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MASTER'S THESIS

Only death can pay for life - The role of
the protagonist's death in young adult
literature

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Children and Young Adults' Literature

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Interpreting

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I confirm that the work is self-prepared and that references/source references to all sources used in the work are provided, cf. Regulation relating to academic studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), § 10.

Preface

First and foremost, I would like to bring a special thanks to my supervisor, Zoltan Varga, for all the help you have given me through this year of writing. You have helped me to structure my thoughts and improve on my orthography. I now know how to use the English quotation marks, as well as spell the word structure in the correct manner.

Secondly, I would like to thank my soon to be wife Kristine, who has motivated me when all things seemed hopeless, and who brought me Coca Cola when my head ached after too many hours at my desk. I honestly do not know if I would have been able to finish this master thesis without your support.

I would like to thank my family for their support and understanding this year. You have all been there for me when I needed to let off some steam.

I must also thank my classmates: Mette, Ole Henrik, Andrea, Linda, Kristine, Line, Nina, Silje, and Tora, for all the hilarious moments around the lunch table.

Lastly I must thank you, the reader, for taking the time to read 94 pages concerning such a gloomy topic as the death of the protagonist in young adult literature.

Abstract - Only death can pay for life

Everybody will eventually die. This is a certainty from the moment we are born. Young adult readers are used to experiencing death in their encounters with young adult literature. The parent, the friend, the helper, all of these literary character types may die. But what about when the protagonist dies? This master thesis is about the role of the protagonist's death in young adult literature. In this thesis, I present a close reading of six young adult novels with the following research question in mind: "What is the role of the protagonist's death in young adult literature?" In order to answer this question, I have focused on death as a theme and death as a narrative technique. Hakola and Kivistö argue that death is a narrative force which affects both plot and characters (2014, p. x). Its function is to further the plot in a given direction, yet death is also arguably the most universal of themes, because all things that come into existence, all life, must eventually end.

Since the 70's children's and young adult literature has seen an increase in the frequency of death's appearance (James, 2009, p 2). The death of the protagonist is not something young adult literature tries to shy away from. Death is an inevitable part of life and should be recognized as such. By allowing the young adult reader to experience death and dying in a safe environment and from the safe position as the reader, death becomes less threatening and thereby easier to talk about. Based on Freud Kundu states that it is impossible to imagine one's own death because we still perceive ourselves as spectators (Kundu, 2015, p. 12) and therefore we are safe. The death of the protagonist in young adult literature helps the reader contemplate on their mortality and thus can help them imagine what it might be like to die.

The selected reading material for this master thesis may prepare the reader for their own death by allowing the protagonist to die. A core message from these texts is the realization that death should not stand in the way of living. These texts show that growing up is about living, and living is about going experiences. What one wants to live for and experience is up to the reader to figure out. But the truth is simple, as George R. R. Martin writes it, "[o]nly death can pay for life" (Martin, 2011, p. 779).

Abstrakt - Bare død kan betaler for liv.

Alle som lever vil en dag dø. Dette er en sikkerhet fra dagen man blir født. Lesere av ungdomslitteratur er vandt til at karakterer dør, fra foreldre, venner, og til hjelpekarakterer. Alle kan dø. Men hva skjer når protagonisten dør? Denne masteren omhandler protagonistens død og hvilken rolle den spiller i et utvalg ungdomsromaner. Jeg har gjennomført en litterær analyse med nærlesing som metode. Masteroppgavens problemstilling lyder som følger “hvilken rolle spiller protagonistens død i ungdomslitteratur?” For å svare på dette har jeg fokusert på døden som tema og døden som et narrativt virkemiddel. Hakola og Kivistö argumenterer for at døden er en narrativ kraft som påvirker både plottet og karakterer. Dets funksjon er å drive plottet videre i en viss retning (2014, p. x). Døden er uten tvil det mest universelle temaet som finnes. Grunnen til dette er at alt som eksisterer og har liv kommer en dag til å ta slutt.

Siden 70-tallet har en sett en økning i dødens tilstedeværelse i litteratur for barn og ungdom (James, 2009, p.2) og protagonistens død er heller ikke noe ungdomslitteraturen prøver å sky unna. Døden er en uungåelig del av livet og bør anerkjennes som det. Ved å la ungdomsleseren oppleve det å dø og døden fra en sikker posisjon som leser blir døden mindre truende og lettere å snakke om. Basert på Freud mener Kundu det er umulig å se for seg sin egen død fordi vi uansett vil se på oss selv som tilskuere (Kundu, 2015, p. 12) og at vi dermed fremdeles er trygge fra opplevelsen. Protagonistens død i ungdomslitteraturen kan hjelpe lesere å kontemplere på deres dødelighet og dermed hjelpe dem å forestille seg hvordan det kan være å dø.

Det utvalgte undersøkelsesmaterialet for denne masteren forbereder leseren på sin død, ved å tillate at protagonisten dør. Denne åpenbaringen bør derimot ikke stå i veien for leve. Å vokse opp handler om å leve, og å leve handler om å tilegne seg erfaringer. Hva man ønsker å leve for eller oppleve er opp til den enkelte leseren å finne ut. Men sannheten er enkel, som George R. R. Martin skriver, bare død betaler for liv.

Preface	2
Abstract - Only death can pay for life	3
Abstrakt - Bare død kan betaler for liv.	4
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Background	8
1.2 Research questions	9
1.3 Parameters for the study	10
1.4 Structure of the thesis	11
2. Presentation of primary literature	12
2.1 Before I die - by Jenny Downham	13
2.2 Before I Fall - by Lauren Oliver	14
2.3 The lovely bones - by Alice Sebold	16
2.4 Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - by J. K. Rowling	17
2.5 The Book Thief - Markus Zusak	18
2.6 Soldier boy - by Anthony Hill	19
3. Theory	21
3.1 The cultural structure of death	22
3.2 Death as a theme in young adult literature	25
3.2.1 Realistic fiction	27
3.2.2 Fantasy	28
3.2.3 Historical fiction	30
3.4 Death as a narrative technique	33
3.5 Characters and focalization	36
3.5.1 The protagonist	38
3.5.3 Focalization and narration	39
3.6 Close Reading	40
4. Analysis	42
4.1 Before I Die	44
4.1.1 Death as a theme	44
4.1.2 Death as a narrative technique	47

4.2 Before I Fall	50
4.2.1 Death as a theme	51
4.2.2 Death as a narrative technique	54
4.3 The Lovely Bones	57
4.3.1 Death as a theme	57
4.3.2 Death as a narrative technique	60
4.4 Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows	62
4.4.1 Death as a theme	62
4.4.2 Death as a narrative technique	65
4.5 The Book Thief	67
4.5.1 Death as a theme	67
4.5.2 Death as a narrative technique	71
4.6 Soldier Boy	73
4.6.1 Death as a theme	73
4.6.2 Death as a narrative technique	76
5. Discussion	80
5.1 Death as a theme	81
5.2 Death as a narrative technique	84
6. Conclusion	88
Bibliography	91
Primary Literature	91
Secondary Literature	91

Diagrams:

Diagram 1: Docimo, K. & Lupiani, N. (2019). *Plot Diagram and Narrative Arc*. Retrieved 20. April 2019 from <https://www.storyboardthat.com/articles/e/plot-diagram>

“Death exists, not as the opposite but a part of life.”

By living our lives, we nurture death. True as this might be,
it was only one of the truths we had to learn.

Murakami, 2003, p. 360

1. Introduction

This master thesis explores the role of the protagonist's death in a selection of contemporary young adult literature. I have conducted a close reading of six young adult novels of three different genres: realistic fiction, fantasy, and historical fiction (two books from each genre). The basis for the selection was that the protagonist dies during the narrative. This criteria opens up a wide variety of scenarios for the protagonist's death and which role the death of the protagonist plays within the narrative and which themes it brings along.

The title of this master thesis "Only death can pay for life" (Martin, 2011, p. 779) is a phrase taken from George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The phrase is used several times in his book series and in the television adaptation. Even though he is not considered a young adult author, the phrase is applicable for many young adult novels, at least in the primary selection for this master thesis. Kearsley states that "'Life' cannot exist without 'death' and vice versa; therefore, death can be understood as an indicator of life" (Kearsley, 1990, pp. 7). In young adult novels where the protagonist dies, the themes of life and death become equally important. The novels may serve as a preparation to make the young adult readers aware of their mortality and inevitable death by highlighting and intensifying the experiences of life. The title of this master thesis serves as a reminder that death is the fee one must pay in order to live.

1.1 Background

In this master's thesis, I am going to explore the role of death in a selection of young adult novels where the protagonist dies. A fascinating range of different deaths are available for the young adult reader. The reader can experience death in the first and the third person, also what happens after death, and what dying might be like. Reading through these books, I noticed that the death of the protagonist said something about what it meant to live and be alive in each of them. I will investigate how death and dying are used to affect the literary narrative and how the theme of death is used in the novels analyzed.

I am fascinated by the selection of deaths available for the young adult reader. From youths dying in battle, dying from sickness, even murder and suicide. Young adult literature is not afraid to touch upon the topic of death. Even though he is not considered an author of young adult novels George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* introduced me to this fascinating and intense reading experience, a reading experience which included an actual concern for the protagonist's safety. The protagonist was not safe, even though it was his/her story. This added an extra layer of suspense to the story, a suspenseful reading experience where the protagonist might not survive his/her own journey, and I encountered this experience in young adult literature as well. During my childhood and adolescence, I remember having read stories where the protagonist died, but it was not until I started studying children's and young adult literature that I noticed how many novels were written for the young adult audience that dealt with this topic.

During the second year of my English teacher training program at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, we read *Before I Die* by Jenny Downham (2007). It was a story about a girl wanting to live, but whom the reader knew would die from terminal cancer. The way that Tessa's dying was written into the narrative was very intriguing. Even though I knew that the protagonist was dying from cancer from the very beginning of the story, I still hoped that she would make it, that through some divine intervention a cure would be found and she would be healed. The story felt even more powerful as I read her death. Some deaths we can see coming a mile away and some are unexpected, just as in real life.

1.2 Research questions

The fascination with death in young adult literature has led me to the following main research question for this master thesis: What is the role of the death of the protagonist in young adult literature? I want to explore how the death of the protagonist is used and how it works in young adult literature. The primary literature for this master thesis has a variety to how the death is structured within the narrative, but they are all in fact stories about what it means to

be alive. This is why I will try to structure the main research question into two subclauses with five subquestions in total.

The five sub-research questions are connected to two main aspects of the death of the protagonist in young adult literature topic, theme and narrative technique. First, I will look at death as a theme and how different genres use this particular theme. Death has different meanings in different genres and raises and answers different existential questions. It is therefore important to study how different genres use this theme and what they try to convey when dealing with the subject of death. Secondly, I will look at death as a narrative technique. Narrative techniques relate to how stories are told. A story, or narrative is a telling of a series of events in a particular order (story and plot), both fictional and non-fictional (Baldick, 2001 pp. 165-166). The questions related to narrative techniques will consider the action, how the narrative is constructed, the character(in this case, the protagonist) and the point of view of the narration.

The set of sub-research questions are as follows:

1. Death as a theme:
 - 1.1. How do different genres convey death as a theme?
 - 1.2. What does death in young adult literature try to say about life?
2. Death as a narrative technique:
 - 2.1. How does the death of the protagonist affect the narrative?
 - 2.2. What is special about the death of the protagonist?
 - 2.3. How is the death of the protagonist narrated?

1.3 Parameters for the study

This master thesis will engage with the discussion surrounding death in young adult literature. Hakola & Kivistö (2014) mentions in their introduction to *Death in Literature* that there is a gap between the amount of literary material available to the reader, both young and old, and the academic discussion regarding the topic. This master thesis will look at the

protagonist's death and the role of that death, both as a theme and as a narrative technique and I hope to add to the academic discussion on the topic of death in young adult literature. I will conduct a close reading and analysis of only six contemporary young adult novels written in the English language. My hope is that the findings can be used in further discussion on the topic of death and dying in young adult novels.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis will be structured in the following way. Firstly, I will present the primary reading material selected for this master thesis, as well as the selection criteria used for choosing the books. Then, I will present a synopsis of each book. In chapter 3, I will elaborate on the theoretical framework, exploring death as a social construct before moving on to death as a theme in young adult literature, death as a narrative technique, characters, and focalization. I will end the theoretical chapter with a presentation of close reading. In chapter 4 I will presents my analytical framework as well as the analysis of the six novels, followed by a comparison of the findings in a separate discussion chapter. Lastly, I will conclude the master thesis in Chapter 6.

2. Presentation of primary literature

The amount of books about dying in young adult literature is so vast that there are lists on Goodreads, Amazon and the Stanford Libraries about death, dying and loss. There are almost countless stories with the topic of death: the death of a parent, grandparent, friend, and lover are common topics found in young adult literature, but I want to focus on the ones where the protagonist dies. Some might argue that young adult literature should not include death as a theme, and especially not the death of the protagonist. In her blog concerning young adult literature, Shannon A. Thompson writes that “there is a real risk when you kill off a protagonist that you will alienate the audience. But sometimes, in real life, people you love die. Why should literature ignore this?” (Thompson, n.d).

When selecting the primary literature for this master thesis, the primary idea was that the protagonist died at some point during the narrative. Other fundamental criteria were that the primary reading material must classify as a young adult novel (definition will follow later), the protagonist must be a young adult, and he or she has to die. In order to diversify the reading experience and gather the broadest possible source material for the analysis within six young adult novels the other criteria were as follow:

- The selection had to include both male and female protagonists.
- The selection had to include different perspectives on what dying is like and the circumstances which led to the protagonist’s death.
- The selection had to include a variation in where the death scene took place within the narrative, e.g. beginning, middle, and end.
- The selection had to be written and published in English.

As mentioned earlier, I discovered a Goodread’s list which consists of around 200 books where death and dying are central themes. I wanted to use books from this list and found books written after the 2000s and until this decade. I chose five books from this list’s top 15: *Before I fall* (2#), *The Lovely Bones* (5#), *The Book Thief* (6#), *Before I die* (8#), and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (13#). The last book, *Soldier Boy*, was mentioned in Kathryn

James' Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature. I needed another male protagonist and I found her presentation of the book interesting and chose to add it to the collection of primary literature.

The books in the selection are written and published in English with a Western origin, two British, two Australian and two from the US. The books I have chosen for my master thesis are introduced and analyzed in the following way: Jenny Downham's *Before I Die*, Lauren Oliver's *Before I Fall* and Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* and *Soldier Boy* written by Anthony Hill. The reason I have decided on this order is that the books go from realistic fiction to fantasy, and historical fiction where a fantastic element is gradually introduced and subtracted. This way the books go from realistic fiction, realistic fiction with an element of fantasy, realistic fiction with a strong fantasy element, fantasy, historical fiction with an element of fantasy and historical fiction. The first and last book does not introduce a fantastic element like an afterlife or other supernatural occurrences.

2.1 *Before I die* - by Jenny Downham

Before I Die, first published in 2007 by David Fickling Books a division of Random House Group Ltd. is the story about Tessa, a 16-year-old girl with terminal cancer. She has been diagnosed for some time at the beginning of the narrative. Before she dies Tessa wants to experience what it means to be alive and she makes a list of things she would like to do since she is afraid that she is missing out on life, seeing that she is about to die. Her dreams reflect her age and what young people experience in their youth. She does not want to travel the world or meet interesting people, she wants to experience the typical youth experience. Number one, she wants to have sex. She also wants to get drunk and do drugs. She wants to get a boyfriend, which she gets in the neighboring boy, Adam. Knowing that she is about to die, Tessa feels that she is entitled to live a full life. This is why Tessa and her supporting friend, Zoey, sets out to fulfill her list. Tessa's father, on the other hand, is not so supportive of Tessa's new take on life at first. Her list takes a lot of her sparse, and sorely needed, energy. Since Tessa's mother left, her father had to take on extra responsibility. One day,

when Tessa is with her mother, Tessa ends up in the hospital. Tessa's mother realizes how absent she has been over the last few years when she does not know the answer to any of the questions the hospital staff is asking. This leads to her mother moving back home when Tessa is released from the hospital.

As the story progresses Tessa becomes aware of the things she really wants. She changes her list to include things she appreciates and wishes to experience and not only those experiences that are a part of the youth experience, but adult experiences accumulated over a lifetime. For instance, persuading her father to let Adam move in with her. But as her body rapidly weakens her list gets filled with things like "get out of bed and go downstairs and it's [her illness] all a joke" and "To open my eyes" (Downham, 2007, pp. 336). The story ends with Tessa dying.

2.2 *Before I Fall* - by Lauren Oliver

Before I Fall was first published in 2010 by Harper Collins. The story follows Samantha Kingston a privileged girl who is in with the peak of the social hierarchy at Ridgeview High, a school which is also known as Suicide High due to the high number of students that have committed suicide while attending the school. This is no doubt a result of all the bullying that occurs at there.

The plot starts on Cupid Day and Samantha is woken by her alarm and her annoying younger sister, Izzy, telling her that her mum wants her to get up. Samantha rushes through the kitchen and out to where Lindsay, her best friend, is waiting for her in the car. They leave to pick up the rest of the girl squad and drives to school. It is a big day for Samantha because it is the day that she has planned to lose her virginity to her boyfriend and the girls taunt her for it. It is a Ridgeview tradition that on Cupid Day all the students give each other roses. The number of roses you get is a way of measuring how popular you are. Samantha's gang always gets a lot of roses and it has become a tradition for them to send a rose to Juliet Sykes, aka Psycho, after Lindsay found out that in freshman year Juliet did not get a single Valogram. The note attached to the rose reads "Maybe next year, but probably not" (Oliver, 2010, pp. 28).

There is a party that evening and all the “haves” are there. It is actually ironic since Kent, the host, is on the lower spectrum of the social scale. Suddenly Psycho stands in the doorway. She moves over to Lindsay, and the rest and calls them a “bitch”. This result is Juliet Sykes soaked in beer and being shoved and bullied out of the party. The girls are furious and leave as well. Even though they are all drunk, Lindsay drives them home. Samantha is in the passenger seat, unbuckled when suddenly “Lindsay yells something - words I can’t make out, something like sit or shit or sight - and suddenly the car is flipping off the road and into the black mouth of the woods. I hear a horrible, screeching sound - metal on metal, glass shattering, a car folding in two - and smell fire” (Oliver, 2010, pp. 55).

