

**“OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA  
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**DOCTORAL THESIS  
ABSTRACT**

**DIRECTIONS IN THE LITERATURE FOR/ABOUT  
ADOLESCENTS IN POSTWAR AMERICAN FICTION  
(1951-2012)**

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### ABSTRACT

# DIRECTIONS IN THE LITERATURE FOR/ABOUT ADOLESCENTS IN POSTWAR AMERICAN FICTION (1951-2012)

**Keywords:** history, culture, youth culture, society, social constructions, childhood, adolescence, literary genre, young adult literature, crossover literature, new realism, feminist *Bildungsroman*, Holocaust literature, cancer narratives, psychology, psychosocial conflict, identity, social identity, identity crisis.

This thesis addresses a current and still insufficiently investigated topic that may be of interest to both young people and adults, parents and teachers alike, namely the ways in which real young people and their identity crises have been dramatized in the novels for / about adolescents. More specifically, this research investigates fictional representations of adolescents and their identity crises in eight representative novels, which included both writings belonging to the first wave of adolescent literature, the literary segment known as “the new realism” (Campbell , 2010), and contemporary literary texts reflecting the social changes of our century, and focused specifically on concepts such as youth culture, society, adolescence, psychology, identity crisis, personal and collective identity and literary genre. The approach to these concepts was essential because this thesis focused on a complex research to reveal: America's preoccupations and controversies after World War II, the ways in which adolescents and their problems were transposed in literature, how YA literature became a distinct literary category from children's and adults' literature, and what are the changes in this literary genre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The approach was an interdisciplinary one, incorporating areas such as psychology, sociology, cultural studies and identity theories, and it followed three main analysis lines of literature for adolescents in general and of the selected texts in particular. Given that the chosen novels have the ability to fictionalize real teenagers, their concerns, controversies, their identity crises, but considering that this literary segment has often been confused with children's literature, this thesis has first investigated childhood, children's literature, and adolescence as a social segment, the latter being placed in seemingly unrelated contexts such as philosophy, psychology and sociology. The research continued in the second chapter with

a clarification of the problems related to attempts to define literature for adolescents as a literary genre distinct from children's literature, in order to facilitate the analysis of certain characteristics of adolescence transposed into fictional characters. This thesis focused in its last three chapters on the investigation of literary texts, with particular attention paid to fictional constructions, in order to provide examples of teenage fictional representations and to expose the changes in American society transposed into the literature for young people and its trends in contemporary times.

Psychology contributed to this research through complex analysis of adolescence as an important stage in the psychosocial development of individuals and by highlighting the many changes that take place in the youth psyche in the transition from childhood to maturity. The concept of adolescence in the vision of Granville Stanley Hall (1911) made it possible to establish, in real terms, the psychological and psychosocial changes in the lives of all individuals at this special stage. In turn, sociology has allowed observation of the condition of the child and then of the adolescent in American culture, which has undergone numerous changes throughout the decades and whose evolution has led to the emergence of a literature designed to educate children and young people by adopting less imposing and more convincing ways. Equally important for this research proved to be the concept of identity that finds itself at the crossroads of several fields of knowledge such as sociology, social and developmental psychology. The notion of identity crisis, defined by Erik Erikson (1968), has proven to be a key concept in this approach because all fictional teenage characters are portrayed as suffering such a crisis, by highlighting and investigating it the present research providing readers with examples of life situations with happy ending. Literary theory, in its turn, has proven its relevance in this approach, which aimed, among other things, attesting to the value of literature for adolescents and defining it as a literary genre distinct from children's and adults' literature. Finally, the historical and social perspective allowed exploration of the context in which adolescent literature appeared and the examination of its evolution with the social and technological progress of the 21st century.

In view of the above, the present thesis aims, on the one hand, to follow the directions of YA literature in the United States after the Second World War, the title of the research announcing this approach and delimiting the period from 1951, the year when J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* was published, which was considered a reference for this literary genre and 2012, the publication year of John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars*. Since the second half of the twentieth century, a major change has been noticed in the novels for young people: they have abandoned the idealistic fictionalization of a careless childhood

and portrayed the real life of young people with their difficulties in integrating into society, their turbulence to overcome physical and mental changes, their revolt against authority.

