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A DIMENSÃO ESPACIAL EM A MENINA QUE ROUBAVA LIVROS: UMA PERSPECTIVA NARRATOLÓGICA

THE SPATIAL DIMENSION IN *THE BOOK THIEF*: A NARRATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Débora Almeida de Oliveira¹¹

RESUMO: O presente artigo objetiva analisar a dimensão espacial na obra *A Menina que Roubava Livros*, de Markus Zusak. Com base nas premissas narratológicas presentes nos estudos de Irene de Jong e Mieke Bal, este artigo discute o espaço do narrador, o espaço narrado e as funções do espaço no romance de Zusak. O narrador da obra ocupa uma posição espacial singular já que ele é a personificação da morte; portanto, a análise dos elementos espaciais nesse livro é relevante devido à natureza sobrenatural do narrador.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Narratologia; Espaço do narrador; Espaço narrado; Funções do Espaço.

ABSTRACT: The present article aims at analyzing the spatial dimension in the work *The Book Thief*, by Markus Zusak. Based on the narratological assumptions present in the studies of Irene de Jong and Mieke Bal, this article discusses the narrator's space, the narrated space and the functions of space in the novel by Zusak. The narrator of the book occupies a singular spatial position since it is the personification of death, therefore, the analysis of the spatial elements in this book is relevant due to the supernatural nature of the narrator.

KEYWORDS: Narratology; Narrator's Space; Narrated Space; Functions of space.

1. Introduction

Reading a narrative is diving into a fictional world with its own spatial structure, loaded with its own significance. Although space has been commonly regarded either as just the background of the plot or static descriptions that slow down the rhythm of the narrative, spatial circumstances are an essential key for the narratee to perceive possible meanings that lie within the text. Knowledge regarding the *where* of the narrative helps the narratee build the mental images of what is read and, according to the narrative strategies used for narrating space, the effect produced by spatial information will hugely differ. As Bal exemplifies:

Narrative is a form of place-making. The link between beauty and pleasure, horror and displeasure, necessitates description. The topos of the *locus amoenus* turns a sweet landscape into a solicitation of eroticism: the love story can begin. Writers averse to this sweetness come up with an alternative. However, all they can do is reverse it and, thus, the romantic *locus terribilis* is born. (BAL, 2007, p. 375 – 376)

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There have been many spatial concepts developed in the field of narrative theory, from the literal one (accounting for physical environment) to metaphorical ones (like mental spaces). The author whose definition guides the present analysis is Jong, when she states that “space is here understood in the broad sense of the setting of the action of a story, other localities that are referred to (e.g. as part of dreams or reports), and the objects that fill that space as ‘props’” (JONG, 2014, p. 105). The author continues by saying that “a narrative text may address not only the space of the events but also the space of the narrator (at the moment of narration)” (JONG, 2014, p. 106).

2. The Narrator’s Space in *The Book Thief*.

The Book Thief presents the story of Liesel Meminger, a young German girl who spends her childhood in a poor fictitious town after having being adopted by a couple who hides a Jewish man in their basement. Liesel’s life is narrated by a very peculiar narrator: Death, which is personified as an invisible entity collecting the souls of those who pass away. Death, interested in Liesel’s trajectory, narrates her experiences as a girl living a double life. In public, she is a common Nazi citizen. At home, her best friend is a Jewish young man. The narrator (referred to as a male figure) watches mankind and gives his opinions on the matter of war, closely paying attention to all the good and evil human beings are able to do. At the end of the narrative, Death interacts with Liesel when he finally comes for her, functioning also as a character in the story.