Samantha wakes up. Her alarm has been ringing for 20 minutes. She is sure that it is Saturday and unsure how she got home last night, why Izzy is telling her to get ready for school. Samantha relives the same day seven times, and dies three times herself. She dies the second day. The third she convinces her friends to drop Kents party, only to learn that Juliet has committed suicide. On the fourth Samantha does not care about those around her and starts a fight with Lindsay, makes out with her teacher, and when she and Rob is about to have sex, he falls asleep. Samantha is devastated and ends up being comforted by Kent. The fifth day Samantha tries to find Juliet at the party after the incident, and she follows her out into the woods she sees Juliet throw herself in front of a car. Lindsay’s car. One of her friends has taken her place in the passenger seat and dies. Samantha is shaken and does not want to go home afterward and spends the night at Kent’s house. Where they end up kissing. The sixth day ends in a similar fashion, but instead of being hit by Lindsay’s car Juliet throws herself in front of another car. And that is when Samantha realizes that it was all a coincident, bad luck. That she was dead and forced to live her last day again and again, and that even though she tried to save herself it was really Juliet that needed saving. The seventh day Samantha finally admits her feelings for Kent and on the same day, she sacrifices herself in order to save Juliet’s life.

2.3 *The lovely bones* - by Alice Sebold

Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, first published to critical acclaim in 2002 by Little, Brown and Company, is the story of Susie Salmon and how she died. The second sentence in the novel goes as follows: "I was murdered on December 6, 1973" (Sebold, 2002, pp. 5). There is absolutely no way that Susie comes out of the story alive. She does not even survive the first chapter. Susie is on her way home when she meets Mr. Harvey, the neighborhood's oddball. He wants to show her something, a new clubhouse for the youths in the neighborhood. The clubhouse reveals itself to be a dugout structure in the middle of a cornfield. Susie is so amazed by what Mr. Harvey has managed to build that she lowers her guard for a second. It is only when Mr. Harvey starts complimenting her looks and asks if she has a boyfriend that she stops feeling sorry for him, for being lonely and a bit of a weird character, and started feeling uncomfortable. "'I got to go, Mr. Harvey. This is a cool place, but I have got to go.' He stood up and did his hunchback number by the six dug-in steps that led to the world. 'I don't know why you think you're leaving'" (Sebold, 2002, pp. 11-12). Susie Salmon is then raped and murdered by Mr. Harvey.

Susie flees the scene, but she is no longer more than a ghostly shadow. While running away she touches Ruth Connors, and Susie can swear that Ruth feels her. She then enters her heaven. A nice place, which looks like Fair Fax High. The reasoning for this is that Susie's heaven takes the form of her desires. If she truly desires something and understands why, her desires and wishes will manifest. But what Susie wants most of all she cannot have, she wants to be alive. She has to look from her heaven as her family gets the horrible news from Len Fennerman, a police detective, that they have found an elbow. She watches as her father, Jack, has a conversation with Mr. Harvey, who is building a bridal tent for his "late wife" and how her father gets a feeling that Mr. Harvey was the one that murdered his daughter. She watches how her sister, Lindsey, is spiraling down after her death and how stability is eventually introduced in her life when she starts dating Samuel Heckler. How her mother, Abigail starts an affair with Lenn Fennerman, and then leaves both Lenn and Susie's family and moves to California. And she watches how her brother never truly understands the loss that split the family apart. But she sees good things too: how Ray Singh still loves her, even

though they only kissed once during Susie's short life, or how Ray and Ruth keep in touch because of what Susie's death meant to them.

One day, several years after the murder of Susie, Ray, and Ruth is, unknowingly, at the place where Mr. Harvey dumped Susie's body. Then, something magical happens. Ruth and Susie switch places. Susie is suddenly back on Earth, she has an unknown number of minutes in Ruth's body. This gives her the possibility to go after Mr. Harvey, but she does not. She wants to use her limited time back on Earth to experience life, not chasing her own death. And so she does: she has sex with Ray and afterward, she calls her brother to tell him not to worry, but it is too late. Her brother cannot hear her. Finally, she gets taken back to her heaven where she is now ready to move on.

2.4 Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - by J. K. Rowling

The final installment of the award-winning world phenomenon was published in 2007 by Bloomsbury Publishing. The narrative follows Harry, who has been tasked by professor Dumbledore to find and destroy the remaining horcruxes, pieces of Voldemort's soul so that he can be killed. The story starts with an evacuation of Harry Potter from Privet Drive. The magical trace is to be lifted on his 17th birthday when he comes of age. During the evacuation attempt, Harry's friends drink a polyjuice potion to take on the appearance of Harry and to have a better chance of escaping Lord Voldemort. But when they leave Privet Drive, Voldemort and his Death Eaters are already waiting for them. Chaos emerges and Harry and his friends are scattered. There are two fatalities during the escape, Hedwig (Harry's owl) and Mad-Eye Moody. These are only the first of many casualties.

Even though he does not know where to start Harry wants to go and search for the other horcruxes. The only clue he has is a note in a fake horcrux signed R.A.B. It turns out that R.A.B is Regulus Arcturus Black, younger brother of Harry's late godfather Sirius Black. As the search for the other horcruxes goes on, Harry learns about the story of the three brothers and the deathly hallows, three magical objects of immense power. These are the Elder Wand, the most powerful wand in existence, the Resurrection Stone, which has the power to

resurrect loved ones, and an invisibility cloak said to have originally belonged to Death himself. It is said that the wizard who brings all three together would become the master of death. Harry soon finds out that he is already in possession of the invisibility cloak and that Dumbledore had the Elder Wand. He must, therefore, decide if he should seek out the Deathly Hallows or the horcruxes. He chooses the horcruxes and it is revealed to him that he himself is the horcrux Voldemort never intended to make. To defeat Voldemort Harry will have to die. This is why, during the Battle of Hogwarts, Harry Potter goes alone into the Forbidden Forest to face Voldemort and his own death. He hears Voldemort casting the Killing Curse. "Avada Kedavra."

Harry wakes up somewhere that looks to be King's Cross Station, Dumbledore sits beside him and a piece of Voldemort lies shriveling away on the floor. Harry and Dumbledore then have a conversation about why Harry is still alive and Harry asks if he should go back and continue fighting. "I think, ...that if you choose to return, there is a chance that he may be finished for good" (Rowling, 2014, pp. 590). As Voldemort parades Harry's seemingly lifeless body in front of Harry's friends, Harry rises to duel Voldemort a final time. The duel ends with Voldemort lying dead on the floor and Harry standing victorious.

2.5 *The Book Thief* - Markus Zusak

First published in 2005 by Doubleday *The Book Thief* follows Liesel Meminger and is narrated by Death. Liesel Meminger's story starts aboard a train accompanied by her mother and brother heading toward Molching, and her new foster family. The night is cold and in her sleep, she notices that her brother has stopped breathing. They try to wake him but in vain. Her brother is put to rest in a cemetery and Liesel steals her first book, *The Grave Digger's Handbook*. The book thief would come to steal five books in total, each one under special circumstances.

In her new house in Molching, her foster parents Hans and Rosa Hubermann do their best to make ends meet. Hans is a painter and an accordionist, Rosa does the washings for the richer part of town. As the war progresses times becomes harder for the Hubermanns, mainly

because Hans never joined NASDAP and partially because the rich could not afford to have other people washing their clothes. Hans had already fought in one war and would not take part in the harassing of Jews, especially since he only survived the first war because of a Jew. This is why he lets Max Vandenburg stay in their basement. Max and Liesel become good friends and they tell each other their stories. Max even writes new ones for Liesel.

Max eventually has to leave the Hubermanns and is captured and placed in a concentration camp. Liesel is devastated over Max's departure and starts writing her own story. The story of a girl, whose brother died, who stole books, whose foster father helped a Jew. And when writing this book in the basement, the same basement where Max had been hiding, an air raid comes and bombed Molching. The raid comes suddenly and few make it to the shelters. Hans, Rosa and Liesel's best friend dies in the air raid. In the chaos, the book thief loses her book. "[T]he girl's most precious item was thrown aboard a garbage truck, at which point I (Death) was compelled. I climbed aboard and took in my hand" (Zusak, 2013, pp. 24).

After the war Liesel moved to Australia and settled down, married, birthed children. It is not specified when Liesel died, but the reader gets to know that she has become an old woman who is ready to die. When Death comes to collect her soul he presents her with a gift, the book she lost all those years ago.

2.6 *Soldier boy* - by Anthony Hill

Soldier Boy - The true story of Jim Martin the youngest ANZAC was first published in 2001 by Penguin Books Australia. The story follows the titular character and is written in the third person and focalized through Jim Martin. The story starts with Jim's death before going back to his childhood. He was born on the 3rd of January 1901 in Tocumwal, New South Wales, Australia, the only son in a line of seven children. His school years in Melbourne were filled with cadet training at the Manningtree Road State School, where they practiced marching and target practice. When the war broke out patriotism awoke in the British Commonwealth, they wanted to protect the Empire in its hour of need and many Aussies voluntarily enlisted to the AIF (Australian Imperial Forces). Jim Martin's father was one of them, but he got rejected.

“Never mind, Dad, I’ll go instead” (Hill, 2016, pp. 8) was Jim’s response. This led to a heated argument between Jim and his parents. “If you let me go, I’ll write to you and stay in touch. But if you don’t, I’ll join up under another name and you won’t hear from me at all!”(Hill, 2016, p. 9). And so, at the age of only fourteen years and three months, Jim Martin was enlisted and in the army with his mothers approval.

His final destination was Gallipolis on the Turkish front, as part of the first reinforcements. The war was in a stalemate with high casualties on both sides. Jim and Cec, his mate from army training, have both lied about their age to become part of this adventure. Cec is, in fact, sixteen and believes Jim to be of the same age. When they arrived at ANZAC Cove, Gallipolis, they became aware of the hardened conditions and the bond between the soldiers. Even though some of them were injured or sick, they would not leave the others to go to the hospital ships. This was greatly admired by the newly arrived.

Though the battle was in a stalemate there were still snipers, artillery and machine-gun fire. The food and water rations were poor, but as he had promised, Jim Martin wrote home at every opportunity with encouraging words for his family. But he never, since leaving Australia, got a reply from his family back home, a blow in his moral every time the other members of his battalion were given their mail.

When Jim started getting sick he wanted to be no less than those who came before him, wanting to prove that he belonged. It started with only some aching muscles and a constipated stomach, but soon dysentery started and he could not hold down food or water. He still pushed on, however, refusing to go to the infirmary “May coward shame distain his name ... The wretch that dares not die” [part of the platoon song] (Hill, 2016, pp. 126). But his condition deteriorated and he soon lost half his body weight. When one morning he passed out he was taken aboard the hospital ship Glenart Castle. An hour forty minutes later he was dead.

3. Theory

This chapter will include theory regarding death in young adult literature which will later be used to support my claims in the discussion. The theory includes death as a cultural structure, where I try to elaborate on how different cultures perceive death differently. Next, I will look at death as a theme in young adult literature, before looking at death as a narrative technique. After this, it is important to look at characters, especially the protagonist, and focalization, before I conclude this chapter with a subchapter on close reading.

Death is a complex phenomenon. In its complexity, it requires an interdisciplinary approach to uncover all its aspects. This is why death and its implications are being studied in many academic fields, e.g. biology, philosophy, sociology, theology, and literature. Death is the cessation of the sinus rhythm, but not only this. It is also an abstract theological idea about what happens after our earthly life. Death and dying can take many forms. Death is, according to the Oxford Learners Dictionaries “(1) the fact of somebody dying or being killed, (2) the end of life; the state of being dead, (3) the permanent end or destruction of something, (4) the power that destroys life, imagined as human in form” (Death, n.d), e.g. a skeleton or the Grim Reaper. Death is, no matter how climactic, grand, lonely and sad, an end. In literature, however, death can be understood as a force which drives and/or disrupts the narrative. It is a changing of state, an event placed within the narrative which affects both characters and plot. It can be used as a way of getting closure to the narrative, or sometimes as a point of departure into the narrative. Death can thus be used as a plot device, e.g. as a plot twist or an opening in *in-medias-res*, or to raise the emotional levels of the narrative (Hakola & Kivistö, 2014, pp. x).

Death in children’s and young adult literature has become more and more mainstream and socially acceptable. Kathryn James states that death appears more frequently in children’s and young adult literature after the 1970s, academic attention to the subject is, however, limited (James, 2009, p. 2). This master thesis aims to contribute to the subject by analyzing and discussing the role of the death of the protagonist in a selection of contemporary young adult literature

In this chapter, I will first look at the cultural structures surrounding death and how death is reflected in a culture's expectation of what it means to live. Next, I will look at death as a theme in young adult literature and its different genres. After this, I will address death as a narrative technique, looking at aspects, such as the position and the role of death within a narrative, and also characters and focalization. The last part will focus on close reading and how it will be used in my analysis.

3.1 The cultural structure of death

Every culture at any given time in history has experienced death and has created culturally conditioned responses to death. Blauner states that death is not only disruptive for the individual who dies, but also for the social enterprise surrounding the person. Death raises questions which need to be answered and this leads societies and cultures to create mechanisms to deal with death's problematic impact on the society (Blauner, 1966, in Durkin, 2003, p 47). These real-life mechanisms can take many forms depending on the given society or culture. Some cultural groups might celebrate the life lived and while others might mourn the lives lost. Depending on one's religious stand, death either leads to heaven or hell, reincarnation, being absorbed into a universal energy or simply a state of nothingness.

Death may be a tragedy, but Durkin (2003) argues in his article *Death, Dying, and the Dead in Popular Culture* that death is used in entertainment, like books, TV, movies, and games, to disarm death's severity. This means that a cultural and social structures of the West have been created so that the living is entertained by death. The cultural structures of death can be used as a way of measuring and understanding life within a culture. This is an important concept to take notice of in the light of my analyses. The protagonists' death often sheds light on certain culturally conditioned values, e.i. what the character wants to experience before he or she dies. In popular culture, e.g. in contemporary young adult literature, Durkin found that the theme of death functions as mechanisms which help us deal with death (Durkin, 2003, p 47). The cultural mechanisms of death in entertainment can be used to help some consumers move on or give meaning to life.

Kearl states in his book *Endings* (1990) that “the foreground of life is only possible with the background of death” (Kearl, 1990, p. 3). Therefore, a person cannot truly live if that person cannot die. “Life” is then also culturally created. Different cultures have different ideas and values about what it means to “live” and these ideas and values change over time. The lives «lived» today are quite different from those lived only a generation before us, but the ending has always been the same: death. The fact that all things must come to an end makes death, possibly, the only truly universal literary topic. Kathryn James argues that it is, in fact, humans’ consciousness about their own mortality and its ability to reflect on it that makes us different from any other species. And humans’ reflections about their mortality have created myths, fables, and religions which attempt to answer the question of what is to come after death (James, 2009, p. 1). These stories are culturally established and are used to help societies and those who are left behind cope with the loss of a loved one, or as a mechanism to understand why humans must die and to give hope for those about to die about what comes after death.

“‘Life’ cannot exist without ‘death’ and vice versa; therefore, death can be understood as an indicator of life” (Kearl, 1990, pp. 7). It has been said that only one thing in life is certain, and that is death. It is the end of the human experience and in many ways the motivator for many of our achievements during our lifetime. We spend a lot of time and money trying to prolong our life, by trying to eat healthily or going to the gym. Though we do not necessarily think about dying too much, we think about living. Outi Hakola and Sari Kivistö suggest that, because of human beings’ consciousness towards their own mortality, death is what defines life. This opens up a discussion regarding death as something that gives or takes away the meaning of life. Is death something that robs life of its meaning or is it a possibility to seize the day? (Hakola & Kivistö, 2014, pp. xii).

Death and dying have always been a part of humanity, but as history has progressed through the centuries our encounters with death have become less and less frequent, especially in the West. In Durkin’s article he argues that the generations born after the Second World War lack

firsthand experiences with death (Durkin, 2003, pp 43). The generations born prior to the Second World War generally had closer encounters with death. These encounters varied from having to slaughter animals, to people dying in their beds at home where whole communities came together to help and say farewell. Death was in many ways a part of peoples' day to day life. As time progressed the slaughtering of animals became more and more industrialized. Hospitals and old homes took over the responsibilities of taking care of the sick and dying. We no longer see the slaughtering of the animals we eat, we do not see how sickness and illness end the lives of loved ones on their sick bed at home. We no longer experience death, the contemporary Western culture's encounter with death comes, mainly, through funerals, which in Norway is often carried out with a closed casket hiding the dead body from view. But mainly our encounters with death comes through second-hand experiences like news reports and popular culture, e.g. movies, TV-series, arts, and literature (Kearl, 1990, pp. 379), and we are fascinated by it. Death has the potential to evoke a wide variety of emotions, from curiosity to disgust. Death has become a spectacle, something we wish to experience without actually dying. It is estimated by the National Institute of Mental Health (USA) that by the time a child reaches the age of 16, he/she has seen 18000 murders on television (Durkin, 2003, pp. 43). However, by mainly having second-hand experiences with death this gives us the possibility to close ourselves off from the experience of death. If we do not want to hear about murder, suicide or genocide in the news we simply put the paper down or turn off the TV. Death has in many ways become both less and more accessible. It has become take-away and pay-per-view and if you do not like it, put it away.

As this masters thesis is written within the field of children's and young adult literature, with a focus on the latter, this paper will mainly be concerned with the written media of fictional literature. The written format of fictional literature enables the reader to enter the mindset of the protagonist in greater depth and the possibility of reflecting on what "life" and "death" means. Freud states that a person cannot imagine his/her own death. He argues that "[i]t is indeed impossible to imagine our own death; and whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators" (Freud in Kundu, 2015, p 12). Still, death can be an important part of the narrative, because it allows the reader to experience different versions and possibilities of what dying is like. "A reader lives a thousand lives

before he dies [...] The man who never reads lives only one” (Martin, 2012, p. 526). The same may be said about dying. Campell (2008) states in her article *YA lit and the Deathly Fellows* that “[w]itnessing the actual process of dying is as close as we get in this life to knowing about the experience of death” and that the protagonist’s death that the reader experiences the reality of death from the closest distance, (2008, p. 358) By reading different death scenes, especially the ones where the protagonist is the one who dies, the reader can experience a thousand deaths. Maria Nikolajeva argues that we can learn about our actual world through experiences in the fictional world and that the fictional world can give exemplifications off numerous properties of our own world (Nikolajeva, 2014, p. 23). She states that readers might “gain insight to the actual world form factional worlds, which may highlight and reiterate aspects of reality that would otherwise be neglected” (Nikolajeva, 2014, p. 25). By reading first-person narratives of a dying protagonist, the reader might get an understanding of what dying might be like.