On the other hand, given the need to encourage and persuade young people to read, we propose the creation of a model for the analysis of fictional representations of adolescents, with examples from different social backgrounds, highlighting the benefits of this mechanism called adolescent literature - adults can use this literature as a tool for educating young people, and adolescents can learn how to solve their existential problems. In order to meet these major objectives, this research pursued the achievement of specific objectives in each chapter, which could be classified as theoretical and practical.

The first two chapters aimed at achieving general theoretical objectives: to investigate the cultural, social, historical contexts in which the novels for teenagers appeared, to analyze adolescence and the adolescent in the real world, to facilitate the exploration of their fictional representations, to clarify the problem of defining literature for adolescents as a literary genre distinct from children's and adults' literature. As childhood and adolescence, more precisely their perceptions, have evolved with society, we have considered it important to address childhood as a social construction to later investigate adolescence in order to follow the changes that led to the development of a literature meant to educate younger generations. The analysis in the third chapter was aimed at bringing the concept of personal identity into the foreground and at establishing models by which teenagers were fictionally represented in order to allow young readers to observe problems, conflicts, existential crises portrayed in various ways in literature belonging to this genre. The fourth chapter followed the analysis of the concept of collective identity in two novels portraying teenagers and their identity crises and enriched the research through the analysis of a female character in order to demonstrate that adolescence is determined by external factors such as the social condition, gender or race. The fifth chapter follows the evolution of literature for adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, highlights the differences and similarities between the novels of the last century on the topic and the character level, the transformations that this literary genre suffered in the context of the technological evolution of our century.

In view of a pertinent approach to adolescent literature, we used predominantly qualitative methods. These were based on a corpus of literary texts belonging to the literary category in question, except for the autobiographical novel of Maya Angelou, chosen for its narrative line (of a *Bildungsroman*). Another exception is J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, a literary text that was not labeled as a novel for adolescents, but whose protagonist is considered to be the prototype of the teenager in American literature. The analysis of this

corpus of texts involved the passage of fields such as psychology, sociology, literary criticism. At the same time, a comparative analysis of primary texts was also used in this research in order to identify possible models of adolescents' representation in literature. As stated above, the thesis is organized in five chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by conclusions and bibliography, the first two chapters establishing the theoretical framework in light of which the analyses of the other three are conducted.

Divided into two parts, **the first chapter** has drawn attention to the complexity of the relationships between society and literature, and has brought to the fore the concept of adolescence analyzed from a psychological perspective. The close connections between society and history have facilitated the examination of the history of children's literature and the transformations that led to its evolution into YA fiction. In addition, the examination of adolescence through psychological lenses has provided the necessary tools for the analysis of fictional protagonists, their issues and their existential crises. In other words, this chapter has explored the condition of the adolescent, once a child, as a member of the (American) society, his/her psychological transformations, his/her psychosocial crises, in order to determine the (socio-cultural) conditions that have led to the emergence of a literature for adolescents. Steven Mintz's *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, Gerhard and Ursula Falk's *Youth Culture and the Generation Gap*, Richard Middleton, and Anne Lombard's *Colonial America: A History to 1763* have been essential secondary sources in this section especially because they have revealed the cultural and social changes in the lives of children. The results in the first subchapter have shown that the condition of children has changed over centuries, and that there were key moments in the history of childhood that changed the perceptions of children in society.

Research studies like Alec Ellis's *A History of Children's Reading and Literature*, Nikki Gamble and Sally Yates's *Exploring Children's Literature: Teaching the Language and Reading of Fiction*, Seth Lerer's *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter* confirmed that literature for children was not separated into two categories children's fiction and adolescents' fiction, although scholars agreed that near the nineteenth century there had been attempts to distinguish between the two. With the investigation of studies like Deborah Thacker and Jean Webb's *Introducing Children's Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism* and Marah Gubar's *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, it appeared that the evolution of children's literature was determined by the evolution of childhood as a social construction, thus it resulted a close connection between society and fiction.