The space of the narrator may be divided according to three levels in the narrative. First, when he functions as an extradiegetic narrator, telling a story he has witnessed in some moment of his eternal existence, no specific space is determined. As he is Death personified, it is expected some omniscience that would allow him to occupy any space at any time, or even all spaces at the same time. The space where Death is during the narration, as it is never mentioned, depends exclusively on the interpretation of the narratee and his personal construct about death as a fact of life. It is possible to infer *when* (after the events took place), but not possible to clearly infer *where* (especially because he is death, a bodiless entity, not a person that occupies a space in time). This literary technique of leaving the space to be interpreted is not totally new; however. The fundamental role of the narratee (the imaginary ideal reader/listener which interacts with the narrator) to fill in the gaps left by the narrative is explained by Jong when she speaks about the descriptions of spaces in literature:

Whether space is described in abundance or sparingly, narratologists agree it can never be presented in a narrative text in its totality: the narratees are offered a mere selection of details. The narrative evocation of space, therefore, always requires active cooperation on the part of the narratees. They are asked to summon the implications of “Paris” or “a dark wood” from their own memory” (JONG, 2014, p. 106)

Not mentioning the space of the narrator at the moment of the narration opens possibilities of interpretation in *The Book Thief*. The narratee, therefore, is not bound by philosophical, religious or cultural restrictions imposed by the text through space hints that would delimit his view. The second space that must be considered is the space occupied by the narrator as internal character. Therefore, it is possible to identify two

main kinds of environments in this level of the narrative: the settings where Death met Liesel or any of her acquaintances and the setting where Death performed his job as a soul collector not directly involving Liesel's familiar world. The following extract summarizes Death's wandering around Earth and reveals the main scenario where the events with respect to Liesel take place.

For two days, I went about my business. I traveled the globe as always, handing souls to the conveyor belt of eternity. I watched them trundle passively on. Several times, I warned myself that I should keep a good distance from the burial of Liesel Meminger's brother. I did not heed my advice. From miles away, as I approached, I could already see the small group of humans standing frigidly among the wasteland of snow. The cemetery welcomed me like a friend, and soon, I was with them. I bowed my head. Quite a way beyond the outskirts of Munich, there was a town called Molching, said best by the likes of you and me as "Molking." That's where they were taking her, to a street by the name of Himmel.

***** A TRANSLATION *****

***Himmel* = Heaven**

Whoever named Himmel Street certainly had a healthy sense of irony. Not that it was a living hell. It wasn't. But it sure as hell wasn't heaven, either. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 26)

Maybe one could argue that this reference to Munich, Molching and Himmel Street is related only to the narrated space (the space of the events), and that Death knows about these spaces due to his reading of Liesel's diary. Nevertheless, he is inserted in this *locus* as he unfolds his memories and shows he visited Liesel's town more than once; as he almost took Max away when the man was sick (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 317), and he also came for its inhabitants during the air raid that destroyed the poor part of Molching, leaving Liesel alive. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 498)

Despite reading Liesel's memories, making allusion to her space, the narrator adds his own memories about places where he had been while Liesel and her friends were living their lives. The most revealing passages are the three death's diaries in Chapter VI, which are inserted in Liesel's narrative, when Death stops the reading of Liesel's book and speaks about his job, indicating the spaces he was in. The first one receives the title "Death's Diary: 1942" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 307). Even though he is focusing on a date, he complains about his never ending journeys in times of war while giving the narratee some brief indication of his space: "There were certainly some rounds to be made that year, from Poland to Russia to Africa and back again" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 308). His complaint is made clear little later when he gives new spatial indication: "In all honesty (and I know I'm complaining excessively now), I was still getting over Stalin, in Russia. The so-called *second revolution* – the murder of his own people. Then came Hitler. (...) To me, war is like the new boss who expects the impossible" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 309). In the second diary, which gives title to another subsection of chapter VI; he speaks again about his presence at a war site:

***** DEATH'S DIARY: COLOGNE *****

The fallen hours of May 30. I'm sure Liesel Meminger was fast asleep when more than a thousand bomber planes flew toward a place known as Köln. For me, the result was five hundred people or thereabouts. (...) There were

several more places to go, skies to meet and souls to collect, (...) (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 336)

The third diary Death introduces to the narratee follows the same principle in structure, giving title to the subsection, and in content, presenting Death still amazed by the human capacity for murdering. Again, he also provides spatial indications of his whereabouts that require the narratee to picture the whole scene according to his historical knowledge:

***** DEATH'S DIARY: THE PARISIANS *****

Summer came. For the book thief, everything was going nicely. For me, the sky was the color of Jews. (...) I'll never forget the first day in Auschwitz, the first time in Mauthausen. (...) Smoky sky in those places. The smell like a stove, but still so cold. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 349)