3.2 Death as a theme in young adult literature

Before the seventeenth century children and adults had the same access to the literary experience of death and the teachings surrounding it. These experiences came from the Bible, fables, legends, and folklore (Butler, 1972). The separation between children’s/young adult literature and literature intended for an adult audience made death more accessible to children and young adults. Young adult literature is, according to Slettan (2014), is a group literary texts of different genres with an intended young adult/teenage audience (2014, p. 9) The term young adult literature has fluid boundaries, where books intended for young adults sometimes are read by children and sometimes read by adults, e.g. the Harry Potter series, they are still written with an intended audience (2014, pp.10-11). It is not the complexity of the themes found in young adult literature which separates it from the generally more highly regarded adult literature. It is more about the voice of the speaker (Pasternock, n.d., p. 1) It is the young adult protagonist and focalizer where the characters are pushing boundaries and discovering themselves, whereas literature for adults tends to be life constraining and limiting the protagonist’s potential. And this is the crucial difference between literature for adults and young adults. This is why young adult literature in this master thesis, is literature with an

implied young adult reader, following the story of a youth, 12-18-year-old and it is a story that young adults read.

Many might think that young adult readers should be shielded from the morbid topic of death in young adult literature. But the tragic death of youths has been a part of storytelling from Greek tragedies and tales of heroes to modern “sick lit” or fantasy. The death of a young person is always shocking and/or devastating. Young Adult literature’s ability to deal with any topic has since the 1960s been one of its key features (James, 2009, pp. 73). This feature makes young adult literature special by letting the reader explore topics of taboo from the perspective of young adults, e.g. through sexual abuse, drugs, and terminal illness and death. “As a group, these narratives also provide an interesting cross-section of experiences of death, thus building a picture of the particular patterns, tensions, and themes that can be said to represent Western death culture in the contemporary ear” (James, 2009, pp. 74). And this cross-section is represented in many lists, e.g. on the web page Goodreads, which currently has a list of 170 books with the topic of death and dying in young adult literature. This list contains a wide selection of different genres, like historical fiction, murder mystery, fantasy, and realistic fiction, and topics, like murder, suicide, euthanasia and cancer.

The amount of books available to the reader surrounding the topic of death in young adult literature has resulted in a discussion in newspapers, blogs and social media. From parents wondering if this is suitable literature for children, young adult readers using hashtags like #yasaves, to authors explaining why they write what they write. As Rupert Wallis wrote in the Guardian:

For younger adults exposure to these sorts of questions vicariously, through reading, can only be invaluable, echoing similar ones appearing in their own lives as they grow up. Death has always lurked in some of the most moving and beautiful children's stories, but for the younger reader, it's usually approached in a palatable manner: good overcoming evil in the traditions of fairytales or in some oblique manner that isn't gratuitous. In a lot of YA fiction, the tone is different: with death woven as realistically

into the lives of characters as it would be into our own, making the stories grittier and darker. This allows young adults to engage with the reality of dying through the safe act of reading (2014).

And this has traditionally been the core of young adult literature. Death and dying have always had a prominent part in young adult literature. Though the genres may differentiate, the topic of death is accessible for the young adult reader. The selection of books used in this thesis comprises three main genres realistic fiction, fantasy, and historical fiction. They all deal with death, but in their own way. It is therefore important to be aware of the limits and possibilities which lies within the different genres. In the following subchapters, I will elaborate on the characteristics of the three different genres and their perspective on death.

3.2.1 Realistic fiction

Realistic fiction tries to depict the world and events in a realistic way, dealing with the concrete and literal description of events and characters. This makes realist fiction paradoxical because the literary work is only a depiction of the real through a fictitious narrative with fictitious characters (Armstrong, 2006, para. 7). In a way, realistic literature deals with what is plausible within our own reality. Given that both characters and the narrative are fictional it is important that they are plausible. Terry Eagleton (2013) argues that realist literature is in many ways impossible because everything within the narrative happens for a reason, rigged by the author to make us believe that the events that transpire is happening in our world for real.

Realism appears to give us the world in all its delightful or alarming dishevelledness, but it actually does no such thing. If a telephone rings in a realist novel or a naturalistic drama, it is almost certain to be a move in the plot rather than a wrong number. Realist works choose the kind of characters, events and situations which will help to build up their moral vision. In order to conceal this selectivity, however, and thus to preserve their air of reality, they usually supply us with a lot of detail that really is pretty random (2013, pp. 112-113).

This duality of realistic fiction trying to present the world in a realistic way and still being fiction still has its purpose, especially in young adult literature. Ever since its beginning, young adult literature has been concerned with ‘serious’ issues and taboos. Kathryn James states that it is “its willingness to engage with the traumatic and harsh aspects of life” (James, 2009, p. 73) that gives young adult literature its characteristics. Realism in young adult literature exposes the reader to many taboo themes, such as sexual abuse, incest, teenage pregnancy, violence, terminal illness, suicide, and death, in a realistic way where the characters feel like real people, with real stories and experiences (James, 2009, p. 73). Though the events and experiences of realistic fiction are just fiction the realistic novel aims to display an authentic representation of life and events which resonates with the world outside the text and match the reader’s expectations of reality. James points out that this is untenable because “a realist text is as much a fictional construct as any other literary text” (James, 2009, p 74). Andrew Bibby (2015) argues that even though realist literature tends to describe the mundane and uneventful life, death still plays a crucial part in realist literature (Bibby, 2015, p 139). Death is not an uneventful experience and this, in collaboration with death as taboo, might be why it has such an important part in the young adult realist literature. The vivid descriptions of what it is like to die can help the reader imagine what it might be like to die. As mentioned earlier these narratives function as a coping mechanism to help the reader imagine what it might be like to die.

3.2.2 Fantasy

The term fantasy in young adult literature is often used to describe literature with magical or supernatural elements. Nikolajeva points out that there is no clear cut definition of what fantasy is, but that it has some key characteristics which separate it from other literary genres. According to Nikolajeva young adult fantasy often has an element of a magical and or supernatural presence, in an otherwise realistic and/or recognizable world (Nikolajeva, 2006, para. 1-2). She supports her argument by referring to Todorov, who states that there is “a clear distinction between the marvelous, the fantastic and the uncanny” (Todorov in Nikolajeva, 2006, para. 7). Todorov’s distinction between the marvelous, fantastic and uncanny separates fairy tales from fantasy. Fairy tales are not set in a world similar to the real one at all. It is also set in a time which is separate to our timeline. Fairy tales are set in a marvelous world,

where all things are possible. Though fairy tales and fantasy are similar in origin and some definitions recognize fairy tales and fantasy literature as the same, others acknowledge that fantasy literature stems from fairy tales, but has since evolved into something of its own. Nikolajeva distinguishes between the two by stating that fantasy is set in reality, whilst fairy tales take place in a magical world detached from our own in both time and space. The characters of fairy tales live “once upon a time” and “happily ever after” which is examples of the detached timeline of fairy tales. Fantasy, however, often transports their characters from a place in our reality to a magical realm and are often taken back to our reality at the end of the novel. An extraordinary event has occurred, but within the parameters of our reality. This means that fantasy can transport a character from our world to another, which is the case in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it can be a small and hidden part of our world, as in the *Harry Potter books*, or it can be a one time encounter with the supernatural, in David Almond’s *Skellig* (Nikolajeva, 2006, para. 2).

Fantasy can easily be traced back to myths and folklore, where magic and the presence of supernatural occurrences. Nikolajeva argues that a key difference between these myths, folklore, fairy tales, and fantasy is that fantasy is a modern phenomenon intentionally created by an author as fiction, and not by collective narrative, which may change, depending on who narrates it. By being intentionally created by an author the motifs and archetypes of fairy tales and myths can be tweaked to fit or challenge the modern reader’s preconceptions about said motifs and archetypes. The intention of myths is to be interpreted as truth. This is not the case of fairy tales, where the events are clearly impossible for the normal human being and can only be accomplished by an extraordinary human. Fantasy, on the other hand, tend to have an ordinary character, to which extraordinary events unfold (Nikolajeva, 2006, para. 8-9).

Fantasy prominently feature deaths as a theme, as pointed out by Kokorski, the reasoning for this is that the fantasy genre gives the author the liberty of creating his/her own reality with its own rules and the ability to define and redefine what death and the afterlife is and what it looks like (Kokorski, 2015, p. 341). In this project, there are several books that have elements of fantasy or are fantasy through and through, e.g. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*,

The Book Thief, *The Lovely Bones*, and *Before I Fall*. James (2009) argues that the fantasy genre has a metaphoric dimension that makes it suitable for death as a theme. By rearranging the structures surrounding death, fantasy is able to reconstruct reality, and give the reader the possibility to reflect on their own mortality and relationship with death, and by extension their life. Where the realist genre tends to disclaim the afterlife, fantasy genre embraces it as a reoccurring theme. The existence of an afterlife is common in fantasy, both for adults and young adults, and the hero's choice to come back from, or, visit the afterlife is a common narrative. An early literary example of this is the *Epic of Gilgamesh* written approximately 2100 BC in ancient Mesopotamia. Kokorski argues that by opening up these fundamental questions about death and the afterlife fantasy has the potential to help the reader develop an angst-free outlook on death (Kokorski, 2015, p. 341).

3.2.3 Historical fiction

Historical fiction is defined by Duthie as “realistic stories set in a time period that predates their creation” (Duthie, 2006, para. 1). The narrative tells a fictional story of a real or imagined character within the framework of the historical event e.g the first and second world war, which is the case with the books in this master thesis. Duthie's definition of historical fiction states that to classify as historical fiction the literary creation must be written at a later point in time than the historical event. This means that literature written during, e.g. the first or second world war, about characters living in that time period is not classified as historical fiction. Duthie argues that it is hard to determine how much of a time span is necessary to classify as historical fiction, but mentions that there should at a minimum be twenty-five years, whereas the Novel Society states a fifty year period from the event/period to the author (Duthie, 2006, para. 2-5).

Another key feature of historical fiction is its realistic elements. Literature consisting of supernatural events, magic, alternate timelines or technological advances outside the historical period tend not to be considered historical fiction but can have historical elements. Though some works of historical fiction tend to speed up the chronological events of history in their narrative this is done with for the purpose of the plot, pacing, and developing the

characters. The narrative is still a work of fiction, rigged to tell a story with a good pace and coherency in context. It should not be regarded as historical truth, even though the characters and events have existed. “Historical fiction is not a substitute for historical nonfiction but its complement” (Duthie, 2006, para. 9). Historical fiction for children is meant to be an exotic setting for a thrilling tale trying to make a modern child reevaluate his or her preconceptions about the time period or conflict, not reinforce stereotypes and misconceptions about the past (Duthie, 2006, para. 1).

However, these stories in historical fiction are often colored by the historical narrative of a nation and is ideologically inspired and constructed retrospectively and often constructed to have a strong moral and didactic purpose in a socially conservative manner (James, 2009, p. 31) It is important to be aware of this didactic underline in literature seeing that death in historical fiction is often colored by these values. Each country, society or culture also has its own version of the historical events, which has been shaped through decades or centuries. Though Western countries tend to have similar values and a similar agreed upon history, with many of the same events. The individual countries have had local events which have shaped the country’s culture and society in individual ways. And this also shapes their perspective on death. Awareness towards these communal understandings of what constitutes a good death is therefore important. What is worth dying for? Is it the greater good? Or is it acceptable to die for an individual? *Soldier Boy* and *The Book Thief* are considered historical fiction because the historical context of the story is central to the plot and it is written decades after the event which unfolds within the narratives. Even though the two books depict dying and the circumstances differently, death is still the theme. The connotations that come with that can, however, be quite different, e.i. sad, tragedy, relief and expected.

3.2.3. Themes

Peter Auger defines a theme as “[a]n abstract idea that seems central to a literary work’s design” (Auger, 2010, p. 311). These abstract ideas, e.g., love, betrayal, life, and death, are central to the narrative because it connects the motivation of the character to the plot, as well as connecting the reader with the protagonist. As the examples mentioned above demonstrate,

themes cover a large portion of the universal earthly experience, and death maybe most of all. Death has always been a central part of storytelling. From the *Epic of Gilgamesh* through Greek tragedies to the modern day mass consumption of narratives presented to us in different media, and where death often plays a prominent part.

Themes are created to convey a message or an intended lesson, which is intended for the reader to discover. (Auger, 2010, p 311). The theme of death has its association with murder, sickness, decay, loneliness, nothingness and the unknown and is in our day to day life often associated with the old and a natural ending to a long life. Putting a young person, with all of life's possibilities, into this theme is in many ways unsettling to our daily preconceptions regarding death. Simultaneously we do however know that death has no age restriction. It can come for the young and old alike. Bringing the young adult reader and the theme of death together in young adult literature is morbid and unsettling, but it is during the formative years of human development where we construct our basic understanding of how the world functions. It is here we learn of natural decay, which responsibilities humans have, belief systems, how to live life (Stephens, in James, 2009, p. 2). In her article in the yearly publication *Children's Literature*, by Johns Hopkins University Press, Francelia Butler refers to a quote by C. S. Lewis when she argues why children's and young adult literature is so suitable to uncover the depths of life and death. "[A] children's story is the best art form for something you have to say" (C. S. Lewis). Butler argues that the simplicity of a children's story makes the themes more transparent and tangible. By explaining abstract concepts, like death, in a simplistic manner, it becomes more easily accessible to the reader. Though this master thesis is not about children's literature and death, I would argue that the same can be said for young adult literature. Young adult literature is more complex than literature written for children, but it is also closer to children's literature than literature written with an intended adult audience.

3.4 Death as a narrative technique

Narratives are the way in which stories are told. A narrative is defined by Abbott (2008) as “the representation of an event or a series of events” (2008, p. 13). He makes the distinction between a description and a narrative. To qualify as a narrative, something has to happen. There needs to be an action, no matter how small, which drives the narrative in a direction (Abbott, 2008, p. 13). These narratives must have an effect on somebody or something. Abbot argues that all ‘characters’ are ‘entities’, but not all ‘entities’ are ‘characters’. Characters are those entities which display human characteristics (2008, p.19). The entities in the primary selection of literature for this master thesis are all human or human-like characters, so for the purposes of this master thesis, I will refer to these entities as characters. I will focus on characters in more details in subchapter 3.5.

This master thesis is about the role of death in narratives for young adults where the protagonist dies. Hakola and Kivistö (2014) argue that death is a narrative force which affects both plot and characters. Its function is to further the plot in a given direction, e.g. as a starting point in a murder mystery novel or as closure in another novel (Hakola and Kivistö, 2014, p. x) When a prominent character dies it disrupts the narrative and shakes the very core of the narrative, sending the narrative into uncharted terrain. There are numerous ways that death can be used as a narrative technique. In this master thesis, I will focus on the following key aspects “when”, “who”, “how” and “why” when analyzing how the protagonist’s death affect the narrative. The death of the protagonist contributes something to the narrative. It should not be without meaning that the narrator ends the protagonist’s earthly existence. The death of a character can be used as a rite of passage, to mark justice or injustice. It can be used as a catalyst which sets in motion a series of events. It can be the start, the middle and the end.

The “when” of the narrative decides what comes next. Diagram 1 shows the three normal stages of storytelling represented in a Freytag Triangle: the beginning, middle, end. The primary texts in this master thesis contain books with death scenes in all three stages. Both *The Lovely Bones* and *Before I Fall* tells a narrative of a girl who dies early in the story and

Soldier Boy starts its narrative with Jim Martin's death. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* Harry dies as the climax of the story, and Tessa dies again in the middle in *Before I Fall*. *The Book Thief*, *Soldier Boy*, *Before I Die*, and *Before I Fall* has death as the resolution to the story. The genre of the story will, as mentioned earlier,

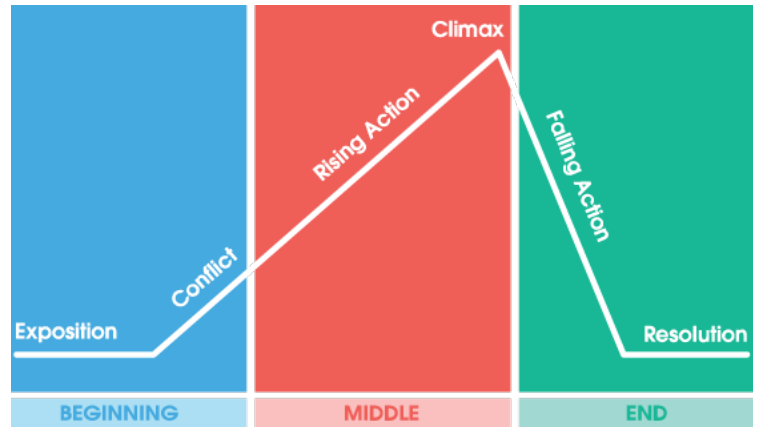


Diagram 1, Docimo, K. & Lupiani, N. (2019)

contribute to the limitations and possibilities of the narrative. Though death in many ways is an ending, it can very well be the start that sets the narrative apart from other narratives within the genre. Hakola and Kivistö describe narrative events as building blocks which changes the state of the narrative.

Death, too, is a veritable change in state, a transformation from one kind of being to another kind of (non)being, and as with any narrative element, death happens in a certain place and at a certain time. Consequently, as a narrative event, death both affects characters and leads the story in some direction. (2014, p. x)

The “who” of the death scene is, in this case, the protagonist. As the definition of young adult literature states the protagonist should be between the age of 12 to 18. And focalized through him/her. This gives the narrator some possibilities and restrictions. The narrative can be told in first and third person perspective. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, *Soldier Boy*, and *The Book Thief* are all narrated in the third person, whilst the rest is written with a first-person narrator. The books are all focalized through the protagonist. Death has often been written into stories to give closure or meaning, but Hakola and Kivistö argue that many recent novels have no such closure or underlying meaning, but rather the opposite. That these deaths are written in to show how death is sometimes meaningless (Hakola & Kivistö, 2014, p. x)

“How” a character dies has significance for the narrative. Is he/she killed? If so by whom? Is the death caused by sickness or an accident? The setting and surroundings of death is also

important. Does the protagonist die alone or in company with somebody else? What is the role of the surrounding people? How a character dies can also determine if there is a chance of reconciliation. Some stories trap the soul of characters with supernatural weapons, whilst others structure their narrative in a way where the character can only die in a certain way.