The research continued with a close examination of the cultural and social environments where YA literary texts have been produced by approaching sociological studies like Paula S. Fass's *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* and Gerhard and Ursula Falk's *Youth Culture and the Generation Gap*. The results have shown that the emergence and the evolution of the literature written for teenagers was influenced by the changing role of adolescents in society and the rise of youth culture in America. The emergence of youth culture shaped YA literature and increased the interest of publishing houses; they understood that the readership has to separate into children and young adults, and they have to publish books for a new target audience: adolescents.

The emergence of youth culture being established, the research continued in "Theoretical Perspectives on Adolescents' Psychosocial Development", with a detailed analysis of the real teenager, the subject in all YA novels, and with an investigation of the transitional stage called adolescence by placing it in contexts such as philosophy and psychology. Considering one of the main aims in this thesis, namely to determine how adolescents and their difficulties they faced on their way to maturity have been represented in literature, it was necessary to figure out the real adolescent, his/her identity crises, difficulties, problems, concerns. In this section, the hypothesis was that a novel written for young people, having adolescent characters, fictionalizes real people experiencing difficulties on their way to maturity, thus all the concerns, issues, problems, crises, fears of teenagers represented in literature are authentic. Essential psychological research studies such as Granville Stanley Hall's *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, John Guilfoyle Williams's *The Psychology of Childhood to Maturity*, Erik Erikson's *Identity: Youth and Crisis* confirmed our hypothesis. The findings here have shown that in their transition from childhood to adulthood real young people encounter physical and psychological transformations that cause them fear, anxiety, conflict with authority, rebellion, identity confusion. These results have set the theoretical background for the analysis of the characters and their issues through psychological lenses in the third, fourth and fifth chapters of this dissertation.

**The second chapter** has clarified the issues of defining YA literature as a distinct literary genre from children's and adults' fiction. In other words, the second chapter has defined young adult literature, has dealt with the hardships of its rise, has searched for its roots, has established the most important moments in its history, and has settled the pattern that shapes and guides any YA literary text. After it has briefly explored three of the most

important theories that deal with the ways in which literary texts should be categorized (Tzvetan Todorov, 1976; Mihail Bakhtin, 1981; John Frow, 2005), the investigation has clarified the ambiguity surrounding this literary category. A hypothesis in this chapter has been that YA fiction is shadowed by what is considered valuable literature, although it is worthy of consideration like any other literary genre, the initial question here being: "Why is YA literature categorized as lacking literary value?". Pam B. Cole's *Young Adult Literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and a number of relevant articles such as Chris Crowe's and Terry Davis's have confirmed that YA novels are worthy to be considered. The results in this section have indicated the reasons why the literary value of this genre has been underestimated and have provided answers to the initial question. The negative influence of publishers, the place occupied by YA novels in libraries (Pam B. Cole), their superficial investigation, the fact that it was not taken seriously (Terry Davis), the fact that it was considered unworthy of evaluation (Chris Crowe, Cindy Lou Daniels), are reasons that led to an understatement of YA literature. However, by considering Michael Cart's and Pam Cole's beliefs, this subchapter has re-evaluated, has reinforced YA literature's value, and it has legitimated it as a literary category, thus it is expected to raise awareness of its importance determined by its capacity to fictionalize real adolescents facing real problems.

Another hypothesis was that YA literature has separated from children's literature along with writers' choice to include adolescent protagonists in their fictional texts. A possible confirmation of this assumption was expected to answer the initial question: "Where does YA literature begin?". Through a close investigation of research studies like Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* and Roberta Seelinger Trites's *Twain, Alcott and the Birth of the Adolescent Reform Novel*, results have demonstrated that the hypothesis is confirmed. Investigation has shown that with his choice to fictionalize an adolescent character and to give him the role of an active observer and critic of the American society, Mark Twain set the roots of a new literary genre. The findings in this section have shown that starting with the two above-mentioned novels adolescent characters gained value and functioned as models for adolescents and adults.