Consequently, the narrator introduces multiple plots that have their own spaces. The construction of multiple spaces, in this case, is important for guiding the narratee through the change of plots and, at the same time, expanding the space of the story, whose totality is seen as the multiple pieces of space description come together. On this matter Bridgeman stated: "As a basic mechanism of reading, in texts which develop more than one plot-line at once, location allows us to identify rapidly a return to an already-established ongoing scene" (BRIDGEMAN, 2007, p. 56). Finally, the third space occupied by the narrator in *The Book Thief* happens to be indicated after Death finished reading Liesel's book, many years after the events narrated by her when she was a child. At her final moment, when she is an old lady with a big family, Death goes to Sydney, Australia, and keeps a real interaction with Liesel:

Yes, I have seen a great many things in this world. I attend the greatest disasters and work for the greatest villains. But then there are other moments. There's a multitude of stories (a mere handful, as I have previously suggested) that I allow to distract me as I work, just as the colors do. I pick them up in the unluckiest, unlikeliest places and I make sure to remember them as I go about my work. *The Book Thief* is one such story. When I traveled to Sydney and took Liesel away, I was finally able to do something I'd been waiting on for a long time. I put her down and we walked along Anzac Avenue, near the soccer field, and I pulled a dusty black book from my pocket. The old woman was astonished. She took it in her hand and said, "Is this really it?" I nodded. With great trepidation, she opened *The Book Thief* and turned the pages. "I can't believe . . ." Even though the text had faded, she was able to read her words. The fingers of her soul touched the story that was written so long ago in her Himmel Street basement. She sat down on the curb, and I joined her. "Did you read it?" she asked, but she did not look at me. Her eyes were fixed to the words. I nodded. "Many times" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 549 – 550)

Before finishing the discussion on the narrator's space in this section, it is important to pay attention to the fact that Death, even not providing elements to determine his position at the moment of the narration, subtly says in the previous passage that he picks stories to read "in the unluckiest, unluckiest places". Again, it is up to the narratee to decide if the reading of *The Book Thief* is happening in such a space.

3. Narrated Space

The narrated space, being the general spatiality where events happen, may be described through full details or through scarce indications. From a broad perspective the macro space where the events take place in *The Book Thief* is Germany, at the height of the Nazi regime. The specific setting related to the plot is 33 Himmel Street, a street in the fictitious and poor small town of Molching. Bathed by the Amper River, on the outskirts of Munich, Molching is located on the way to the Dachau concentration camp. Now and then the narrator also mentions places related to war contexts, like Russia, Poland, Africa, France and England. Although such localities are not the stage for the actions performed by the protagonist, they are still important for extending the panoramic view on the setting that composes the Second World War. The inscription of the narrative in real spaces (Germany, Munich, Amper River, Dachau, as well as other countries) illustrates how the narratee is required to complete the scenery with his own imagination, as they are just presented by the narrator and do not receive any description. About that, Jong says: “By referring to a real place (...) the narrator anchors the setting of his narrative in real geography with which his narratees would be familiar” (JONG, 2014, p. 108).

Normally the space in *The Book Thief* is introduced by the narrator focalizer (the one who perceives the narrative), who displays panoramic shots of open landscapes as well as limited views of inner spaces, like house interiors, for instance. These space indications may appear within the narrative as the object of description or during the narration of events when the action calls for it. However, in none of the situations the rhythm of the narrative slows down by long and detailed spatial descriptions. Brief in length and summarized in content, space descriptions in *The Book Thief* become an integral part of the story, providing important symbolic meanings to the narrative. For Bridgeman (2007, p. 55), “objective spatial relationships between aspects of a narrative are helpful in enabling readers to visualize its contents, but equally important, here, is the way in which characters inhabit the space of their world both socially and psychologically.” Indeed, by presenting space as an object of reflection, the narrator manages to construct a more complex narrative world. One example is the description of Himmel Street, main stage for the crucial events that happen in Liesel’s life. After informing the narratee that Himmel means heaven, (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 26), the narrator provides a second brief description about Himmel Street highlighted by centered bold letters and rich in significance.