“Why” the protagonist dies also carries significance. As mentioned, Hakola and Kivistö stated that character, in contemporary young adult literature, often dies to show how unfair and meaningless death can be. The books in this master thesis have a variety of “why” the main character dies. They die as a “hero’s sacrifice”, they are murdered, they die to illness or of old age, but the implications of their death is linked to the “why”. It is also important to analyze the “why” with the genre in mind, since the genre often contributes restrictions or possibilities. The “why” and “how” are also closely connected. There is an overlap in this section, where death as a theme and death as a narrative technique link together.

Death can also be used as a way of getting closure to a story. Abbot (2008) discusses closure as the resolution to a conflict (p.56), but also as a meeting of expectations and uncertainties that arise within the narrative (p.57). Closure is closely linked to suspense and surprise, the buildup to the climactic event and how quickly it is over. Suspense is meant to keep the reader interested, but at the same time releasing gratification when resolved (p. 57). This resolution can happen in two different ways, according to Abbott: closure can either meet expectations or raise questions. Abbott explains this as “closure at the level of expectations” and “closure at the level of questions”. To take the former first, closure at the level of expectations is when expectations are met by the reader. An example of this is found in fairy tails where the princess meets the prince, they fall in love and live happily ever after. It is the sequence of events which leads the reader to expect certain outcomes from the narrative, Abbot continues (p. 58). These expected outcomes can, of course, be disrupted by a surprise ending. If this ending is acceptable we still get closure. If all romantic comedies ended the same, there would be nothing but clichés. It is this balance between what is expected and the unexpected surprise that leads us to accept the closure of the narrative (pp. 59-60). Closure at the level of question is about enlightenment and getting answers, like; who did it? What do

they want? What happens next? (Abbott, p. 61). If we do not get answers to the questions we have after reading a novel it can be frustrating and it will not give us closure.

3.5 Characters and focalization

One of the reasons literary characters can be fascinating is that they give insight into another person's circumstances. They can feel like real people who could occupy our world, and at the same time, they can consist only of letters on a piece of writing. They affect us, but we cannot interact directly with them (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider, 2010, p. 3) Though I will not go into the debate regarding literary characters as something which exists only on paper, as real people, or as an abstract constructs, I maintain that, literary characters can affect the reader and so in that aspect they are real enough. Literary characters are available to the reader and, depending on the author's writing, can give us insight varying from omniscient insight into the whole gallery of characters within the narrative, to the protagonist or a third party narrator with restricted access to the character's inner thought process. When a literary character dies this is described in different ways, but described to the reader. A reader who does not know where his or her own story will end. This gives the reader an insight into an experience unknown to their own existence. This master thesis concerns itself with what the role of the death of the protagonist is, it is therefore important to take a closer look at characters and characterization in young adult literature.

Abbott (2008) defines a literary character as an entity who is involved in the action that has agency (Abbott, p. 230), the ability to cause events (Abbott, p. 228). These entities are often human, or human-like, but can of course be animals, often anthropomorphic, or something else entirely. As mentioned earlier, the entities in the primary literature for this master thesis are all human, or human-like, and are therefore characters. Though there are some entities within some of the books, e.g. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, where there are some human-like characters; house elves and goblins, as well as Hedwig, Harry's owl, and in *The Book Thief*, where Death is both a character and narrator. Because this master thesis is about the protagonist, I will not go into a detailed description of secondary characters not essential to the scene in which the protagonist dies. The gallery of characters in the primary literature

for this master thesis varies from round characters with a lot of agency in their story to, flat or semi-flat characters with a single defining trait. In fact, Terry Eagleton (2013) proposes that the characteristics of the character are not what he/she has in common with the rest of the world, but rather what sets them apart, including their mental and moral qualities (Eagleton, p.49). These characteristics are compared to the norm and can only count as characteristic traits if they deviate from the norm in a noticeable way (Eagleton, 2013, p. 50).

In order for the reader to make a mental image of what the character(s) is/are like the author can revile characteristics about said character directly, by telling, or indirectly (Baldick, 2001, p 37). By telling the reader, for example, that the protagonist “had brown hair that floated down to his shoulders”, the author paints a picture in the mind of the reader of what the character is like. The reader can, of course, contribute to the physical description of the character by adding things that are not depicted in within the narrative exists only in the reader's mind, and have little to no implication to the reading experience (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider, 2010, p. 12). Characteristics, however, are not only the physical attributes of the character but also his or her actions or thoughts, these revile personality traits and the effect that the character has on others. By showing the reader what the character is like, through the actions of the character, the reader can see that, for example, Samantha Kingston’s, from *Before I Fall* is in fact actually a bully, though she does not perceive herself as one. Abbot claims that characters are more complicated than their actions (Abbot, 2008, p. 132) and it is through these actions that the reader really sees who the character is. The actions and thoughts of the character make up who they are.

It is this make-up of characteristics which determines whether or not a character is to be considered a flat characters or round character (the terms were crafted by E. M. Foster). Flat characters typically have no hidden complexity and are often set in a single behavioral pattern, e.i. they behave in one way through the narrative (Abbot, 2008, p. 133). Round characters, however, have a deeper layer of complexity to them and remind the reader of actual people (Abbot, 2008, pp. 133-134). To exemplify this, a flat character is for instant Hagrid, in the Harry Potter universe. Hagrid is a loyal and gentle half-giant, but not so clever. His loyalty often results in him spilling secrets, like who, and what guards the Philosopher’s

Stone. Hagrid is often used as a comic relief within the narrative. Harry Potter, on the other hand, is more complex and rounded. He gets cross when he is left out of things he deems relevant for his situation. He is loyal, adventures, and brave, but is still able to be afraid when facing danger. His pubescent temperament and reasoning behind his behavior make it so the reader does not always like and, or agree with Harry. The main difference in describing Hagrid and Harry lies in their characteristics.

Literary characters can sometimes become so similar in function that they become the same type of character. A type is a character who stands as a representation of a class or a group of people (Baldick, 2001, p. 265). Some examples of character types are the Malfoy family, which represent the entitled elite in society, and the Weasley family representing the working man's family struggling to make ends meet. During the last 2000 years, and even longer, some types have become so universal to the human experience that they have developed into archetypes, a symbolic character type who embodies a theme, symbol or setting (Baldick, 2001, p. 265). These archetypes are found in literature form all ages and serve a similar purpose. An example of an archetype is the Christ figure or savior figure. The Christ figure sacrifices his or her life and in doing so saves a person, a group, or all mankind. Another example is the helper, who helps the protagonist on his journey but does not do the task for him, e.g. Gandalf from *The Lord of the Rings*.

3.5.1 The protagonist

This master thesis is about the death of the protagonist. It is therefore relevant to say something about the protagonist in young adult literature and what characterizes them. Baldick's *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2001) uses both the term protagonist and hero/heroine to describe "the main character in a narrative or dramatic work" (2001, p. 122) The distinction between protagonist and hero/heroine primarily being that the protagonist is a gender-neutral term, but also that the connotations of the hero/heroine as a morally superior character has been diminished, and therefore not as accurate as the term protagonist when describing the main character of a narrative (Baldick, 2001, p 122. Maria Nikolajeva has written a chapter on identifying the protagonist in her book *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (2002). In this chapter, she states that the events and plot

of the narrative often revolve around the protagonist and that the titular character is often the protagonist. However, some books do not have a titular character, e.g. *The Lovely Bones*. In these kinds of books, the protagonist is often introduced at the beginning of the story. The protagonist does not necessarily need to be introduced as straight forward as “Once upon a time there lived a boy called Felix”, as fairytales tend to start. The Harry Potter series, for example, the start of its narrative with an introduction about his aunt and uncle and where Harry is not described before he is a young boy of 11. However, from the moment the protagonist has introduced the story revolves around him or her, and he or she is present throughout the majority of the narrative (Nikolajeva, 2002, pp. 47-53). The protagonists in the primary selection for this master thesis all get introduced at the beginning of their book, with the exception of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*; which starts with a chapter about Voldemort and the death eaters, and *The Book Thief*, which starts with a monolog form Death, the narrator. Three of protagonists, in the selection, are the titular characters, and three are not. An example of this in the primary texts for this master thesis is *The Lovely Bones*, where Susie Salmon, the protagonist, is in her heaven. As mentioned earlier the plot of the narrative should revolve around the protagonist. In *The Lovely Bones*, Susie has little to no agency to the events of the narrative, but she is, for the most part, a spectator, like the reader.

3.5.3 Focalization and narration

Every story is told through someone's perspective. This perspective is the lens in which the reader encounters the characters and events. This is called focalization (Abbot, 2002, p. 73). The focalizer, .e.i. the person who's eyeing the reader experiences the events is not the same as the narrator (Baldick, 2001, p. 98). The narrator is the voice of the story, whereas the focalizer is the eyes. A story can be focalized through different characters and is not always focalized through the protagonist. In Harry Potter, the narrator focalizes the story through Harry's eyes and limits himself to Harry's point of view and thoughts. Though the narrator is the voice of the story, he can also be the focalizer and decide the readers perspective, which is the case in both *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Peter Pan*.

3.6 Close Reading

For this master thesis, I will conduct a close reading of the primary texts mentioned in the introduction. In its most basic form close reading is a thorough and in-depth reading of a literary work to get a deeper comprehension of the text (Boyles, p. 90) which then functions as a framework for the analytic model one chooses to apply (Lukić & Espinosa, 2011, p. 106) Close reading has been used as a literary analysis since the beginning of the field. From biblical exegesis and rhetorical analysis to a 5th graders analysis of themes in a book he/she has read in school. It has multiple applications ranging from: analyzing the grammatical structures of a text, analyzing written structures and patterns, and analyzing themes and events in texts. Barbara Herrnstein Smith states that the term close reading has been used to describe a large variety of activities linked to the in-depth study of a text. Smith also argues that close reading is not as much a method as it is definitive of the field (Smith, 2016, p 57-58). “The term close reading refers not only to an activity with regard to texts but also to a type of text itself: a technically informed, fine-grained analysis of some piece of writing, usually in connection with some broader question of interest” (Smith, 2016, p 58). The fine-grained analysis Smith mentions is in this master thesis the analysis of the chosen books regarding the research question; what is the role of the death of the protagonist in young adult literature.

Close reading has, as previously mentioned, always played a part in literary analysis, e.g exegesis, and hermeneutics, however, with New Criticism close reading became the preferred analytic tool which was used to look at different texts as something not bound to social or historical context, but a work of its own (Lukić & Espinosa, 2011, pp. 105-106). New Critics wanted to explore how texts of different kinds had a dimension to them that were applicable to all humans, throughout all ages. Although several methods of New Criticism have been challenged, close reading has endured as a tool for interpretation within different analytical frameworks, e.g. feminism (Lukić & Espinosa, 2011, p. 106).

The method of close reading is useful when analyzing relationships within the text. The approach allows the analyst to uncover narrative and semantic structures that are deeper than

a first reading interpretation and uncover meanings that others may have overlooked. Close reading is also useful when one wants to investigate and explain why people get the reaction that they get from their first reading. The analyst may also connect their own knowledge and perspectives to convey that interpretation or explanation. One of the key differences from the initial first reading interpretations and a close reading analysis is the systematized structure of the analysis, by applying the text to theory, method and technique, e.i. inductive or deductive reasoning (Castilla, 2017). The systematized structure mentioned here will be explained in more detail in chapter 4, where I will elaborate on the main research question and sub-questions used in the analysis and then in the comparison in the discussion section later.

Schur (1998), claims that those who apply close reading to a literary analysis depend on three overlapping assumptions: (1) the immediate response to a text is insufficient, this is only a starting point for further research;(2) that the rhetoric of the story is as important as the story, ignoring how the story is written is inadequate; and (3) there is not a singular correct interpretation above all others. Some readings, however, might be considered better than others, depending on how convincing and comprehensive they are (p. 5). By implementing these assumptions to a close reading analysis, Schur states that:

They point toward the following goals. One is to reveal things that a hasty, straightforward reader would miss. Close readers seek to discover and identify implicit formal and thematic elements, thereby making them explicit. Another task is to draw meaningful connections between these specific forms and broader themes. The final challenge is to unite these observations in a coherent (if necessarily partial) version or view of the text's meaning.

Schur, 1998, p. 5

4. Analysis

I will now present the analytical framework for this master thesis. I have conducted a comparative analysis using close reading as my main method in order to investigate the death of the protagonist in a selection of contemporary young adult literature. The death of the protagonists serves different roles and carry with them different emotional, spiritual, and structural impact on the narrative and themes of the novel. The following analysis provides a close reading of the aforementioned material with the following research question in mind: “what is the role of the protagonist’s death in young adult literature”. Close reading is as mentioned a thorough reading of a text, or texts, which is then connected to a broader question of interest. It is through the scope of the primary research question I have read the primary material for this master thesis, and calibrated the analysis by focusing on the following subquestions:

1. Death as a theme:
 - 1.1. How do different genres convey death as a theme?
 - 1.2. What does death in young adult literature try to say about life?
2. Death as a narrative technique:
 - 2.1. How does the death of the protagonist affect the narrative?
 - 2.2. What is special about the death of the protagonist?
 - 2.3. How is the death of the protagonist narrated?

The following analysis is structured to cover all the research questions. The order of the analysis is set in a 2x3 order, two novels from each of the three different genres in order from realistic fiction, fantasy, to historical fiction. The order of the novels are realistic fiction (*Before I Die*) to realistic fiction with an element of the supernatural (*Before I Fall*), fantasy with strict realistic limitations (*The Lovely Bones*), fantasy (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*), historical fiction with an element of fantasy (*The Book Thief*) and finishes with a work of historical fiction (*Soldier Boy*). The analysis will only focus on one novel at the time. The findings from the analysis will then be used in a discussion about the role of the death of the protagonist in contemporary young adult literature.

The death scene(s) in the narrative has been the primary focal point for this master thesis, but for those scenes to make sense, the story as a whole needs to be considered. A death without a narrative, either before or after it, is meaningless. It was, therefore, important to look at the how the narratives treat the death scene, how the protagonist is portrayed, and how the theme of death seldom comes alone but is often accompanied by other themes. This is why I divided the analysis into two focus areas, death as a theme and death as a narrative technique when I conducted the analysis. These two focus areas are intertwined, as the narrative technique is used to underline the theme of these books. I will try to keep the two focus areas of the analysis separate, but there will be some overlapping because of the intertwined nature of theme and narrative technique. Each book analysis will keep to the same structure as far as the flow of the text allows. Some of the novels are more suited to comment on themes and some are more suited to comment on narrative techniques and this is why there might be some differences in length from novel to novel.

I will use excerpts from the primary reading material to highlight different findings. These excerpts will then be analyzed and discussed in regard to the main research question and subquestions. This allows me to narrow down the focus area of this master thesis and substantiate the claims I make later on. The analysis and findings are arranged from realistic fiction, with no element of fantasy, to fantasy, each book having a stronger fantastic element, until it peaks with Harry Potter, then gradually moving away from the fantastic element in historical fiction, until it ends with a work of historical fiction without a fantastic element. Most of the excerpts will be as stand-alone excerpts within the main text. This is to show how the text is structured on the written pages of the books I have used. The texts structure on the page affect the reading experience and this is why I have chosen to give an accurate depiction of the excerpts used in this analysis.

As mentioned earlier close reading has been my primary method for this analysis. It is important to understand and acknowledge the implications this method can have on the analysis. Close reading offers the reader the opportunity to dive into the reading material and analyze it thoroughly, thus getting a deep comprehension of said reading material, but the analysis is also subject to subjectivity. This is important to acknowledge, without dismissing

the analysis. There is no such thing as an objective reading experience, every reading is in some way subjective. The reader's response of the narrative is colored by a range of factors, e.g. the reader's gender, cultural background, emotional development, intertextual competence, to mention a few. Schur (1998) states that readers, who are not conducting a close reading tend to miss out on important information because they simply are not looking, or reading, thoroughly enough (1998, p. 3). Close reading requires the reader to investigate the text thoroughly with a broader question in mind. There is no one true interpretation of the text, but close reading offers the opportunity to engage with the text, making a better argument for the findings and might therefor constitute as a better reading than others. It must also be stated that both the reading material, the main research question and subquestions will influence the findings in the analysis. If I were to have chosen other books or had another set of research questions the outcome of the analysis would have been different from the findings I will present in the next part of this master thesis. Other readers would probably also have presented different findings when conducting a, or the, similar analysis.

4.1 *Before I Die*

Before I Die (2007), written by Jenny Downham, follows young Tessa of sixteen years old with terminal leukemia. The story is focalized and narrated through Tessa in the first person. The events of the narrative unfold chronologically up until the moment where Tessa dies. The genre of the book falls under realistic writing, which in this novel means that there is a high probability from the very start that Tessa is going to die. This adds suspense to the narrative and raises the stakes. Is Tessa going to be okay? Is she going to finish her list?

4.1.1 Death as a theme

When reading the book the reader will find out that there is no supernatural intervention or surprise cure from a faraway kingdom to cure Tessa's illness, and that is ok. The theme of the book is the acceptance of death. Tessa has got acute lymphoblastic leukemia and has gone through chemotherapy, been in remission, but sadly she has had a relapse in her condition. Tessa was diagnosed right around her twelfth birthday. She is now sixteen years old and has

received the news that they, the doctors, will not be continuing the treatment. The genre of realistic fiction is constructed to mirror life in the real world as realistically as possible. In the real world, death has no age restriction. Kids and teenagers, as well as adults and frail old people, are all at risk of dying from illness and other causes. The fact that Tessa has got lymphoblastic leukemia is not outside the realm of possibility. That is not to say that her illness and death is not sad and tragic, of course it is, but it is probable for a young girl with her whole life ahead of her to die from cancer. In Tessa's case, her condition has also infected the nervous system and will, therefore, be progressing more rapidly than first expected.

He shifts on his chair. 'You've moved further along the line, Tessa.'

There's a big window behind his desk, and out of it I can see the tops of two trees. I can see their branches, their drying leaves, and a bit of sky.

'How much further along the line have I moved?'

'I can only ask you how you're feeling, Tessa. Are you more tired, or nauseous? Do you have any leg pain?'

'A bit.'

'I can't judge it, but I'd encourage you to do the things you want to do.'

(Downham, 2007, p. 62)

By declaring early on in the narrative that Tessa is going to die, Downham adds hope as well as suspense to her story. A hope that Tessa is going to be okay, a hope that Tessa will be cured, a hope that Tessa will get to experience life in its fullest and longest form. But alas, *Before I Die* is not that kind of story. Tessa is going to die. Her youthful death is paved before the reader from the very start, and it is sad that a teenager dies from something as meaningless as cancer, but the reader is given the possibility to come to terms with her death through the theme of accepting death.