These results led the research into the hypothesis that early adolescent literature had a very important role to include in literary texts the problems and difficulties of young people to attract readers' attention to the events of adolescent life. By appealing to essential research studies like Patty Campbell's *Campbell's Scoop...* and Mary Q. Steel's essay it has resulted that after the Second World War were published important novels for YA literature: Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, S.E. Hinton's *The*

*Outsiders*, Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, Paul Zindel's *The Pigman*, Robert Lipsythe's *The Contender*. These authors have taken YA literature to another level, have broken barriers and have connected literature for teenagers to reality by creating characters that disturbed the universe and impressed the readers, and the years of their publication were referred to as being key moments in the history of YA literature.

By comparing and contrasting the representations of adolescents in literary texts, **the third chapter** of the thesis has set out common points between novels written in different decades by reflecting various social and cultural frames. What we were most concerned with in this chapter was the narrative construction of the protagonist's personal identity. Therefore, the analysis has dealt with investigating the narrative strategies used by the authors to build personal identities through the power of words, and it implied different approaches meant to re-new some beliefs related to the construction of literary characters. One of the main aims in this chapter, divided into two parts, has been to reveal the comprehensive literary and cultural conversation between texts written by authors from different ages preoccupied with similar concerns, and to re-view the selected literary texts through psychological, sociological and cultural lenses.

The first section has aimed to investigate how the two authors fictionalized and dramatized adolescents and their conflicts, their search for the self, by following the already mentioned links between YA literature, society, culture, psychology, identity theory and social identity theory. In addition, this section has revealed similarities and differences between characters, literary strategies, language, in the texts under investigation. The findings here have demonstrated that intertextuality brought together, in a comprehensive literary and cultural conversation, two literary texts written by authors from different ages. Results here have also shown that Stephen Chbosky engaged in a conversation with other coming of age novels, not only by simply referring to them, but also by acknowledging the influence they had on his protagonist's personal development, thus giving his readers examples of how adolescents were shaped through literature and how youth inspired and continues to inspire authors. By comparing and contrasting the two fictional texts, it has resulted that their protagonists are connected through their feelings, thoughts, age, experience, crises. The findings have shown here that the protagonists' isolation, difficulties to make friends, an identity crisis manifested through their alienation, are three similar characteristics that demonstrate the fact that, although written at a distance in time, the two texts dramatize adolescents by using features that are very much alike.

Through a close analysis of the information provided by the texts, and by approaching Erik Erikson's psychosocial theories dealt with in the first chapter of the thesis, as well as the already mentioned sociological analyses of the 1950s such as David Riesman's et al. *The Lonely Crowd...* and Kate Charlton-Jones's *Dismembering the American Dream...*, this chapter has examined how Stephen Chbosky and J.D. Salinger fictionalized adolescents, their concerns, issues and conflicts. By re-viewing Stephen Chbosky's novel through Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, it has resulted that the author fictionalized his protagonist's crisis by following the conflict Identity vs. Role Confusion that appears at the fifth stage of personal development, more specifically by emphasizing his acute upset, inability to concentrate and self-destructive preoccupations.

The second part of the chapter comprises three sections and it has investigated Sherman Alexie's and Robert Cormier's literary representations of adolescents and their identity crises. By approaching essential research studies such as Arnold Krupat's *The Voice in the Margin...*, Kenneth Lincoln's *Indi'n Humor...* Louis Owens's *Other Destinies...* and Joseph L. Coulombe's *Reading Native American Literature*, this part has aimed to investigate how the concerns, problems, conflicts, difficulties have been represented in Sherman Alexie's and Robert Cormier's texts. Starting from Roberta Seelinger Trites's beliefs that the construction of a teenager in YA literature is challenging because it blends aspects of cultural and social environment, this section has checked on whether the adolescents' identities in the two texts under consideration here have been constructed as being influenced by external factors. Results here have shown that whether it is a crisis of an identity displaying a dualistic dimension, like Junior Arnold Spirit's, or a crisis of an adolescent in search for the self, like Jerry Renault's, both texts reflect different approaches to the same issue: adolescents' struggle to understand power in their individualization process.

**The fourth chapter** has enriched the identity landscape by exploring the relevance of the concept of collective identity as it was theorized by George Herbert Mead (1934) or more recently by Francesca Polletta and James Jasper (2001). The analysis of the literary characters has considered the investigation of their individual formation and transformation, influenced by the conflicts between the desire for individuality and the need for socialization. The aim of this chapter has been to investigate S.E. Hinton's protagonist, Ponyboy Curtis, and Maya Angelou's character Marguerite Johnson, their coming of age in social environments, the manifestations of the conflict between self-determination and socialization, the difficulties they encounter in their personal development, and their success to mature.