***** A PHOTO OF HIMMEL STREET *****

**The buildings appear to be glued together, mostly small houses
and apartment blocks that look nervous.**

There is murky snow spread out like carpet.

There is concrete, empty hat-stand trees, and gray air.

(ZUSAK, 2007, p. 27)

It is interesting to notice that the narrator proposes to describe a photo, dedicating four short lines to create an image of the poor neighborhood. The sentence “The buildings that appear to be glued together” reveals an oppressing connotation. It expresses the extreme financial difficulties of its people. When Liesel’s family conceal

a Jew; the presence of so many people in such close proximity also becomes a danger to the Hubermanns, who must be always cautious when opening their curtains. Aside that, the description of the climate, shown through expressions like “murky snow” and “gray air” reinforce the oppressing situation of the Hubermanns, who need to protect their Jew friend from the cold (although not having enough blankets) and consequent diseases, as he spends most of his time hiding in the basement. Later in the narrative, the narrator provides the last description of Himmel Street. This time it is declared: “On the whole, it was a street filled with relatively poor people, despite the apparent rise of Germany’s economy under Hitler. Poor sides of town still existed. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 46). Not only does the narrator emphasize the misery of Himmel’s inhabitants but he also makes a judgment on the social organization of Germany, attaching more meaning to the space description by showing the huge contrast between the German citizens. This spatial description technique, not centered on physical explanation, characterizes space not through physical traces, but through actions, events and characters located next to it.

Not tired of emphasizing the poor condition of the neighborhood where Liesel is sent to be adopted, the narrator shifts his gaze from Himmel Street and directs it toward Liesel’s new home; the Hubermann’s house. The previous description of the neighborhood is completed by the description of the house. Their connection form a panorama explained as it follows: “some locations need to be precisely situated with respect to each other because they are the stage of events that involve space in a strategic way” (RYAN, 2009, p. 428). Here, space description is used in a way that foresees future events, as great attention is paid to the basement and how unfit it would prove to be against air raids.

The Hubermanns lived in one of the small, boxlike houses on Himmel Street. A few rooms, a kitchen, and a shared outhouse with neighbors. The roof was flat and there was a shallow basement for storage. It was supposedly not a basement of *adequate depth*. In 1939, this wasn’t a problem. Later, in ’42 and ’43, it was. When air raids started, they always needed to rush down the street to a better shelter. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 32)

Indeed, while the narrative is developed, the basement will be set as the major space which will serve as stage for the most important events concerning Liesel and her family, as Max will be hiding there. The ironic fact regarding the previous passage is that although not considered proper for the protection against bombs, the basement resisted an air raid and Liesel, reading there when the first bombs fell on Himmel Street, managed to survive. In fact, since Max’s arrival, the basement receives great attention from the narrator, who sprinkles indications of its conditions (if painted, if cold, if having objects) all over the text. There are only two more spaces in *The Book Thief* which are granted with more details, including all the objects that fill it in. The descriptions of spatial objects include the kitchen, being Rosa Hubermann’s domain, and the library at the mayor’s house, being Liesel’s space of acquired literacy knowledge. All the other houses, even when focalized from the inside, do not receive too much attention to their inner objects. On this matter Bal (1997, p. 135) says:

The filling in of space is determined by the objects that can be found in that space. Objects have spatial status. They determine the spatial effect of the room by their shape, measurements, and colours (...) The way in which objects are arranged in a space, the configuration of objects, also influences the perception of that space. In some stories, an object or objects are

sometimes presented in detail. In other stories, space may be presented in a vague and implicit manner. (BAL, 1997, p. 135)

On the other hand, while Liesel's main spaces are clearly defined and described, the major spaces concerning the Holocaust do not get so detail: the concentration camps. Being the touchstone of every production dealing with the holocaust, concentration camps are expected to be extensively discussed about or described in their full terror. However, this kind of space is represented in *The Book Thief* through Dachau, the most famous concentration camp in Germany, with some kind of reserve, in a clear attempt to spare the narratee from its horrors. Liesel knows that Jews are taken away, for example, and that her mother, as well as other people, must have been taken. She does not have full clarity on this topic, nevertheless, the narrator does. Not only does the narrator have the knowledge of what is happening, he also goes to concentration camps to collect souls and gets shocked about what he sees. Death comments on the murdering of Jews, but by the time Max is taken and returns almost at the end of the narrative, no allusion to his time in the camp is made.