The last two things Tessa thinks of are "Moments" followed after a gap of open spaces, and "All gathering towards this one" (Downham, 2007, p. 346). Again I would like to bring attention to Kearl's thoughts on life and death, that you cannot have one without the other.

All of Tessa's moments, every memory and sensory input have led her to this moment, her moment of death. Her whole life has accumulated into a moment where she ceases to exist. "THE END" (Downham, 2007, p. 346) concludes Tessa's existence and there is nothing more to her story. Since we, the human race, do not have any certain knowledge about what the afterlife is like, it is fitting for a realistic novel not to venture into this discussion. This text is about how the realization of one's death makes one want to live and experience what life has to offer. Another central theme of the book is, therefore, life or the act of living.

Though the book has imagery that alludes to Christian motifs and metaphors, Tessa herself has throughout the book had an atheistic outlook on the afterlife. She clearly states that she does not believe in any life after death:

'What about heaven? Do you believe in that?'

She rips a sterile needle from its package. 'I think heaven sounds nice.'

'That doesn't mean it exists.'

She looks at me sternly. 'Well, let's hope it does.'

'I think it's a great big lie. When you're dead, you're dead.'

Downham, 2007, p. 116

She does not believe that anything happens to you after you die. All she cares about is the life she has on the earth and how she can live it. Tessa's belief is that there is no afterlife, this is in accordance with the genre of realistic fiction. Works of realistic fiction mainly tends to say something about what it means to be alive and not focus on the afterlife. Though some works of realistic fiction have religious characters and themes, there is seldom an insight into what comes after death. *Before I Die* is no exception to this trend. The book simply ends with "THE END" (Downham, 2007, p. 346) ending Tessa's existence with the same words. Because of the book's nature, as a work of realistic fiction, it is more inclined to address the life with a backdrop of death.

Before I Die covers a wide variety of themes; life, acceptance, love, and loss. These themes are all built upon the foundation of the central theme of death. As the analysis of the other books will show, books where the protagonist dies tend to say something about what it means to live. Tessa's story is about seizing the day in order to get the most out of the limited time one has left.

4.1.2 Death as a narrative technique

Tessa's death is in many ways stretched out in the entire book. It is clear from the very start that there is something wrong with Tessa. Her inevitable death is the driving force or, as Hakola and Kivistö claims, the narrative force of the entire narrative and as the conversation with her doctor on page 62, as shown in an excerpt above, proves this. Tessa wants to live before she dies. This really causes Tessa to take her list seriously. She has already done the first point on her list, sex, but now she must step it up. "I want to live before I die. It's the only thing that makes sense" (2007, p. 63). Death is a motivating factor in Tessa's life.

Tessa is in many ways robbed of her life by her youthful death. The cancer does not only kill her, but drains her of the energy she has left. However, her cancer forces her to live and experience a full life, or at least what she constitutes as a full life at the age of 16 years old. She wants to experience what it means to be alive. Her cultural background, being British, combined with her age of sixteen years old, accumulates into a list of things she wants to do before she dies. This list is deeply colored by these factors. Sex, drugs, breaking the law, learning to drive, fame, travel the world, love, living with her boyfriend. She wants her life to contain all the things she values from her culture and in her society, and while breaking the law is not something that is valued in any society, it is something many youths have done. The list is an accumulation of all the things Tessa values in her life, but as she "grows up", not by age but by experiences, she gradually changes her perspective. It is no longer the shallow experiences of youth she wants before she dies, it is the meaningful relationships and experiences of the more mature nature she wishes to experience, an example of this is to have Adam move in with her so that she can experience what it is like to live with the man whom she loves and who loves her.

Unlike the other books in the primary selection, *Before I Die* had no clear antagonist in its narrative. The antagonist is “the most prominent of the characters who oppose the *PROTAGONIST or hero(ine) in a dramatic or narrative work” (Baldick, 2001, p. 12). But this story does not have a character who opposes Tessa. There is in fact not a single person I would categorize as an individual who is bad or mean to Tessa throughout the narrative. Tessa fights cancer, it is as simple as that, so death becomes the antagonist, an antagonistic force, which will inevitably stand victorious. In this narrative death, as a non-tangible concept, is taking on the properties of an antagonistic character. By opposing Tessa, her cancer, her death, becomes both the catalyst and the antagonistic force that sets Tessa’s story in motion and who motivates her into doing the things she has on her list. It is the force that fights against her and exhausts her. The antagonistic presence is not something that is very obvious at a first glance of the story, but it is nevertheless there. When Tessa is confronted with the fact that the doctors will no longer continue her treatment, Tessa must learn to accept the fact that she actually is going to die. Again this acceptance forces Tessa to speed up her list and forces her to live.

As mentioned in the introduction to this analysis of *Before I Die*, it is narrated and focalized through the eyes of the protagonist, Tessa. This gives the reader a unique insight into the mind of a terminally ill girl which is expressed through Tessa’s thought process and dialogue, as well as the text’s position on the pages in the latter part of the book. The reader is restricted to Tessa’s thoughts and point of view, as is often the case in first person narration, and is why we do not know what the other characters in the novel think or does unless they express it in their dialogue with Tessa, or in her presence. An example of this is the conversation in the kitchen between her mother and father.

‘I’m bloody knackered.’

‘I can see that.’

‘The boundaries change all the time. One minute she doesn’t want anyone near her, then she wants to be held for hours. She won’t leave the house for days, then disappears when I’m least expecting it. This list of hers is doing my head in.’

‘You know,’ Mum says, ‘the only really right thing anyone could do would be to make her well again, and none of us can do that.’

He looks at her very intently. ‘I’m not sure how much more I can manage by myself. Some mornings I can hardly bear to open my eyes.’

Downham, 2012, pp. 146-147

Had it not been for Tessa eavesdropping on her parents, the reader would never experience her father’s acknowledgment of his desperate and frustrating situation. Tessa's limiting perspective also affect the last chapters of the book, where Tessa is drifting in and out of consciousness. Her focalization and narration herby affects not only the information given to the reader but also the structure of the text on the written page. Had this story been narrated in the third person, by an omniscient or restricted narrator, this scene would have been quite different. There would probably have been a description of the room, who was there, and what their body language was like. Instead what happens is that the reader experiences Tessa’s sensory hearing, picking up speech, and Tessa’s memories and thoughts. An interesting point to take notice of is the fact that each paragraph of text in a couple of chapters, whether it is dialogue or Tessa’s thoughts gradually becomes smaller in size and content and the reader can get a sense of how long Tessa is lucid, though she is no longer capable to converse with those around her. While some chapters have long conversations throughout the novel, the last chapter only has small fragments separated by empty space. The space between each paragraph signal the time between consciousness and unconsciousness. It is hard to say if each space is a minute or an hour, but the point is still the same, Tessa goes in and out of consciousness and this affects the reading. To save space I have decided to show this in brackets [x] where x indicates the number of empty lines.

There’s sun in my teacup.

Zoey stares out of the window and I drive out of town.

The sky gets darker and darker.

[7]

Let them go.

[new page]

Adam blows smoke at the town below. Says, ‘Anything could be happening down there, but up here you just wouldn’t know it.’

[4]

Adam strokes my head, my face, he kisses my tears.

We are blessed.

[6]

Let them all go.

[14 and new page]

The sound of a bird flying low across the garden. Then nothing. Nothing. A cloud passes. Nothing again. Light falls through the window, falls onto me, into me.

[5]

Moments.

[7]

All gathering towards tis one.

[4]

THE END

Downham, 2007, pp. 344-346

The spaces between each paragraph of text add suspense and the time to reflect on the reader’s experience. Downham shows the reader how dying is not as simple as it sometimes is in the movies, where the dying character is lucid and then after a sigh has drifted away with a sigh. In this excerpt, Tessa is getting ready to die. She is no longer afraid and is at peace with her condition. “Let them go” and “Let them all go” indicates this. She wants to experience what comes after. “I will die first, I know, but they’ll all join me one by one” (Downham, 2012, p. 97).

4.2 *Before I Fall*

Before I Fall (2010), by Lauren Oliver, is narrated and focalized by Samatha (Sam) Kingston. The story is set in a realistic setting and would fit the young adult realistic fiction genre with characters and events similar to those young adults would encounter. The only difference is

that Sam relives her last day seven times. When she dies she is thrown into a limbo-like state of being, forced to relive her last day. Her deaths give her the opportunity to reflect on the choices she made in her life and reliving the last day gives her the opportunity to change the outcome of that day.

4.2.1 Death as a theme

The genre of realistic fiction rarely features supernatural elements that overshadow the realistic nature of the story. It is after all one of the main characteristics of the genre that it depicts the world as close to the one the reader occupies as possible. In *Before I Fall* the supernatural element functions only as a reset and has otherwise no implication on the story other than to underline the theme of the book. As with the previous novel the main theme is accepting death. The theme of death, however, seldom stand alone and though death is the main theme of the book, it is accompanied by many others. The theme of death is often used to enhance or emphasize other themes. Two of the themes accompanied by death in *Before I Fall* are redemption and self-examination. They are fulfilled through the protagonist's death. Samantha is given the possibility to change her outcome, not in the sense that she is able to survive, but that she is able to come to terms with it and leave behind her a legacy she can be proud of. After much scrutiny of the different relationships Sam has had with those around her, she slowly realizes the arbitrary circumstances which led her to her social position. Sam has gained her position by befriending the right people at the right time and secured her place by keeping others in their place. Her death leads Sam to question the social hierarchy of her high school and her group of friends. And it is her investigation of Juliet, the victim of most of their bullying, and of Lindsay, the ring leader in her group of friends and the most popular girl in school, which leads her to her redemption. Through self-examination and examination of her relationship with the other supporting characters, Samantha is able to redeem herself by slowly changing her own biases and preconceptions about the others. She realizes that her relationship with her boyfriend Rob is unfulfilled and is about nothing more than physical attraction and being popular. This leads her to discard this relationship in favor of Kent McFuller's affection, with whom she shares an emotional connection. Examining her misinformed attitude towards Juliet Sykes results in Sam realizing how her popularity has been earned at the cost of the other's pain and unpopularity. Through dying, Samantha gains a

new perspective on the frailty of life, but not the first time around. Sam has to die a total of three times and relive her last day a total number of seven times before she is fully redeemed.

Sam's death is also about accepting the inevitable and randomness of death. At first, when she finds out that Juliet is the reason for her own death, she is certain that her death is an act of vengeance from Juliet, after years of abuse from Samantha and her friends. But she later realizes that this is not the case. Juliet is simply tired of living and tired of being kept down by her peers. It is not retaliation for the abuse and she does not intend that anyone else should die. It just happens. The theme of death in the book is the theme of acceptance. Accepting that all things must come to an end and that no matter who you are, your social status or group of friends, everyone is going to die at some point. The key to Samantha's redemption is the acceptance of this fact, to be okay with the fact that not all stories end happily. Though Samantha's story is sad there is bittersweetness to her ending. She has died, but redeemed herself.

Samantha's redemption comes late in the novel, when she sacrifices herself so that Juliet can survive. At first, however, Sam is stressed out, confused and furious that she is the only one who remembers the day she died. The confusion and frustration is reinforced when she dies the second day. The realization that she is stuck in a loop frustrates her and leads her to do many things she thought she wanted, like making out with Mr. Daimler, who is her teacher and stealing her mother's credit card. Samantha slowly realizes that even though many things seem like fun or a game without consequences, her actions actually impact a lot of her friends and classmates. She has the power and knowledge to destroy relationships and friendships, which is something she does on her fourth day, only to see what happens when one does not care about the consequences. Sam discovers how one day can make all the difference in the world.

Samantha's last day, all seven of them, is meant to have meaning for somebody else than herself. This realization is what leads Samantha to sacrifice herself so that Juliet can live on the seventh day. This savior's sacrifice for Juliet's benefit is Samantha's final redeeming act.

Before she died, Samantha was not someone whom one would consider a nice person. As mentioned earlier, she and her group of friends stayed on top by holding other people down. By dying and reliving her last day Samantha is given a chance to change how she is perceived, who she is and who she wants to be. Sam's transformation during the seven days of the plot is divided into days that gradually changes her perspective and perception. She no longer feels entitled to be the center of everything and she comes to term with the incredibility of her own death. *Before I Fall* is about accepting one owns mortality and by doing so, wanting to be the best version of yourself. In the novel, Sam dies three times. After having died two times, Sam tries to hide, by not going to the party. She tries to dodge her fate, and she manages to do this, only to learn that Juliet has killed herself, and the day resets. Sam tries to alienate people, she tries to save everybody, until she realizes that her story is not about saving herself but saving Juliet. *Before I Fall's* theme centers around the idea that the action one chooses to do in one day can change the world. Samantha's life accumulates in a split second decision to disregard her own safety and try to help Juliet. When Juliet throws herself into the road, it seems like she does not want to die anymore. Had it not been for Samantha's sacrifice, Juliet would have died without actually wanting to go through with it. By sacrificing herself Samantha becomes redeemed.

In that split second she's launched herself into the road, but she looks back, startled, recognition lighting up her eyes. Then I'm hurtling out behind her. I slam into her back, and she goes shooting forward, rolling toward the opposite shoulder, just as two vans converge, about to pass each other. There's a furious high whine and someone - more than one person? - screams my name and a feeling of heat all through my body and the sensation of being lifted, thrown, by a huge hand, a giant's hand; the earth revolves, turns upside down and sideways, and then a fog of darkness eats up the edges of the earth, turning everything to dream.

(...)

And a face above mine, white and beautiful, eyes as large as the moon. You saved me. A hand on my cheek, cool and dry. *Why did you*

save me? Words welling up on a tide: *No. The opposite.* Eyes the color of a dawn sky, a crown of blond hair, so bright and white and blinding I could swear it was a halo.

Oliver, 2010, pp. 338-339

Sam's death is about saving Juliet, but also about saving herself. It is unclear whether it is her soul or her legacy Juliet helps Sam salvage, in a way it might be both. In the novel Sam states on the sixth day that she is going to save two lives, Juliet and her own, by the seventh Samantha has realized that it was not about saving herself, not in the way that she thought at least (Oliver, 2010, p. 303), The excerpt above shows the last time Sam dies. Sam has redeemed herself by realizing that her life should have a positive impact on others. The greatest impact one can have on another is to ensure that person's safety. The world does not revolve around Samantha's needs, other people's needs are just as important. And that she is willing to sacrifice her own happiness in order to save Juliet is why Sam believes that Juliet saved her.

4.2.2 Death as a narrative technique

Sam's death affects the narrative in multiple ways. It functions as a reset button for the narrative, which in its next retelling only deviates slightly from the original version. Step by step these retellings come to deviate so much from the original narrative that both Samantha Kingston and the other characters have a different perspective on their surroundings and relationships. By restarting the narrative at the same time and place, no matter what happened the previous night, the reader becomes familiar with the fundamentals of the narrative as well as the character of Samantha Kingston. This gives the reader the insight so that they are able to see the transformation that she goes through.

The character of Samantha Kingston is developed through her actions as well as through her descriptions of herself. Sam describes herself as not much prettier than anybody else, "big green eyes, straight white teeth, high cheekbones, long legs". She also has "a long nose, a flat butt, borderline nonexistent boobs and skin that gets blotchy when she becomes nervous" (2010, p. 12). But she is popular, much by affiliation with the gorgeous Lindsay,

but this popularity comes at a price. Samantha and her girlfriends, Lindsay, Elody, and Alley, can only stay on top if somebody else is kept down. And it is these actions that show who Sam really is. All the people who do not fit into their conception of popularity, and those who cannot increase their “value”, are second rank citizens. In fact, Sam tries to lecture the reader about what popularity is. “You can’t really define it, and it’s not cool to talk about it, but you know when you see it. Like a lazy eye or porn” (2010, p. 12). And they get away with many things others would not, like having a burping contest or spitting up a vanilla latte, and why? Because they are popular. “[W]e’re popular because we can get away with everything” (2010, p. 13). Sam was not always the popular girl, however. She used to be the one that people, including Lindsay, made fun of. This brings us back to those who are not popular, like Kent McFuller, who is not valued until he throws a party. Another one who fits this description is Juliet Sykes, aka Psycho. Juliet is singled out as the target of most of the bullying caused by Lindsay, Samantha, Elody, and Ally. Sam’s transformation from entitled popular girl to a caring self-sacrificing girl becomes apparent after she dies. Her death causes her to change.

Samantha Kingston dies three times during her existence on Earth. The prolog of the novel starts with Sam telling us that: “[t]hey say that just before you die your whole life flashes before your eyes, but that’s not how it happened for me” (2010, p 1). Though there were things she did not want to experience again, like bad kisses and algebra classes and boring family vacations, she had expected to see the highlights of her life. Sam narrates the circumstances of her death in great detail. From the flash of a white car to Lindsay yelling.

*I hear a horrible screeching sound - metal
on metal, glass shattering, a car folding in two — and smelled fire. I had
time to wonder whether Lindsay had put her cigarette out.*

*Then Vickey Hallinan’s face came rising out of the past. I heard laughter
echoing and rolling around me, swelling into a scream.*

Then nothing. (2010, p. 3)

However, these are Samantha’s reflections about her death before she is redeemed. After her redemption she has a different outlook on what it was like to die. The first excerpt shows what Sam saw when she died: Vickey Hallian. She thought she was going to see her greatest

hits, but she did not. She remembered how she had participated in making fun of Vickey Hallian for her weight. Sam's reflections about this are that this is something that happens all the time everywhere and that the whole point of growing up is "learning to stay on the laughing side" (Oliver, 2010, p. 2). After having relived her last day seven times, and changed her perspective, her experience of dying also changes. Death is no longer scary or frightening. She sees her highlights:

And kissing Kent, because that's when I realized that time doesn't matter. That's when I realized that certain moments go on forever. Even after they're over they still go on, even after you're dead and buried, those moments are lasting still, backward and forward, on into infinity. They are everything and everywhere all at once.

They are the meaning.

I'm not scared, if that's what you're wondering. The moment of death is full of sound and warmth and light, so much light it fills me, absorbs me: a tunnel of light shooting away, arcing up and up and up, and if singing were a feeling it would be this, this light, this lifting, like laughing . . .

The rest you have to find out for yourself.

Oliver, 2010, p. 341

Sam is no longer afraid of dying, because she knows that she can be proud of her own life and what she has achieved, and that she will be remembered in the memories of those who cared about her.

A function of Sam's first death is making the reader getting to acknowledge their own judgmental psyche. The reader has gotten to know what Sam is like through the first of her last days, before her transformation. After having read the first chapter the reader will not consider Sam to be a nice person, she is what can only be described as a 'bitch'. Her actions have been in the interest of self-preservation, no matter the cost. But after Sam dies the first time she points the finger back at the reader:

But before you start pointing fingers, let me ask you: is what I did really so bad? So bad I deserved to die? So bad I deserved to die like that?