Divided into two sections, this chapter has first focused on S. E. Hinton's literary text, *The Outsiders*, more precisely on Ponyboy Curtis's personal identity construction, and then it has brought to the fore Maya Angelou's autobiographical novel, with the intention to investigate young Maya's struggle to come to age in a racist community. This chapter has also changed the perspective from a fully male-centered one to a female-centered, this novelty balancing the outlook of the entire thesis.

This chapter has relied on research studies such as George Herbert-Mead's *Mind, Self and Society...*, Robert Kegan's *The Evolving Self...* and it has also approached relevant articles like James Marcia's "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status, Karen Coats's "Young Adult Literature: Growing Up in Theory", Barbara M. Newman and Philip R. Newman. "Group Identity and Alienation: Giving the We Its Due". The intention here has been to decipher the conflict between individual's need for socialization and for independence, and to use the results in the investigation of characters in the above-mentioned literary texts. Findings here have shown that there is a permanent tension in the lives of young people between the two yearnings, and that these tensions cause the identity crisis. Our expectations were that the protagonists' conflicts, concerns, difficulties are mainly triggered by the dynamic relationship between the "I" and the "We". They confirmed after a close examination of the above-mentioned psychological theories and of the literary texts under discussion here. The results have demonstrated that Ponyboy's identity crisis turned out from his attempt to find a positive resolution to the conflict between the self and the social group, and his personal development was influenced by his friendship with Johnny Cade.

The second part has focused on the analysis of the fictional representations of adolescent girls, with emphasis on Maya Angelou's novel. The main objective here has been to investigate the ways in which the identity crisis of an African-American girl was fictionalized in Maya Angelou's autobiographical novel, in order to check how and if adolescence was fictionalized as depending on gender or politics. In order to achieve this goal, the subchapter has been divided into three parts that provided relevant information related to the representations of female characters in YA literature, African-American autobiographies that gave voice to marginalized people, and the ways in which a girl's coming of age was fictionalized in Maya Angelou's text.

This section has started from the hypotheses that adolescent girls have been fictionalized differently, and that they make little appearance in fiction. By following essential secondary sources such as Charles Ferrall and Anna Jackson's research study *Juvenile Literature and British Society, 1850-1950*, John Gillis's *Youth and History*:

*Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770-Present*, Jon Savage's *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875-1945* and Jane Sunderland's *Language, Gender and Children's Fiction*, the first section has investigated the fictional representations of female characters' identity crises and their struggles to resist gender and racial stereotypes, opposed to boys' difficulties dealt with in the previous chapter. The above-mentioned research works have confirmed that the experimentation of this life stage seems to depend on external factors such as gender or social class. For instance, Gillis pointed out that adolescence was a life stage that belonged only to middle-class young boys, while Jane Sunderland drew attention to the fact that in books for children and young adults, white middle-class boys were overrepresented. These results have directed the research to feminist studies, our expectations being that, although female protagonists were ignored there must have been other researchers who analyzed fictional representations of girls.

Another hypothesis here was that feminist movements changed the ways in which boys and girls were represented in literature. Secondary sources such as Leslie Fielder's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Rita Felski's *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, Mary Bray Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, Elizabeth Abel et al *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* have confirmed this hypothesis. Results have shown that for many years YA novels have had only masculine protagonists and ignored female characters. The explanation for this phenomenon, findings here have demonstrated, is that YA novels evolved from *Bildungsromans* that fictionalized and dramatized exclusively white boys' coming of age. Starting from the traditional definition of the *Bildungsroman*, this section has drawn on feminist *Bildungsroman*, and then it has investigated a *Bildungsroman* by an ethnic woman writer. Tobias Boes in "Modernist Studies of the *Bildungsroman*: A Historical Survey of Cultural Trends" signaled the expansion of the *Bildungsroman*'s definition with the rise of the feminist studies during the 1980s and 1990s. Findings have proved that in 1983 Elizabeth Abel published her above-mentioned study where she distinguished between the feminist novel of apprenticeship and the novel of awakening, in 1989 Rita Felski separated the feminist novel of awakening from the masculine *Bildungsroman*, and in 1994 Mary Bary Pipher drew attention to the fact that American society has to change from a girl-destroying society to a society that promotes equality of rights. These findings have straightened our attention to coming of age novels that have a feminine character, and the intention was to explore a black girl's growing up process. Our expectations were that the journey to maturity of a girl is difficult because adolescence's starting point is challenged by the torments of