For me, the sky was the color of Jews. When their bodies had finished scouring for gaps in the door, their souls rose up. When their fingernails had scratched at the wood and in some cases were nailed into it by the sheer force of desperation, their spirits came toward me, into my arms, and we climbed out of those shower facilities, onto the roof and up, into eternity's certain breadth. They just kept feeding me. Minute after minute. Shower after shower. I'll never forget the first day in Auschwitz, the first time in Mauthausen. At that second place, as time wore on, I also picked them up from the bottom of the great cliff, when their escapes fell awfully awry. There were broken bodies and dead, sweet hearts. Still, it was better than the gas. Some of them I caught when they were only halfway down. Saved you, I'd think, holding their souls in midair as the rest of their being—their physical shells—plummeted to the earth. All of them were light, like the cases of empty walnuts. Smoky sky in those places. The smell like a stove, but still so cold. I shiver when I remember—as I try to de-realize it. I blow warm air into my hands, to heat them up. But it's hard to keep them warm when the souls still shiver. God. I always say that name when I think of it. God. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 349)

It is clear to see in the above-mentioned passage that spatial description of the concentration camp is more attached to events and characters than to physical qualities, which provides an insight of the camps, but in general terms. The narration of how prisoners die (gas and fall from hills) is balanced by the idea of death as a comforting end to their miseries. About this narratorial choice of not focusing on death camps Kirk is lucid when proposing the following interpretation: "This lack of representation in itself is interesting, as Death is inarguably *most* present in the death camps of the Holocaust. However, ostensibly because it is not central to the story of the book thief, the inside of the camps is never represented" (KIRK, 2010, p. 91). Finally, the last space concerning Liesel is Sydney, the location where she will have the opportunity to meet Death, after a life that allowed her construct a large family, with husband, kids and grandchildren.

When I traveled to Sydney and took Liesel away, I was finally able to do something I'd been waiting on for a long time. I put her down and we walked along Anzac Avenue, near the soccer field, and I pulled a dusty black book from my pocket. The old woman was astonished. She took it in her hand and

said, "Is this really it?" I nodded. With great trepidation, she opened *The Book Thief* and turned the pages. "I can't believe . . ." Even though the text had faded, she was able to read her words. The fingers of her soul touched the story that was written so long ago in her Himmel Street basement. She sat down on the curb, and I joined her. "Did you read it?" she asked, but she did not look at me. Her eyes were fixed to the words. I nodded. "Many times" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 549)

Again, there is a brief description about the setting that, here, is summoned up due to the events of the narrative, and not as object of reflection. It is important to emphasize that this is the first time death talks to one of the souls recently departed. Taking a walk like long-term friends, Death and Liesel keep the dialogue at a soft mood, differently from the other situations in which death collected suffering souls, getting emotionally affected by their pains. Maybe it can be inferred that the invocation of Sydney, a traditionally sunny place, serves to highlight the change in the atmosphere, which now is distant from the gloomy Nazi Germany. Also, it might be speculated that Sydney, as Markus Zusak's hometown, is in some degree paid tribute to.

4. Functions of Space

When literary space is analyzed just as the primary condition for a story to take place, many layers of meanings may be missed. In order to attend to the question of meaning in a given narrative it is also necessary to observe the functions fulfilled by space construction. According to Jong (2010, p. 123-127) there are five main functions involved in the interpretation of literary space: thematic, mirror-description, symbolic, characterizing and psychologizing functions.