Is what I did really so much worse than what anybody else does?

Is it really so much worse than what you do?

Think about it.

Oliver, 2010, p. 56.

Sam challenges the reader to consider her fate and contemplate on tier judgmental thoughts. Though Sam might not be considered a nice person based on her actions in the first chapter. The reader must accept that they might not be considered nice in all accounts. Though the reader might not bully other people, they might be a passive onlooker to others misery and is that so much better than what Sam does before dying. Sam's death, and the choice to have the narrator, a deceased girl, address the reader from beyond the grave gives the death of the protagonist another narrative property. The death of Samantha is not only meant to start a change in her life, but also in the psyche of the reader.

4.3 *The Lovely Bones*

Susie Salmon's death is perhaps the most tragic one of the novels analyzed. Her death stands out because she is raped, murdered and dismembered. The book brings about themes such as life and death, and the acceptance of one's fate as well as letting go of the things that stands in the way of one moving on.

4.3.1 Death as a theme

The Lovely Bones is a work of fantasy where the fantasy element appears after death. The fantasy world, or heaven, is always present, but is only revealed to the reader after Susie has died. Though this world is revealed quite early in the novel, it is only Susie who gets access to it. She is placed in "her heaven" after death. There are other people there, people who have died in a similar way. The different characters who are in heaven have their own section of heaven, but these sections overlap in some places. In Susie's heaven there is a high school and a soccer field, but no teachers or classes. When they die they get their dreams and they

are able to expand their heaven if they desire something enough and understand why they want it, but they are not able to interact with what happens on Earth or visiting those who are still alive. They can only observe. The main supernatural occurrence in the novel is a one-time occurrence, during which Ruth, who is sensitive to the supernatural world, and Susie, to whom Ruth had a connection, switch places. Otherwise, the book is similar to a work of realistic fiction. Still, because of the introduction of an afterlife in a heavenly world, and Ruth's connection to the spiritual world, *The Lovely Bones* constitutes as a fantasy novel grounded in a realistic world where most of the action takes place. This is in line with Nikolajeva's definition of fantasy in young adult literature. The fantastic element is hidden from mankind and the only way to get access to it is to die.

A rule in heaven is that you can get anything you want as long as you desire it enough and understand why. There is, on the other hand, only one thing she will not get to do because it violates the rules of the heaven system. Susie wants to live and experience all the things she did not get to experience. "People grow up by living," I said to Franny. "I want to live." (Sebold, 2002, p. 19). This expands the theme of the book to not just being about death and acceptance, but also to what it means to grow up. To Susie there is a lot of things she did not get to do, love and sex being two of them, but also being there as her siblings grow up and being there for her family in hard times. However, from her heaven, she is able to watch her family experience the things she never got to. In a way, Susie grows up by living through her family and friends. And when she is suddenly placed back on Earth in Ruth's body, there is not a moment to waste. She wants to experience love and sex.

"I've watched you both for years," I said. "I want you to make love to me."

His lips parted to speak, but what was on his lips now was too strange to say out loud. He brushed my nipple with his thumb, and I pulled his head toward me. We kissed.

Sebold, 2002, p. 307

Susie remains the same mental age as she was when she died. This is evident in the experiences she wishes to have when she is given the opportunity of living again for a few

hours in Ruth's body. She chooses love. Had she been older when she died she might have prioritized differently, for example, to visit her family in the short time she had, or pursue the man who murdered her, all are options she could have chosen. Instead, Susie chose love, something most youth wishes to experience and something that holds a big part of the human experience. The choice not to pursue Mr. Harvey might simply be due to that Susie has started to let go of her worries, she does no longer wish to spend any more time and energy on the man who murdered her. The act is done, and now she has the opportunity to live, if only for a brief amount of time.

The theme of the book is to accept death and let go. When you let go of the things that hold your attention to Earth, you can move on to another part of heaven, which Susie calls the wide wide heaven. The difference between the first heaven and the second is that in the second you can simply be. It is about exciting and not about wanting. This is why you have to let go of the things you wanted in life before you can move on to the next. It is not stated whether there is a religious requirement for entering heaven, but the first heaven is in many ways similar to a softened purgatory. However, instead of the soul being purified and made ready for heaven, Susie will be in her heaven until she no longer has any unfinished business on Earth. When Susie is ready to let go of the realm of the living, she can move on to the wide wide heaven. But even after she has moved on, she is allowed to go back to "her own heaven" and look at her family, which she does from time to time. The difference is that she no longer has a wish to live anymore, she has let go. At the very end of the novel a worker finds Susie's bracelet and hands it to his wife.

"This little girl's grown up by now" she said.

Almost.

Not quite.

I wish you all a long and happy life.

Sebold, 2002, p. 328

Susie has almost grown up, she has experienced one of the things she missed out on and was able to come to terms with the things she missed out on and able to move on.

The fantasy genre is what brings this story closure. The gritty circumstances surrounding Susie's death, her being robbed of her youth and not being able to experience what life really has to offer is given closure when Susie is transformed into Ruth's body. The ending comforts the reader because Susie is able to go the next part of heaven, Susie has experienced the things she wanted to do in her life, find love, and has now left the world of the living up to the living.

4.3.2 Death as a narrative technique

The story is narrated and focalized through the protagonist, Susie Salmon. It is told in the past tense, meaning that Susie has already died when she decides to tell her story. This was a new take on narration in young adult literature when the novel was published, and has been the inspiration of the deceased narrator in many other works of young adult literature since (Campbell, 2008, p. 357). The following excerpt shows the first two sentences Susie shares with her readers.

My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie.

I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973.

Sebold, 2002, p. 5

The story transpires in the year of 1973. This means that the reader, from the very start, knows that Susie Salmon is already dead, and has been dead for quite some time. The book is published in 2002, meaning that all readers will have the past tense perspective to the story. The reader is at once aware that this story involves the murder of a fourteen-year-old girl. This choice of narrator and perspective is not necessarily that different from that of a third person narrator in other novels, the twist here lies in the fact that Susie goes from being one of the living characters to a semi-omniscient spectator of the lives of those who are still alive. As Susie Salmon looks down from her heaven onto the life of the ones who stayed behind when she died, she learns about her whole family's struggles and problems. This insight into her family would not have been granted to her if she had not died.

In most of the other books in the selection for this master thesis, death is caused by pure luck or rather a lack of it. Susie is murdered, robbed of her youth and innocence by Mr. Harvey.

Susie Salmon's death scene is a gritty and unpleasant reading experience. The whole first chapter is dedicated to her murder and how it happened. The reader, having been told that Susie would be murdered, experiences this first chapter in unpleasant suspense. Susie is led into a secret underground room, dug out by her neighbor Mr. Harvey in the cornfield next to her neighborhood. His shy behavior is gradually replaced by a more dominant and threatening one. Mr. Harvey refuses to let Susie go home when she wants to. He asks her if she is still a virgin, then he gags her and rapes her before killing her.

He took the hat from my mouth.

"Tell me you love me," he said.

Gently, I did.

The end came anyway.

Sebold, 2002, p. 15

The first chapter in *The Lovely Bones* shows the rape and murder of a young girl. Susie's death becomes the catalyst for the entire story. If Susie had not been murdered her story would probably not have been no near as interesting. Then the story might have been about a girl who fell in love and lived happily ever after. Susie's story is, however, about how she died and where she ended up afterward. By dying Susie opens up another world for the reader and sets the narrative in motion. The reader later finds out that Mr. Harvey not only killed Susie, but he dismembered her. Her elbow is one of the only remains that are found off Susie's body.

The excerpt above is just the first part of Susie's narration of what it was like to die. As a result of her no longer bound to her body, she runs away, also establishing her connection with Ruth, whose body she will later occupy. Susie narrates the story from beyond the grave and in the next chapter she reviles what happens to those who die.

On my way out of Earth, I touched a girl named Ruth. She went to my school but we'd never been close. She was standing in my path that night when my soul shrieked out of Earth. I could

not help but graze her. Once released from life, having lost it in such violence, I couldn't calculate my steps. I didn't have time for contemplation. In violence, it is the getting away that you concentrate on. When you begin to go over the edge, life receding from you as a boat recedes inevitably from shore, you hold on to death tightly, like a rope that will transport you, and you swing out on it, hoping only to land away from where you are.

Sebold, 2002, pp. 36-37

Susie's death reviles the supernatural, or spiritual world to the reader. Though it can be argued that she does this on the very first page, this excerpt gives more information on what happens to the characters of this literary universe after they die and reviles this to the reader.

4.4 *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows tells the story of how Harry Potter finally defeats Voldemort, not by being a more skillful wizard, Voldemort is, after all, the most powerful dark wizard of all time, capable of withstanding death because he has split his soul. Harry defeats Voldemort by sacrificing himself. This makes the sacrifice of death one of the key themes, as well as a narrative force, in this last installment. Harry has an understanding that it is better for one to die, than that all should perish.

4.4.1 Death as a theme

The theme of death is present in the entire Harry Potter universe, where family and friends have died or be killed off from the very start. The last installment is no different from the rest. Throughout the book, people fight to secure Harry Potter, or to save the Wizarding World. Harry's sacrifice, however, is somewhat different, he goes willingly, without resistance, in order to end Voldemort. The other deaths in the story have been in order to secure Harry's ability to continue the fight against Voldemort. It is Harry's realization that he has to die, in order to destroy the horcrux living inside him in order to stop Voldemort which leads him to surrender himself willingly.

When Harry chooses to sacrifice himself for the greater good he becomes a 'Christ figure'. The 'Christ figure' is an archetypal character who sacrifices himself for the greater good or so others might benefit. The archetypal Christ figure, or savior figure, has been closely associated with the Jesus Christ in the Western art and literature, which has been heavily influenced by its Christian heritage. This is because cultures are deeply influenced by their religious practices, Christianity has been the dominant religion in this part of the world, and even though fewer and fewer identify as a Christian practitioner, the centuries of religious influence do not disappear (Foster, 2012, p. 65). This Christian influence can be found in literature, as well as TV and cinema, music and art. The character does not need to be a direct copy of the Biblical Jesus but tends to go through similar ordeals (Foster, 2012, p. 67). Harry's death can be considered to be similar to that of a savior, or Christ figure. For this interpretation to be valid Harry Potter must be considered to have been killed by the killing curse. Without actually dying, Harry has not sacrificed anything. Death and self-sacrifice for the greater good is the main theme in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. It is Harry's sacrifice that leads to Voldemort's downfall, and Harry's victory. Had Harry not sacrificed himself, the last horcrux would still be intact, and Voldemort would have been victorious. Voldemort could then have continued to terrorize the Wizarding World. By dying, Harry Potter can be considered a savior figure, or a Christ figure, sacrificing himself to secure the survival of his friends and the Wizarding World. Harry does not know what is going to happen after he surrenders himself. He probably thinks he will move on to the afterlife, to be reunited with all his loved ones who have died for him. This is why he shares his knowledge about the horcruxes with Neville Longbottom before he sets his course to the Forbidden Forest and what he thinks will be his death. If Harry knew that he would be all right there is no sacrifice. Harry chooses to face his own mortality in order to save the rest of the Wizarding World.

The fantasy genre is, as mentioned earlier in this master thesis, suitable to tackle the question of an afterlife because of the genre's requirement to restructure reality. The fantastic element of an afterlife becomes less questionable and less open to scrutiny, because, after all the very world is fictional. The Harry Potter series has acknowledged from the very start that there is

an afterlife, though it is not apparent exactly what comes after the world of the living. The inclusion of ghosts and other spirits, for instance the encounter with Harry's family and mentors before he enters the Forbidden Forest, is an evidence of some kind of existence after death. The ghosts are spirits who are able to vocally interact with the living world and are able to be seen. The spirits of Lilly, James, Remus, and Sirius seem to be present, but part of another realm, which the living cannot see. This is evident from the conversation with these spirits when Harry holds the Resurrection Stone. "'You'll stay with me?' 'Until the very end,' said James" (Rowling, 2014, p. 571). Voldemort's quest is to ensure that he lives forever so that he does not have to face his fear of death. This is why he made the horcruxes and split his soul as many times as he did. Harry on the other hand is eager to be with those who have sacrificed their lives so that he would live. This eagerness does, however, not lead him to move on when he is given the opportunity during the meeting with Dumbledore at Kings Cross. Harry chooses life and the fight against Voldemort.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows uses death as a theme as a way of raising the question of what might be worth fighting for and what might be worth giving your life for. The setting of this last installment in the Harry Potter series is that Voldemort has risen to power and is as powerful, or even more, than he was the previous time he rose to power. Though he is not considered the master of the Elder Wand, he is still capable of great magical feats with it. To great danger to himself, Harry rises to the occasion and pursues the horcruxes, accompanied by his friends. They know that the only way to stop Voldemort is to fight against him, by destroying the horcrux. The fight between good and evil is quite common within the fantasy genre, and the Harry Potter series uses this theme as well. Harry chooses to fight, by surrendering himself, for his friends. He knows that as long as the last horcrux is inside him, Voldemort can never truly be defeated. The choice to stand up against evil and fight for a better world is, at its core, the message of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the sacrifice that Harry makes is used to support this.

As many of the other books in the selection for this master thesis, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* emphasizes the fact that everyone is going to die at some point, but that this

should not discourage one from living. Upon his journey to the underworld, Dumbledore explains this simple truth to Harry by saying;

You are the true master of death, because the true master does not seek to run away from Death. He accepts that he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying.

Rowling, 2014, p. 589

Death is an inevitable part of life and by accepting this truth one is able to overcome the fear of it. This again can be connected to Kokorski's (2015) argument that the fantasy genre has the possibility to help the reader develop an angst-free outlook on life, but Kokorski's argument is also valid for other genres, relating to the topic of death. As mentioned before a reader who reads about death experiences death a multitude of times, and the protagonist's death and reflections about death and dying can help the reader to disarm the fear which often accompanies one's death.

4.4.2 Death as a narrative technique

Harry Potter's death affects the narrative in many ways. It is a narrative force, which drives the narrative forward, it functions as a thrilling increase in suspense, and as a crucial part of the plot and the demise of Voldemort. As a narrative force, Harry's death, at first forces the narrative to a standstill after the following excerpt the rest of the page is empty and the reader has to turn the page.

He saw the mouth move and a flash of green light, and everything was gone.

Rowling, 2014, p. 575

The narrator chooses to end the chapter and page on a cliffhanger which adds suspense. The reader has to turn the page to figure out what happens next. It is at this point that the suspense is at its highest peak. Harry's death is the climax of the story. If Harry is able to defeat death, he must surely be able to defeat Voldemort. Harry's fight with Voldemort is thus in a way an anticlimax. The buildup towards that fight is nowhere as intense as the buildup before Harry faces the killing-curse. And the payoff is nowhere as grand either as Voldemort lies dead on the floor.

There is an argument to be made that Harry Potter did not die in the Forbidden Forest, after all, he awoke unharmed and was able to fight on. What I would like to call Harry's death scene in the Forbidden Forest is in many ways a Schrödinger's cat conundrum. He is both dead and not dead at the same time. This leads me to view Harry's encounter with Voldemort's killing curse in two different ways. From one perspective Harry is an archetypal savior figure, mirroring Christ, who had to die in order to resurrect and save the world. The other perspective views Harry's encounter with the killing curse as the entry ticket to visit the underworld, a *katabasis*, in order to learn how to defeat Voldemort. If one interprets the death scene this way Harry does not die from Voldemort's curse, so the narrative properties of his trip to the underworld is somewhat different from that of actually dying. When confronted with the question:

‘Then ... I'm dead too?’

‘Ah,’ said Dumbledore, smiling still more broadly. ‘That is the question, isn't it? On the whole, dear boy, I think not.’

(Rowling, 2014, p. 578)

Dumbledore states that he does not think Harry is fully dead, but he is not alive either. The two interpretations of this excerpt reveals a duality to the role of death in the narrative. If Harry does not die, but simply visits the underworld in order to learn the final missing pieces about his connection to Lord Voldemort, he cannot resurrect and therefore cannot be considered a savior figure from this perspective. However, a visit to the underworld has its temptations. After having learned what happened the night his parents died, learned about how the Deathly Hallows actually works, Harry is faced with a choice.

‘I've got to go back, haven't I?’

‘That is up to you.’

‘I've got a choice?’

‘Oh yes.’ Dumbledore smiled at him. ‘We are in King's Cross, you say? I think that if you decided not to go back, you would be able to... let's say ... board a train.’

‘And where would it take me?’

‘On,’ said Dumbledore simply.

It is important to note that this is a real temptation. Harry has visited the underworld, or at least a part of it, and if he so chooses, he can leave the world of the living behind and move on. Death hereby becomes a temptation and relief, something that has the power to set one free and leave all the problems of the living world behind. Harry, however, does not act on this temptation. He chooses to return to the world of the living, where he is able to defeat Voldemort.

The two different ways of interpreting what can be described as Harry Potter's death scene leads to two different scenarios which affect the narrative differently. Both uses the death of Harry as a plot device which raises the stakes. It is, however, up to the reader to interpret whether or not Harry's death means that he died alongside Voldemort's horcrux or if it was only the latter which was killed. Which ever way the reader chooses to interpret the event both are valid readings, because there seems to be proficient evidence to support both claims.

4.5 *The Book Thief*

Martin Zusak's *The Book Thief* is about a young girl, Liesel Meminger, and her struggles during the second world war. Though the book is filled with death, from the death of the supporting characters to Death being a character and the narrator, Liesel's death is in many ways an extra added entry to the story of a young girl who survived the second world war. Liesel does not die during the main plot of the book. The only reason that her death is included in the narrative at all is that Death, the narrator, chooses to include it in order to emphasize a point. That everyone is going to die.

4.5.1 Death as a theme

The theme of death becomes apparent from the very start, when Liesel's brother dies, only to be followed by many others during the narrative. The central theme of the book is the acceptance of death as a part of life. Liesel has to overcome her fear of death, which she eventually does. When she is young she is tormented by horrible nightmares where she sees her brother lying dead on the train. She wakes up afraid and cannot sleep. This is when Hans

Hubermann, Liesel's foster father, decides to teach her to read. Each night when the nightmares come Hans and Liesel practice reading. Gradually, through reading and conversations with Hans, she is able to let go of the nightmares and accept death as a tragic, but inevitable part of life.