being of color. In order to find out if these expectations confirm or not, this research appealed to the investigation of black autobiographies in America.

The last section of this chapter has analyzed how young Maya's coming of age has been dramatized in Angelou's autobiographical novel, and how it followed the path of a *Bildungsroman*. The information provided by the text and the essential secondary sources such as: Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, Remus Bejan's "Nigrescence: Mapping the Journey in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", Sidonie Smith's "The Song of the Caged Bird: Maya Angelou's Quest after Self-Acceptance", Dolly McPherson's "Initiation and Self-Discovery", Claudine Raynaud's "Coming of age in the African American novel", confirmed that young Maya's identity crisis was amplified by the difficult social conditions in which she grew up, and it manifested in the difficulties to find her personal self in a racist community.

**The fifth chapter** has emphasized the social changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that influenced YA literary genre, at the same time revealing trends in YA fiction in our era, and has investigated two contemporary novels for adolescents. Encompassing two parts, this chapter aimed to analyze the tendencies in YA literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to highlight the changes in terms of perspective, topic, form, characters, narrative strategies that differentiate literary texts written in the second half of the twentieth century from those of today, and to shed light on fictional representations of adolescents and their concerns in our contemporary world.

The first part has indicated the social changes that influenced young adult literature, one of the research questions here being "what are the trends and issues of adolescents today?". By approaching research studies like Eastwood Atwater's *Adolescence*, Robert Bly *The Sibling Society*, Sandra Becket's *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*, Rachel Falconer's *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership*, and a number of important articles, it has resulted that at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century society had to meet new requirements for adolescents' development. Just as in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, adolescent literature follows two paths: on the one hand are the fantasy texts, surprisingly read by adults, on the other hand are realistic texts that mirror images of youth through topics related to the current socio-cultural context. Results have shown that, on one hand, YA novels have improved in the sense that they address more mature and more emotionally difficult issues, thus the representations of existential crises from the previous century have been replaced by difficulties such as those posed by drug use, unwanted pregnancies, sexual abuse, cloning. On the other hand, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, YA

literature tends to target a standardized readership and, as the findings here have proven, fantasy novels have had a greater success to adult readers than realistic novels.

Encompassing five sections, the second part of this chapter has investigated literary representations of adolescents and their concerns, troubles, issues, difficulties to grow up in two contemporary YA novels with the intention to analyze as many relevant life situations fictionalized in YA literature as possible. Moreover, this second part of the chapter has shown that YA literature is currently anchored in the real world, and that it dramatizes issues that are relevant today for adolescents and adults alike. In this section, the attention has shifted from the traditional YA literature to a more up-to-date literature, and has brought to the fore concepts like Holocaust literature for young adults, historiographic metafiction, magic realism, trauma, cancer narratives. The intention here has been to investigate representations of adolescents facing traumatic difficulties, forced to come to age with cancer or in Nazi Germany. The selection of the two contemporary novels has allowed exploring the difficulties experienced by teenagers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and has highlighted the reading preferences of teenagers today.

In the first section, essential secondary sources like Lydia Kokkola's *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature*, Hamida Bosmajian's *Sparing the Child: Grief and the Unspeakable in Youth Literature about Nazism and the Holocaust*, Arienne Kertzer's *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature and the Holocaust* and Lawrence Langer's *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* confirmed that the number of novels representing what was once unrepresentable in YA literature has increased. It has been demonstrated here that especially through Holocaust literature for young adults, readers receive history lessons and its main goal is to set a dialog between history and literature. Findings here have also shown that the adolescent needs to know the truth, and to be aware of the difficulties he/she might encounter on the way to maturity. That is why, even a very sensitive subject like the Holocaust needs to be dramatized and adolescents must learn about it from books and must maintain the truth unaltered.