First, Jong states that "space may acquire thematic function when it is itself one of the main ingredients of a narrative" (JONG, 2014, p. 123). In *The Book Thief*, most of the central events and actions occur at 33, Himmel Street; the main street that cuts Molching from beginning to end. It is on Himmel Street that Liesel learns to socialize with other kids and adults. There, she finds the small houses of her neighbors who interweave with her life. This is the street of poor people, far from the other neighbors who are in a better financial condition and can afford paying for Rosa's washing and ironing services. Himmel Street is occupied by suffering people who barely have what to eat; especially those families whose number of kids reaches six (like Rudy's family). For Liesel, 33, Himmel Street is an ambiguous place and her relation to it is troubled by what it represents. On one hand, it is a space that represents freedom, where she lives her adventures with Rudy and from where she collects little objects, newspapers and even snow to take to her friend in the basement, so he may have the chance to get in touch with the external world. It is a safe place for an abandoned girl who is known in all neighborhood; a place where all kids play outside from morning until night. On the other hand, it is also unsafe and dangerous, a place where anybody could discover about the Jew in her basement and denounce the Hubermanns to the authorities, which would equal to death sentence. About spaces which acquire a thematic function, Bal (1997, p. 136) mentions that "the fact that 'this is happening here' is just as important as 'the way it is here,' which allows these events to happen." Accordingly, even the narrator demonstrates strangeness when Himmel is destroyed:

Through the overcast sky, I looked up and saw the tin-can planes. I watched their stomachs open and the bombs drop casually out. They were off target, of course. They were often off target.

***** A SMALL, SAD HOPE *****

**No one wanted to
bomb Himmel Street.
No one would bomb a
place named after
heaven, would they?
Would they?**

The bombs came down, and soon, the clouds would bake and the cold raindrops would turn to ash. Hot snowflakes would shower to the ground. In short, Himmel Street was flattened. (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 497 – 498)

The second space function listed by Jong, the mirror-description, is not applied in *The Book Thief* if one considers space as a physical location. The fight imagined by Max against Hitler, in his delusion, creates a mental space representing a boxing ring (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 251) that mirrors the Jewish resistance against Hitler, even though such resistance had been done in the form of escaping and hiding; and not in the form of physical confrontation. The third function is often employed in *The Book Thief* as part of the narrative technique. The symbolic function, which loads spaces with symbolic interpretations, may be explicitly recognized in relation to two locations: the basement and the library in the mayor's house. The basement is the place where Liesel does not need to pretend she likes Hitler or any of the actions performed by the Nazis. There she lives happy moments with Max and her foster parents. In a psychoanalytical reading Karpasitis (2014) summarizes the role of the basement:

From the kitchen table the progressive development of the sheltered space comes in the form of the basement. Unlike the kitchen table, this new space does in fact provide Liesel, Max and to some extent Hans with a degree of safety, security, privacy and space for interiority. (...) she feels that the basement, the place of secrets, the place of Max, is the only space where she can be psychologically comfortable with her various traumas (including witnessing the death of her brother). The writing of her story in the basement is also significant in terms of plot – it saves her life. From a practical perspective, she is in the basement writing her story when the bomb drops on Himmel Street and is thereby saved from death. From a psychoanalytic perspective – her ability to put finally her trauma into words (the Freudian talking cure) saves her life. Ironically, it is the basement, the hidden unconscious room of secrets and trauma, that is the only setting to remain standing after the rest of Himmel Street is destroyed. (KARPASITIS, 2014)

The library that belongs to the mayor's wife, on the other hand, does not hold any sense of security, although Liesel likes being there. It is the place where Liesel has the opportunity to read books and, because of her hidden incursions into the library, she is given a notebook where she will write her personal story. Representing the power of words, the mayor's library is the tool for Liesel to write her own book the future. She writes "I love this place and hate it, because it is full of words" (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 522). The last two space functions, according to Jong, are the characterizing and the psychologizing ones; Jong (2010, p. 128) states that "the characterizing function refers to a character's permanent traits, the psychological to his or her mood of the moment". Therefore, using the mayor's library and, as an extension, the rest of the house, for

example, it can be said that they perform both the characterizing and psychologizing functions. First, the house represents the Nazi power of its inhabitants, rich and distant from the common citizens like Liesel. The physical description shows their superior social and political status as it is located at the top of the hill: “The house straddled the hill, overlooking the town, and it was unforgettable” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 130). Also, the description given by Rosa about the mayor’s wife, blended with the description of the house, provides an insight about the psychology of the former:

Rosa’s greatest disdain, however, was reserved for 8 Grande Strasse. A large house, high on a hill, in the upper part of Molching. “This one,” she’d pointed out to Liesel the first time they went there, “is the mayor’s house. That crook. His wife sits at home all day, too mean to light a fire—it’s always freezing in there” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 42.)