Before going deeper into the theme of death within *The Book Thief* it is important to understand the importance of the theme of death combined with the genre of historical fiction. *The Book Thief* is set during the second world war and is in many ways a typical historical novel, but it has an element of fantasy, as it is narrated by Death and Death is a physically manifested character in the story. As mentioned in 3.2.3, Duthie (2006) makes the argument that one of historical fiction's key features is its realistic setting and recollecting of events. And this is why *The Book Thief* is categorized as a work of historical fiction. It is set during the second world war and takes the reader through some of the processes leading up to the conflict, e.g. the book burnings and antisemitism, as well as the downfall of Nazi Germany. Though most of the events and locations in the book are fictional, Zusak has created a narrative within the context of the second world war which seems plausible to the reader. An example is Molching, a fictitious town which is set on the outskirts of Munich. This makes the bombings, which occur in the story credible. Around 45% of Munich was destroyed during the second world war (Bronstein, 2019). Still, there is the magical element of Death as both character and narrator. Though Death adds a supernatural element to the narrative, Death has no direct influence on the narrative. He is a bystander looking at the events which transpire and has done so for centuries. He only interacts with the physical world once during the narrative, to pick up Liesel's book. When he collects Liesel they are both in and not in the physical world. This becomes apparent as he takes her on a walk down Anzac Avenue and talks with her, while cars drive by. These cars do not, however, notice Death and Liesel. Death's narration and perspective will be addressed in more detail in the next subchapter.

As mentioned in the subchapter 3.2.3, Historical fiction, Duthie makes the argument that historical fiction for children and young adults is meant to help the reader reevaluate his or her preconceptions about the time period or conflict. By doing so the reader might become

aware of what led up to the conflict. I would claim that *The Book Thief's* main goal as a work of historical fiction is to help visualize the second world war to the reader and by doing so ensure that the devastation which occurred during the second world war does not repeat itself. This is why the narrator, Death, focuses so detailed on the deaths surrounding Liesel. From her little brother to Rudy Steiner, and Hans and Rosa Hubermann, Liesel slowly loses those dearest to her. But the book does not shy away from the death of other characters as well, from air force pilots to Jews, death is depicted on both sides of the war. When death narrates his last encounter with Liesel he notices those who are still alive and living their life. He states:

A few cars drove by, each way. Their drivers were Hitlers
and Hubermanns, and Maxes, killers, Dillers, and
Steiners. . . .

Zusak, 2005, p. 554

By including this sentence, Death, shows the reader how the different types of characters we have gotten to know within this narrative still live on in more recent times. Works of historical fiction has, as mentioned earlier, a goal to present the time period with a didactic backdrop (James, 2009, p. 31). *The Book Thief* opens up the second world war to the reader so that they can learn to recognize similarities in their own time period. The buildup towards the conflict starts with biases towards an ethnic and religious group. By stating that the drivers where Hitlers and Hubermanns, and Maxes, killers, Dillers, and Steiners Death shows us how some people still carries the characteristics and attitudes that these characters had and by doing so that the world is not perfect. Being a work of historical fiction there is a lesson to be learned about war and misinformed prejudices towards certain groups of the population, the Jews in this case, but also xenophobia in general. George Santayana said that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” and as a work of historical fiction set during the second world war, *The Book Thief*, highlights death as a theme in order to help the reader remember.

The theme of death is thoroughly intertwined with the events in *The Book Thief*. And this is to be expected of a novel set in Germany during the second world war. The tone of the book

is set quite early in the story, Death comes for everyone, and *The Book Thief* makes this very clear to the reader. Some deaths are random, tragic or unintended, and others are more expected and welcomed, like Liesel's own death. And the narrator tells the reader this in the very beginning of the book.

HERE IS A SMALL FACT

You are going to die.

Zusak, 2005, p. 13

The theme, and presence, of death, is used to get the reader aware of his or her own mortality. Everyone will eventually die, and *The Book Thief* shows the reader how growing old is a privilege and not something one is entitled to from the moment of birth. Though the circumstances surrounding the different deaths in this novel is quite different from each other.

You will know me well enough and soon enough, depending on a diverse range of variables. It suffices to say that at some point in time, I will be standing over you, as genially as possible. Your soul will be in my arms. A color will be perched on my shoulder. I will carry you gently away.

Zusak, 2005, p. 14

Death as a theme carries with it the realization that life must end, the realistic nature to the historical genre cannot overlook this fact, which results in the fact that Liesel also must die. Unlike many of the other characters, however, she does not die in a climactic way, but as an attempt to bring closure to the story of how Liesel Meminger, more on this later.

Her own death is not unexpected to Liesel. Liesel is old when she dies and has probably lived a long and fulfilling life: she has married, birthed children and received grandchildren. When Liesel dies she awaits death sitting up. "Like her papa, her soul was sitting up" (Zusak, 2005, p. 547) awaiting to be guided to the other side. This is in contrast with other works of young adult literature where death is a major theme. Young adult literature regarding death often tends to kill off characters to underline the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of a

young person. *The Book Thief* paints a more positive view of the death of its protagonist. Though the other deaths in the narrative are tragic, chaotic and unfair. The death of Liesel Meminger is depicted as expected and awaited. And unlike those who did not get to live their lives, Liesel, seemingly, got to fill hers. Liesel lived a full life after the war and her death gives her character and the reader closure by conforming to the theme, everyone will die.

4.5.2 Death as a narrative technique

Death makes its presence known at all times in *The Book Thief*, both as a character and as a result of life ceasing to exist. Set during the war, with air raids that can come as lightning from clear skies, death is a constant threat to the characters of the story, especially Liesel, whom Death reports to have encountered three times. There are some devastating deaths in this novel, e.g. Rudy Steiner and the Hans and Rosa Hubermann, but Liesel's death itself is not grand.

The death of the protagonist, Liesel Meminger, is in many ways a digression to the narrative. The story of Liesel's childhood, where her brother dies on a train on the way to their foster home in Germany where she befriends a Jewish man and buries her friends and family, is seemingly over when Max is reunited with Liesel in 1945 after the war ends. Yet there are still some pages left regarding the life of Liesel Meminger. The reader does not get to know how old Liesel has become when she dies, other than her being described as an old woman. She was only a child when the war started, and after having survived it, it is only natural that she would pick up the pieces and continue to live her life. Sometime during her lifetime Liesel moved to Australia and settled down in Sidney and died, seemingly, from old age, as nothing else is described in the book. Liesel's death is calm and expected. Her thoughts go to all the lives that branch out from hers, her children, Max, and also to those who have already died. This is in a great contrast to the other deaths in the narrative and the other books in this project, which, to some extent, can be considered random, chaotic, and unfair. Liesel was ready to die.

Liesel Meminger's death is meant to function as closure, and vaguely answer some questions the reader might have. Liesel has managed to live a seemingly normal life after the war. As mentioned earlier, she has moved to Australia and is now an old woman, she has birthed children and they have given her grandchildren. This, in a way, answers enough of the questions one might have after a story about a young girl who lived through the second world war, like, what happened to her after the war ended? Dying of old age is a privilege, especially in young adult literature. There was no guarantee that Liesel would make it out of the war alive, after all, Death himself said: "I saw the book thief three times" (Zusak, 2013, p. 15). Knowing that Death comes for us all and Death himself stating that "you are going to die" (2013, p. 13), one can assume that Liesel is no exception to this rule. The reader knows from the very start that Death encountered Liesel three times during her limited life span, and it is safe to assume that one of these times Death came for Liesel. This knowledge is given to the reader at the very beginning of the narrative.

There is an argument to be made that Liesel might not be the protagonist to the story. Sure, the story is about her, but it is also about Death. The inclusion of death as a character and narrator supports this claim. Similar to Susie Salmon in *The Lovely Bones*, Death is a spectator to the lives of the living, forced to see them make the same mistakes over and over again. Death is the entity which brings the story together, though it is about Liesel's life. If Death is the protagonist to the story, Liesel's life is just a focal point he uses to emphasize an argument. Death, being a character outside time, could have chosen any time in history, but chooses to use the second world war to show how life is precious. By choosing to narrate a story about life in a setting surrounded by death Death is able to give the reader the realization that life itself is a given and that death will come for everybody eventually, no matter the outcome of one's life.

The inclusion of Death as not just a concept, but also as the character who narrates the story brings with it an open-ended interpretation of what happens after death. Death walks along Anzac Avenue alongside Liesel and gives her the book where she had written down the experiences of her childhood. There is no religious backdrop, but simply an existence after the life lived on Earth. The narrator even seems to take no side and hold no judgment over

those whom he collects, “[w]hen the war was over and Hitler had delivered himself to my arms” (Zusak, 2013, p. 552), but he does seem tired. Tired of seeing mankind repeating the same mistakes and holding the same attitudes and prejudices towards each other.

4.6 *Soldier Boy*

The story of Jim Martin is mainly intended for Australian readers but is also suitable for readers from other countries. The novel’s protagonist, Jim Martin, is a 14-year-old who enlists himself in the Australian Imperial Forces in order to fulfill his patriotic duty. Though he is not old enough to enlist, he does so with his parents’ blessing. He gets their blessing after having threatened his parents that he would do so either way, but if he had their approval he would write to them. After his training, he is dispatched at Gallipoli to fight the Ottoman Empire and dies of dysentery aboard the hospital ship Glenert Castle.

4.6.1 Death as a theme

The historical context of *Soldier Boy* is important to bear in mind when reading the novel. Being a historical novel the author is limited to the known and tangible experiences of the first world war. The author is also limited by the historical evidence regarding Jim Martin’s life. The narrator of the story uses a lot of time and effort when he describes Jim’s upbringing and education in a militarized and patriotic school system. This gives the reader an understanding of why Jim felt that it was his patriotic duty to enlist and join the war that threatened the British Empire, and thus himself. Before the first world war, a lot of countries focused on their national identity, and Australia, as part of the British Empire, was no exception from this. The book is meant to be inspiring and patriotic. An example of this is shown on the front cover, where one can read the following “He whom this scroll commemorates was numbered among those who, at the call of King and Country, left all” (Larsen, in Hill, 2001, front cover). It is therefore quite sad that his death is in no means patriotic and in service to the war effort and the Commonwealth. He dies of sickness aboard hospital ship Glenert Castle. The whole death could easily have been avoided by simply going to the infirmary as requested of him several times by officers and friends. Aboard the

hospital ship they cut away his filthy clothes “once so new and proud out on” (2001, p. 129) symbolizing that the army no longer had any use of his service.

The story of Jim Martin uses death as a theme to emphasize how meaningless war and death is. By dying aboard a hospital ship, Jim accomplishes nothing. He does not get to prove himself in battle, and he does not get the glorious welcome upon his return. The tone of the book gradually shifts from a strong and patriotic book to a tragedy: Jim Martin’s death. This is evident in the two narrations of his death. The first narration has a patriotic undertone, but when the narrator is finished telling the story of Jim Martin the second narration of his death becomes tragic.

The tragedy, which is Jim Martin’s story, rises and falls on his patriotism. A tragedy, according to Baldick (2001), is “representing the disastrous downfall of a central character” (p. 260). This downfall often results in the protagonist’s death due to a tragic flaw, or hamartia, in the character. A hamartia, or misstep, is an action which leads to the protagonist downfall (Baldick, 2001, pp. 109-110). In Jim Martin’s case, this misstep is not going to the infirmary when requested by his friends and commanding officers. His conviction is caused by his patriotic feelings, his pride, and is why he feels that he has to be present with his squad at all times. His friend, Ces Hogan, has become ill twice and has been sent to the Casualty Clearing Hospital (CCH), each time he returned fit for fight. When he comes back he is more aware of the other soldiers’ symptoms and takes an interest in Jim’s condition. Though Jim is coughing, bleeding from his nose and has a stomach ache and constipation, he refuses to go to the CCH. Ces asks him to go multiple times and is met with similar responses each time.

‘You sure you’re not crook?’

‘Just a few pais ... like you had.’

‘You oughta see the medics...’

‘Look! I’ll get over it! Just like you did.’

Hill, 2001, p. 123

When Jim is confronted with his condition he tries to trivialize it, but deep down he knows something is wrong, as it is affecting his performance in the trenches.

The demonstration drew little enemy fire. It was as if he (the Turks) knew it was just a demonstration, without serious intent, and his heart was not in it.

Nor was Jim Martin's. Standing in the trench, he found it hard to make much sense of what was going on or what he was supposed to be doing. His gut ached. He couldn't hold the rifle steady. He shouted as they were told, but all that came out was vomit.

Hill, 2001, pp. 123-124

After around two and a half weeks of being sick, Jim got dysentery, a sickness which mostly stems from poor hygiene and is treatable with a water drip and antibiotics (Biggers, 2017). But Jim's patriotism and not wanting to be considered a coward prevents him from going to the CCH. As the Battalion song goes "May coward shame distain his name / The wreck that dares not die (Hill, 2001, p. 126). Even though Ces tries to convince Jim that there is no shame in seeking help from the CCH, Jim refuses to go. His tragic flaw is that he is unable to see his own physical limitations. First of all, he should not be there, as a boy of only 14 years, but also his health. And when he finally acknowledges that he is not well, he also becomes afraid that he will not become well again, the next day he loses consciousness.

So Jim was carried down to Anzac Cove and laid in an open barge that was taken that day's cargo of sick and wounded soldiers to Glenert Castle, anchored offshore. Far more sick than wounded. With the coming of cold weather, the swarms of Gallipoli flies with their arsenal of disease had begun to disappear. But for many soldiers it was too late. (2001, p 129)

Jim's faith conforms to the main theme of *Soilder Boy* which is the tragic death of youth. Through a yearning desire to aspire military greatness Jim Martin's life amounts to nothing.

This might be considered a harsh statement, seeing that Jim Martin is considered a war hero in his own country, but the narrative Hill presents in *Soldier Boy* leaves behind a bitter after taste in the reader. His death is not heroic, only tragic. This is the perspective of a foreign reader. For those Jim Martin left behind, however, the story is different. In order to come to peace with his death it might be important to view his actions as heroic and patriotic, especially for his family, and may be for the military that sent a fourteen-year-old into battle. This is why it is important to bear in mind James' argument that historical fiction is colored by the historical narrative a nation wishes to present. To some Jim Martin's death marks the pinnacle of patriotic youth and their willingness to give everything for their country. To others, however, Jim Martin's death brings only sadness.

4.6.2 Death as a narrative technique

Jim Martin death is narrated two times in *Soldier Boy* where the first narration of his death sets the story in motion and the second concludes it. The book starts at the end of Jim Martin's life. This brings the reader right into the most emotional part of Jim Martin's story, where he is lying aboard the hospital ship Glenart Castle slowly dying of typhoid and dysentery. Jim is only capable of whispers, because all his strength has left him due to the illness and thirst he experiences. The tone created at this moment, where Jim desperately wants water and reassurance, sets the tone for the whole narrative, the reader knows from the very start of this book that Jim Martin will not survive the ending. The narrator uses the first chapter to establish the surrounding circumstances for Jim Martin's death, and the first pages of the second chapter to describe his mother's reflections upon hearing the news. Only then does the story of how Jim Martin ended up fighting in the first world war and dying aboard Glenart Castle resume. It starts by telling about Jim's birth and the upbringing which led him to enlist. Jim Martin's death therefore affect the narrative by setting it in motion. When the main character dies in the introductory chapter, the reader becomes intrigued and involved in the narrative from an early stage in the reading experience. The reader therefor wants to figure out the course of events which led Jim Martin to die at such an early age.

There is a noticeable change between the first time Martin's death is told in the beginning and the second time in the very end of the book. The first time the narrator elaborates on the circumstances surrounding Jim Martin's death from an onlookers perspective. There is a strong patriotic undertone to this narration. The narrator gives the impression that Jim is in safe hands and that there might be hope for him. It was in fact unexpected that he died, he had after all only been left alone for ten minutes. There is a melancholy to his death and it is important for the narrator to try and give his death meaning.

And nothing to say that, so far as is known, he was the youngest of all the Anzacs to die. The youngest Australian soldier boy to sacrifice everything for his country.

Hill, 2001, p. 6

The excerpt shows how the narrator tries to paint Jim Martin's death as something heroic and patriotic, a life given in service for his country. The fact however is shown in the undertone of the second narration of Jim Martin's death where he is more the focus of attention.

Whereas the first narration depicts the nursing staff as attentive and responsive, and where Jim's death seemed to be untimely and unexpected, the second narration almost depicts them as inattentive. Jim is left alone and drugged on morphine. The patriotic undertone is replaced with tragedy. The main reason for this is that the reader now knows the story about Jim Martin. They know that his so called sacrifices might have been avoided had he gone to the infirmary as requested countless times, or if he had simply stayed at home as his mother wanted.

The narrator has constructed the narrative in a way which leads the reader to come to see the duality presented in Jim Martin's death. The first one is constructed in a way to highlight Jim as a true patriot who answered the call off his nation in a moment of need. The second is constructed as a tragedy, meaningless and in a way ironic. It is the same narrator who narrates both the beginning and end. By constructing the narrative in this way he shows the reader the coping mechanisms which exists in order to try and make death meaningful. The narrator both creates the notion of Jim Martin as a patriot and questions it at the same time. The interpretation of his death is therefore ambiguous and depending on one's reading *Soldier*

Boy is either a story of a true patriot or a tragic story of a boy who wanted to prove himself, but amounted to nothing.

Reading the beginning and the final pages of *Soldier Boy* raises the question of what is a meaningful death. Jim Martin asks the nurse Reddock aboard Glenert Castle, “[a]m I going to get well...?” (Hill, 2001, p. 130). To which she answers affirmingly. The events which transpire on this page, 130, is unsettling. They bring about questions about what a good and or meaningful death is. Jim has served his country in a time of need and his final moments is aboard a hospital ship alone, asking for water.

‘Water... please, water...’

A nurse helped him drink - such sweet water - and gave him an injection of morphine to help ease the pain.

(jumping further down on the same page)

‘Am I going to get well...?’

‘Of course you are, my dear boy...’

So that was all right. Right as rain.

‘Thank you, sister. I feel better already.’ (2001, p. 130)

In the excerpt above Jim is sedated and comforted by his nurse. He asks a valid question about his prognosis and is met with comforting words. Jim is in many ways robbed of his death. By taking away the knowledge of his inevitable death, Jim Martin is not able to reflect on the choices which led him to where he now lies dying. Thinking that he would only get some rest and wake up rested and on his way to recovery, Jim Martin dies deceived and drugged. Though Jim Martin’s sickness had run a long way there is no conversation about his prospect and diagnosis. This is, of course, an easy interpretation of the events and it also might be a bit harsh. Readers century from the 21st century will have their medical institutions in mind when reading these pages, and it might be considered unfair to hold the hospital staff on a warship to the same standards that we expect from our caregivers in our

time. Regardless of one's position towards this statement, Jim is given a "merciful" death without pain and suffering, a merciful escape to an otherwise painful death.