The second section has approached Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction and The Politics of Postmodernism*, with special attention paid to the investigation of historiographic metafiction in relation to Markus Zusak's literary text. The intention here has been to use Linda Hutcheon's concept in order to decipher Zusak's text. Results have demonstrated that Markus Zusak's novel reflects historiographic metafiction and that the author has fictionalized a historical event while creating a strange view on Nazi Germany, by re-envisioning history from a fresh and affirmative perspective. Zusak's

experiment with facts and fiction, and his choice to re-envision history by combining unusual with ordinary elements has led this research to another postmodernist concept- magic realism. Secondary sources such as Maggie Ann Bowers's *Magic(al) Realism*, Jenni Adams's *Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real*, and Jo Langdon's "Magical Realism and Experiences of Extremity", have confirmed that *The Book Thief* can be investigated in the light of magic realism and by using Linda Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction.

The subchapter "Liesel Meminger's Experience of Traumatic Events" has focused on the investigation of Zusak's protagonist, her concerns, troubles and difficulties to grow up. The section has started from the hypothesis that Zusak dramatized Liesel's crisis as triggered by the fact that she lived in Nazi Germany, she experienced the Holocaust trauma and has successfully recovered from it, and that trauma influenced her personal identity development. By using concepts from psychology detailed in Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* and Ruth Franklin's *A Thousand Darkneses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction*, this section has demonstrated that Zusak's protagonist experienced trauma, thus revealing the author's narrative strategies used to fictionalize and dramatize adolescents and their difficulties to come to age. The results have shown that the hypothesis confirmed and that in his literary text Zusak has indirectly converged, hinted and suggested the atrocities of the Holocaust by building his character. In order to show that in his text Zusak's has used postmodern approaches renewed with post-postmodern perspectives, the next subchapter has analyzed the protagonist's recovery from trauma through the lenses of trauma theory, and at the same time, it has examined to what extent Markus Zusak's novel transforms the effects of the Holocaust into a story about survival and recovery.

The last section has investigated how John Green has fictionalized the coming of age of an adolescent girl suffering from cancer, and has started from the assumption that illness and impending death have affected her identity. Psychological and medical research studies, such as Cyntia M. Mathieson and Henderikus J. Stam's "Renegotiating identity: cancer narratives", Michael Bury's "Chronic Illness and Biographical Disruption" and Kathy Charmaz's "Loss of self: a fundamental form of suffering in the chronically ill" have confirmed the hypothesis. Results have demonstrated that cancer-suffering patients have to renegotiate their identity, to reconstruct it under new circumstances. The medical sources have provided useful instruments to analyze the literary text and they facilitated the analysis

of Green's novel, where the two cancer-suffering teenagers struggle to understand the world and to grow up. Findings here have shown that Green has not allowed his characters to come to age, their personal development being interrupted by Augustus's death. However, through the power of words, the author has successfully dramatized the two teenagers' personal development at a deeper level. Together, the two adolescents understood the fragility of life and the eternity of death, thus they both developed an assertive philosophical outlook on life.

Overall, this thesis has re-reviewed novels for adolescents through psychological lenses and has revealed previously unknown things, such as the very close link that exists between this literary genre and psychology which allowed the analysis of characters by using concepts from this field. It is meant to be a contribution to a better understanding of the changing world of teenagers, their problems, conflicts, issues transposed in literary texts that obviously reflect the social, cultural, historical context in which they were written. Another aspect that resulted from this research is related to the connections between the novels published at a significant distance in time but which have reported similar teenage problems. Regardless of the limitations, this thesis also aims to contribute to increasing performance in education in favor of both adults and young people who may be interested in this research that provides examples of what it means to be a teenager and which could be used as a more convincing tool for young people. By examining the teens' social condition in different periods of time, it is hoped that it will contribute to a better understanding of the changing social group of young people. Through the detailed analysis of literature through psychology, the present paper also aims to contribute to a better understanding of the adolescent psyche. Last but not least, this dissertation is meant to raise the awareness of young and adult readers of the value of adolescent literature.

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