The mayor’s wife lives in agony after the death of her son at war. Her melancholic behavior merges with the atmosphere of her house, and the narrator notices it: “And Frau Hermann, the mayor’s wife, standing fluffy-haired and shivery in her enormous, cold-aired doorway. Always silent. Always alone. No words, not once” (ZUSAK, 2007, p. 93 – 94). After meeting Liesel and spending some time with her, the woman’s melancholic behavior changes slightly and it is possible to infer that her way of living was a temporary psychological condition. All the previous functions of space obviously refer to the spaces depicted either by the narrator or by a character in *The Book Thief*. However, it is relevant to mention that many important spaces are just inferred, like the ghettos, for instance. When Max is with his family and the Nazi police knock at his door, he manages to escape but his family stays to back him up. It is possible to infer they were living in a ghetto, since this was the first step of segregation taken by the Nazis. The whereabouts of Max’s family, as well as Liesel’s biological parents, is never mentioned. The camps of extermination are a possible answer that is not given by the narrative. When it happens, the destiny of characters, and their probable deaths, cannot be set in a specific space. Adams (2012, p. 144) speaks of *placeable* and *unplaceable* deaths, that is, deaths that cannot have their location determined in any passage of the narrative.

5. Conclusion

In general, most narratives provide clear information about the locations where the events take place. In *The Book Thief*, the nature of the narrator sometimes blurs the exact identification of the places involved in the text. Death, as an abstract entity, depends on a series of cultural pre-conceptions in order to be constructed in the work as either an omniscient narrator, or a personified character who speaks to the protagonist at the end of the narrative. Consequently, the spatial dimension he (thinking death as a male figure) occupies cannot be determined. It is clear that the narrator is referring to a story in the past and that all the events have already ended. According to him, he was everywhere during those times of war, collecting souls at large. Yet, his actual position, the point where he stands to stop and tell this past story is never mentioned. Obviously, this impossibility is due to his supernatural nature, and one should think that one of the primary characteristics of death is the escaping of the temporal-spatial continuum. On the other hand, the narrative is quite clear about the setting, especially the ones directly involving Liesel’s life. Her neighborhood and the places where she goes and comes are

clearly described; nonetheless, these descriptions are brief, not taking more than four or five lines. Liesel's small town is a fictitious one, but there are real places in the narrative, like Germany, Dachau and countries in Europe, which may give the work a more realistic tone. Concerning the concentration camps, a setting which is impossible to be dissociated from Holocaust narratives, it is clear that the narrator does not extend his explanation too much on this setting. He speaks about the times he needs to visit camps to take souls from there, but he never provides information on their spatial characteristics. In this case, it is the reader's role to infer what they are like.

Finally, the spatial dimension in *The Book Thief* is analyzed according to the functions they may perform in the narrative, which are taken as thematic, mirror-description, symbolic, characterizing and psychologizing functions. Liesel's neighborhood, for instance, performs a thematic function considering it is also one of the traces that help the construction of meaning as a whole. The function of mirror-description is performed when the setting represents the plot, that is, when the story line may be understood through the use of specific places. In *The Book Thief*, when Death tells about the imaginary boxing fight between Hitler and the young Jew Max, the setting is described in many details, and this setting represents the real fight between the Nazis and the Jews. The symbolic, characterizing and psychologizing functions explain themselves. If one analyzes every place in the narrative, it is possible to see that they may be taken as a symbol (the trains) or as a tool for a physical or psychological characterization. The Mayor's wife is a sad woman who lives in a sad house, for instance. To conclude, it is important to pay attention to the spatial dimension in *The Book Thief*, as it is a Holocaust narrative with elements of magical realism (death as the narrator). Considering that narratives about the Nazi period in Germany normally describe in vivid colors all the spaces where horrors and tragedies happened, it is interesting to see that Death does not give the reader this kind of description. He makes harsh comments on the nature of men, but the reader is not given full descriptions of settings where so many atrocities were committed. This lack of information is meaningful, as it could be a way to protect the young target audience of this work.

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