appeared an odd, yet familiar, shape*” [3, p. 11].

Another significant color is red, for example, “*The sky was like soup, boiling and stirring. In some places, it was burned. There were black crumbs, and pepper, streaked across the **redness***” [3, p. 13]. The red color red fully represents all the violence, destruction, and blood that war has brought, causing havoc and turmoil. Moreover, irony and antithesis are used to show contrast between domestic, yet ordinary aspects of everyday life and the scenes of devastation: “*Yes, the sky was now a devastating, home-cooked **red***” [3, p. 13].

The three main colors – white, black and red – prove to be symbolic in the novel. Death explains how these three colors interact: “*They fall on top of each other. The scribbled signature **black**, onto the blinding global **white**, onto the thick soupy **red***” [3, p. 15] making the Nazi flag. By layering these colors, Markus Zusak directs the readers into looking for the symbol of the Nazi ideology, destruction, and human suffering. Moreover, he points out how war shapes the characters’ lives.

However, in the epilogue of “The Book Thief”, the narrator comes to a peaceful conclusion with the color blue. By the end of the book Liesel has lived a calmer life and when her final moment has come, she has just passed out as an old ordinary woman. Death talks about this moment of quiet and peace, describing “*the sky was the best **blue** of afternoon*” [3, p. 577]. This color symbolizes liberation, representing Liesel’s escape from the horrific war, as well as fulfilment, showing the long life she was able to live.

In conclusion, color symbolism in “The Book Thief” plays a crucial role in defining the shape and style of the narrative. Color metaphors serve as a powerful linguistic tool completely involving readers into the atmosphere and emotional landscape of the book. Markus Zusak uses white, black, and red to process the horrors of Nazi Germany as well as show the tragedy of war, whereas blue represents liberty and peace at the end of Liesel’s life. The linguistic realization of these colors allows the author not only to reflect on the historical events but also share human experience and memory.

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