From Jim Martin's acknowledgment of his condition to him laying on his death bed on board Glenert Castle, his mind drifts from feelings of being abandoned by his family, after not having received any correspondence from them to God and the comforting prayers and children's songs he learned as a child. Jim Martin dies in a hospital bed, alone and drugged. And like other books in this project, i.e. *Before I fall* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the moment of death is marked by "Then Nothing" (Hill, 2001, p. 130). This marks the end of sensory input, as well as the end of the life of Jim Martin. In the majority of the other books in this master thesis, the story continues after death, but not in this one. Jim Martin's death is the last entry in his existence.

5. Discussion

In this discussion I will look at the links between the books in order to comment on the tendencies of the protagonist's death in contemporary young adult literature. In order to do so, I want to bring the focus back to the main research question for the analysis: What is the role of the death of the protagonist in young adult literature? The analysis was carried out with this main research question in mind. In order to answer this question I have focused on two different aspects of the death of the protagonist in the novels: death as a theme and death as a narrative technique. In the discussion that follows I will first discuss death as a theme in relation to the subquestions for that topic. Then I will do the same with death as a narrative technique. The subquestions are as follows:

1. Death as a theme:
 - 1.1. How do different genres convey death as a theme?
 - 1.2. What does death in young adult literature try to say about life?
2. Death as a narrative technique:
 - 2.1. How does the death of the protagonist affect the narrative?
 - 2.2. What is special about the death of the protagonist?
 - 2.3. How is the death of the protagonist narrated?

The theme of death is connected to what it means to live throughout the novels. Being products of contemporary Western young adult literature, the novels tackle the theme of death revealing values of what it means to live in Western societies. The deaths focus on the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of a teen, who had a life at their feet.

The death of the protagonist is used to make the reader experience a personal death and come to terms with their own mortality. The reader can imagine what might be awaiting them after their own death, e.g. heaven, limbo, or simply a state of nothingness. As seen in the analysis, contemporary young adult literature is not afraid to use all the aforementioned possibilities,

though, at least in the selection for this master, none of the books has a religious interpretation of the afterlife.

5.1 Death as a theme

The different genres explored in this master thesis use death to emphasize their respective take on what dying is like, and what comes after. As mentioned earlier each genre treats the theme of death differently. I will now discuss how the different genres treat the theme of death. Realistic fiction is not about claiming to know what comes after death, as this would go against the genre's characteristics, which includes depicting the real world in a realistically constructed narrative. No living person can with absolute certainty claim to know what comes after death or what dying is really like, therefore realistic fiction cannot claim to know this either. By leaving an open ending, or stating things like "The End," as in *Before I Die*, the genre takes away the focus on what might come after and rather centers on what dying is like when one is still alive. The death of the protagonist in young adult realistic fiction is more about what the protagonist is missing out on in life and therefore also about trying to experience what life has to offer before it is too late. James argues that death can be seen as a catalyst for growth (James, 2009, p. 74). The death of the protagonists in realistic fiction is therefore about living, growing up and gathering adult experiences. The protagonist's life, in some ways, becomes a compact Bildungsroman, forcing the teen to grow up fast, both in maturity and experiences.

The death of the protagonist serves a different purpose in the fantasy genre. Here the author is given the freedom to script an afterlife and supernatural elements to suit the narrative. The inclusion of an afterlife is used to make the reader think about what might come after.

Though there are some religious undertones in the imagery used in the selection of young adult fantasy for this master thesis, there are no religious requirements to ensure the protagonist's place in the afterlife in the selected reading material for this master thesis. There are no specific frameworks of belief and no doctrine. In *The Lovely Bones*, there is a heaven system unveiled to the reader after Susie Salmon dies, but the requirements for her ending up in her heaven are somewhat vague. It is unclear if "heaven" is only obtainable for those who

are considered “good enough” or if even Mr. Harvey would have ended up in heaven had he died within the limitations of the narrative. What the reader does know is that the heaven system in *The Lovely Bones* groups people together depending on how they died, at least in the first stage of heaven. As mentioned previously there is a presence of an afterlife in the Harry Potter universe, ranging from ghosts and spirits to an existence unknown to the Wizarding World, but acknowledged. There seems to be no requirement to enter this afterlife, other than to die. As ghosts are a part of this world there might be a spell that is needed to become one, otherwise the afterlife is unknown to the living.

The fantastic element in *The Book Thief* opens up a reflection about the afterlife. Though what happens in the afterlife is not that clear. Death is a character only revealed to those who have died. He comes and guides them to the afterlife, but that afterlife remains unclear. The character of Death does not, however, distinguish between what one might consider a bad person and a good person. He accepted Hitler and Liesel alike, what happens to them afterwards is a mystery. The fantastic element in *Before I Fall* firstly reveals the afterlife to contain a limbo, or reliving the last day over and over again. This in itself is also a kind of afterlife, a concentrated version of the Buddhist life cycle, Samsara, where rebirth is only stopped when one achieves Nirvana and is set free from the cycle. Again there is no elaboration on what happens to Samantha Kingston after she is set free from reliving her last day, but there seems to be some requirement, she has to put other’s needs in front of her own. It seems that fantasy, or a fantastic element, in young adult literature tends to offer the reader different possible scenarios after death, but without stating that one religion is more correct than others.

The two examples of historical fiction are perhaps the two which differ most from each other in the book selection for this master thesis. Though both are set during a world war, the theme of death is used quite differently. In *Soldier Boy*, Jim Martin’s death is used to underline how meaningless war and fighting can be, as well as stubbornness and unwillingness to let others help. His death is also used to show how death is culturally constructed in terms of seeing him as a patriot, a coping mechanism that is used to give his death meaning. Liesel Meminger’s death in *The Book Thief* on the other hand uses the theme of death to show the

reader that there can be a life after conflict and loss as well. That even though death and devastation ruins one's childhood, one is allowed to move on, start a family and settle down. The historical context of both books is used to remind the reader of the hopelessness and meaninglessness of death during wartime, but the protagonists's death serve different purposes in relation to the theme. In *Soldier Boy* the theme of death is about questioning the coping mechanisms used when remembering those who died. In *The Book Thief* it is about moving on after tragedy and living life.

As the selection of books presented in this master thesis can imply the death of the protagonist can be executed in various ways in young adult literature. All the analyses above show that the common denominator in narratives where the protagonist dies is that they say something about life and growing up. Susie Salmon states that it one grows up by living (Sebold, 2002, p. 19). An example of this is that Tessa, Samantha and Susie, all have an urge to experience what life is before they die. This is why they all choose to have sex with someone they love, when the opportunity arises. Sex and love are two fundamental experiences in Western society. From an early age children and young adults are imprinted with the idea that love is something which fulfills one's life and gives life meaning. Sex is both a byproduct of love, but also a motivator on its own right. What Tessa wants to experience, first and foremost, is sex, in her case love is something she wants to experience after this. Life is about acquiring experiences and acknowledging that life has an end. It is therefore safe to say that the role of the protagonist's death in young adult literature is to emphasize the theme of life and living. The experiences gained in contemporary young adult literature are enhanced when the protagonist's life is on the line. This underscores Kearsley's statement that "the foreground of life is only possible with the background of death" (1990, p. 3).

The fundamental theme of almost all the books, excluding *Soldier Boy*, is the theme of accepting death as a natural part of life. By presenting this theme to the young adult reader they too are given the opportunity to come to term with their own mortality. The theme of accepting death does not however hinder the protagonists in living their life. They all seem to

live their life for what they believe in or as a way of experiencing what they want. Life and death are on opposite sides of the coin form each other and one cannot have one without the other.

5.2 Death as a narrative technique

In the novels selected for this master thesis, the protagonist dies at different points in the chronology of the narrative. Some die early, e.i. Susie and Samantha a, some die in the middle, e.i. Harry Potter and Samantha, and some die at the end of their narrative, Tessa, Jim, and Liesel. Depending on when the death occurs the change of state, as argued by Hakola and Kivistö, takes on different properties. The death of the protagonist affect the characters, mainly the protagonists in this analysis, and the events (Hakola and Kivistö, 2014, p. x) If the protagonist dies in the beginning, the whole premise of that narrative rests on the protagonist's death and transformation from one existence to another. The death scene acts as a catalyst for the narrative. If we take Susie's and Samantha's deaths as an example Susie enters heaven, and Samantha relives her last day. If the protagonist dies in the middle of the story, it is used as a way of raising the stakes, as is the case of Harry Potter. The death therefore becomes the climax of the story, where the tension is at its highest peak. Another way the protagonist's death is used in the middle is by affirming the rules of death within the story. Samantha cannot escape her last day, no matter how much she tries. Her second death is therefor used to highlight this aspect of her limbo. The resolution, or ending, uses death as closure, a way to end the story, as with Tessa's, Liesel's and Jim's death. For this to make sense the protagonist's death must be proclaimed in advance so that the reader does not have any unresolved questions to why the protagonist had to die.

Narratives where the protagonist dies in the beginning involve death as a way to gain and change, perspective. Susie's perspective changes quite literary from a first-person perspective, with the limitations this entails, to a third person bird's eye view of all the things transpiring on Earth. Her death has the narrative properties to act as a catalyst for the narrative. By dying Susie sets in motion a range of events, both in her life and in the life of those around her. By dying reveals the afterlife for herself, Ruth, and the reader. Samantha's

death, however, functions as a reset button for her last day. By limiting the time, action of the narrative, and agency of Samantha to one single day the reader easily picks up on Samantha's change in character. The limitations regarding the amount of agency Samantha can perform within one day is why she lives the total number of seven last days. Though her death gradually changes her, she has to die multiple times in order to change her cognitions about herself and those around her. Though she does not know it at the beginning, there is no way she comes out of the last day alive. She uses most of her days trying to avoid her own death, only to realize that there is no way for her to come out alive. Her death is inevitable, but by reliving her last day she is given the possibility to change her cognitions.

When the protagonist dies in the middle part of the narrative, it can be used as a way to add suspense to the narrative. When Harry Potter sacrifices his life, it adds suspense. The reader does not know what will happen next. "He saw the mouth move and a flash of green light, and everything was gone." (Rowling, 2014, p. 575) This is a terrible realization for the reader of the story, to know that Harry has died. Rowling also chooses to end her chapter on a cliffhanger so that the reader has to turn a page to know what will happen next. This might be considered the climax of the story, where the action is at its highest level of suspense. There is no assurance that Harry will ever come back from this, only the next couple of pages can revile that. Samantha's death number two is also happening in the second act. By dying, Sam drives the plot forward, showing what kind of narrative properties her death has, and the limitations of her latest day. Had Sam not died the second day, the story would have been over and Sam would not have gone through her transformative journey and changed as a character. The protagonist's death in the middle of the narrative is used as a plot device, a narrative force which impacts both character and plot, as Hakola and Kivistö claim (2014, p. x).

A protagonist who dies in the end functions as a way to bring closure to the narrative. Liesel's, Tessa's, and Jim's deaths are the end of their life's story. In a way, it is not important what comes after because their stories are about their lives. By grounding the narrative to realistic setting the deaths become about the life they left behind and not about driving the plot any further or adding suspense. Their death is inevitable. Tessa has terminal cancer, Jim

is sick and malnurted, and Death himself has said that Liesel will die. The exception to the realistic setting is Liesel's death, because of the fantasy element in *The Book Thief*, but her death is still about ending the story. The primary difference between Liesel's death, in contrast to Tessa and Jim's, is that Tessa and Jim's deaths have sad connotations, being teenagers who die at an early age, whereas Liesel dies in old age after having experienced all the things that Tessa would have liked to have experienced. Their deaths are closures and serve as an attempt to make the reader aware of what dying might be like, as well as realizing that they also will die one day.

Jim Martin's death is in a way the odd one out in the selection because his death is both the catalyst and the closure to the story in *Soldier Boy*. This way the reader is both prepared for what is to come at the end of the narrative and given closure. The way the narrative is structured gives the reader the opportunity to question how coping mechanisms are used. The narrator changes the tone of the story from the first narration to the second by focusing more on Jim and less on the hospital staff. It is by setting up the comparison between the two death scenes that the reader is able to reflect on the theme of the book and the coping mechanisms put in place to justify Jim Martin's death.

Young adult literature uses death as a way of entertaining the reader, not necessarily in a morbid and twisted way, but as a way of providing knowledge and experiences about something that will inevitably happen to us all. The entertaining factor is seen in the structure of the narrative. No matter which way one looks at the death of the protagonist, from a narrative perspective the death has an entertaining factor. The death of the protagonist occurs as a way of furthering the plot of the story, or concluding it. It is important to clarify that not all entertainment is meant to be a pleasant experience. Some forms of entertainment, for example, horror stories, are constructed to evoke unpleasantness and even fear. However, they are still used as entertainment. Western Cultures has distanced themselves from encountering death in their daily lives (Durkin, 2003, p 43), but humans are still fascinated by death and therefore drawn towards it. The entertaining factor of death is a mechanism put in place to meet this fascination and the death of the protagonist helps the reader contemplate on their mortality.

I find it interesting that all the books in the selection alerts the reader of what is to come. In *Before I Die*, Tessa is informed that she is going to die, in *Before I Fall* Samantha shares her thoughts on the matter of dying in the opening prolog. *The Lovely Bones* starts with Susie saying that she was fourteen-years-old when she died on December 6, 1973. Harry Potter is informed within the memory of Severus Snape that Dumbledore knew of the horcrux within Harry and that he would have to be killed by Voldemort in order to destroy it. In the opening chapter of *The Book Thief*, Death states that he encountered the book thief three times, meaning that Liesel would have to die. She did not die at the first or second encounter where Death comes for someone else, but notices Liesel. This means she would have to die the third time. *Soldier Boy*'s cover, as well as the preface, states that Jim Martin is among those who died at Gallipoli, but the first chapter, *Glenert Castle*, states that Jim Martin died aboard the hospital ship a mere hour and forty minutes after being hospitalized. It seems that the preparation of the protagonist's death is important. Supporting characters can die without a moment's notice, but the readers need to be given a warning before the protagonist is killed off. This might be because of the reader often experiences the narrative through the protagonist. After all it is often the protagonist with whom the reader is supposed to form a connection. By saying that the protagonist is capable of dying the reader must also face their own mortality. Nobody is actually "off the table" when it comes to dying. This is an important realization, and that the authors are aware of. The authors' do not simply settle for letting the reader know that the protagonist is going to die, but that the readers themselves are also going to die.

This again reminds one of the fact that a reader can read a thousand deaths and experience a multitude of ways one might go, and find solace in this. The readers can prepare for their own death by reading books where the protagonist dies and thus experience what it might be like to die. This might also make the reader ponder upon the question of how they themselves want to die and be remembered. Most of all, however, by reading about different deaths the reader also encounters many different lives and the experiences gained and choices taken. By reading about death the reader encounters life.

6. Conclusion

In this master thesis I have completed a close reading of six young adult novels with this research question in mind: what is the role of the protagonist's death in young adult literature? The analysis has focused on two areas of the death of the protagonist in order to provide an answer to the research question. These have been death as a theme and death as a narrative technique. These two areas overlap, because they work together in order to support the plot and the themes conveyed in the story. They do however also highlight different aspects of the death of the protagonist through either themes that support the main theme or the narrative structure of the protagonist's death. When combining both theme and narrative technique I have found that the analysis has revealed two main findings about the protagonist's death. The role of the protagonist's death is to highlight the experiences of life and to give the reader the opportunity to acknowledge that they too are going to die.

The first of my findings is that the common denominator for all the six books analyzed in this master thesis is that they are about life or what it means to live. Even though the books are about death, they center around life. The narratives all tell a story of what the protagonists want to experience, or do with their life, and what they want to fill their life with. This can either be personal experiences that revolves around what the protagonist wishes to experience certain things before he or she dies, e.i. falling in love, have sex, do drugs, have children. Other times they are actions for the greater good, e.i. the fight against evil, the fight for what is right, or what they believe in. Though death is a central theme to these stories the coin has two sides, death and life. You cannot have one without the other. You cannot live without being susceptible of death and you cannot die without having lived. The narratives all depict a young protagonist what he or she constitutes as a life and what that life should be filled with.

The other main finding concerning the role of the death of the protagonist is that it serves as a reminder of the readers own mortality. The death of the protagonist is used to give the young adult reader insight into a topic one usually tries to steer away from, the death of oneself. The death of literary characters has been used to help people come to terms with death as an

inevitable part of life for a long time, but mostly in relation to the loss of a grandparent, friend, or family. All other characters can die without warning and without too much explanation, but the protagonist is different. The death of the protagonist is different, because it forces the reader to consider his or her own death. This is why, as the findings in the analysis suggest, young adult literature tend to prepare the reader for the death of the protagonist. This can be done in various different ways: as a voice from beyond the grave, having other characters stating that this is going to happen, or as an opening statement to get the reader hooked on the story. As the analysis and discussion suggests the novels must warn the reader of the protagonist's death because the reader is most likely to identify with the protagonist and place themselves within the narrative in the protagonist's place. When the protagonist is able to die within a narrative surrounding them young adult readers is confronted with the fact that they too are going to die at some point.

The first and second findings can be seen as a lesson to bestow upon young adult readers. Even though the reader, and sometimes the protagonist, knows that the protagonist is going to die the narrative does not come to a stop. The realization that even young people can die is a lesson in life and living. Though these types of narratives might be considered morbid, or sad, I maintain the point of view that they are important in the upbringing of a younger generation. These type of narratives remind the reader that death is a natural part of life and by acknowledging this one is free to live. The realization that death is not simply something that happens to other people, but also to one self, can be a great motivator to do the things one wants to do. Life is meant to be explored and the time of youth is when most people gather the primary experiences they cherish and remember when they are old. The protagonist's death in young adult literature focuses on what it means to be alive and to gain the experiences of a lifetime through living.

To conclude this master thesis I will suggest that further research on the topic of the protagonist's death should be done. It can be done by expanding the book selection and also admit a wider variety of genres. It has not been the goal of this master thesis to exhaust the topic, but mainly start the discussion of what role the protagonist's death plays in young adult literature. I have only focused on three genres and it would be interesting to see if other

genres gave the protagonist's death the same role as the findings of this master thesis would imply. The topic of the protagonist's death needs more research in order to compliment and diversify the discussion of which role the protagonist's death plays in young adult literature.

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