



Symbols of a Perfect Chaos in Markus Zusak's *Bridge of Clay*: Through Traumatic Past to Better Future

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Submitted: 22.03.2021

Revision Requested: 31.08.2021

Last Revision Received: 04.09.2021

Accepted: 06.01.2022

Citation: Bohovyk, O., & Bezrukov, A. (2022). Symbols of a perfect chaos in Markus Zusak's *Bridge of Clay*: Through traumatic past to better future. *Litera*, 32(1), 267-294. <https://doi.org/10.26650/LITERA2021-901447>

ABSTRACT

In literary texts, the representation of symbols as one of the most prevalent and essential components of the cultural continuum is not always explicit and therefore needs the development of approaches to the identification of implicit symbolic narratives in fictional discourse. One of the most representative contemporary novels in terms of 'symbolicalness' is considered the epic novel *Bridge of Clay* (2018) by Markus Zusak. This breath-taking story revolves around the 'ramshackle tragedy' of the Dunbar family and brims with energy and pathos. The tale of an existential riddle is told inside out and back to front, rendering confusion to the readers and encouraging them to decipher various symbols. That is why this article focuses on literal and metaphorical symbols to trace their meaning-making capabilities in creating a perfect chaos in the book. The novelty of the study lies in the explication of the symbol as a hermeneutic intratextual mechanism of meaning-making and identifying its artistic potential, as well as interpreting the symbol as a way of comprehending the semantic sphere of the text. Furthermore, *Bridge of Clay* is a profoundly heartfelt story of brotherhood that offers an alternative model of masculinity. It is Clay, the most determined of the Dunbar sons, who builds the bridge to transcend humanness. It is the bridge, the central symbol of the novel, which appears to be a link between the past and the future.

Keywords: Meaning-making, time, pathos, chaos, relationship



Introduction

The quality of a symbol to go beyond the empirically presented and express something hidden serves as the basis for the symbolisation of the author's ideas. The symbol is a universal aesthetic category that is revealed through comparison both with the adjacent categories of an artistic image, and with a sign and allegory. In a broad sense, any symbol is an image taken in terms of its significance, and it is a sign endowed with the harmony and ambiguity of an image (Watson, 2013; Hermans & Loon, 1991). The very structure of the symbol intends to represent a holistic image of the world through its phenomena.

The symbol in fiction is first and foremost a combination. It combines the physical picture of the world with its metaphysical meaning, which is manifested through the mundane, giving it the features of another, ideal life (Battistini, 2005). In other words, the symbol in literature replaces a sign or object, expressing its hidden essence and at the same time becoming the leader of the system of ideas about the world inherent in those who use this symbol. The symbol is a conditional expression of the essence of any phenomenon through the appearance, shape, or even internal qualities, of another object. In the most general terms, the symbol gains the characteristics of an essentially new object of knowledge.

The semantic structure of the symbol is multi-layered and is designed for the active internal work of the readers. The meaning of the symbol is explicated as a dynamic structure. This meaning cannot be explained by reducing it to an unambiguous logical formula, but can only be explained by correlating it with subsequent symbolic structures.

In regard to 'symbolicalness', of great interest are the works by Markus Zusak (born 1975), an Australian writer with Austrian and German roots, international bestselling author of six novels, including *The Book Thief* (2005), and most recently, *Bridge of Clay* (2018). While the former is considered Zusak's most famous book, the latter can be regarded as his magnum opus (Sebag-Montefiore, 2019). His novels have won the attention of critics as well as the affection of the readers all over the world. Zusak has the Margaret A. Edwards Award from the American Library Association, and his works have been translated into more than forty languages.

Zusak was at work upon his *Bridge of Clay* for thirteen years. This new and unexplored novel is a sprawling family saga, centring on five brothers abandoned after their mother's death and their father's disappearance thereafter. The boys are left on their own and have to live in a house with no rules, attracting the attention of people to their lifestyle. Five brothers take immature decisions and show their boyish behaviour throughout the book, since "gender is known to be socially constructed and is learned through social interactions and influences of people around us" (Nanda, 2019, p. 50).

The author creates a fascinating story of different generations, traced through the prism of one family, and invites the readers into a whirlpool of events to travel through space and time. From the beginning, the novel seems a confusing mystery, full of puzzles regarding the fate of the characters, their past, which had mostly been traumatic, their present, and their future; the readers do not have a clue what is going on, but gradually a profoundly heartfelt story of a perfect chaos manifests itself through various details. The phrase 'perfect chaos' aptly describes the central plotline of the novel and is even placed on the title page of the book.

When the father, Michael Dunbar, comes back into his sons' lives, he asks for their assistance with building the bridge – a literal and metaphorical way of making amends. Only one of the sons agrees. This is Clay. So, the title *Bridge of Clay* is a central metaphor of the novel, as it is both the clay with which to build the bridge and the name of the fourth of the five brothers to whom the book is dedicated. In the review from Hickling (2018), Clay is called a dark horse who emerges from the shadows to become the central character of the book, the quietest and most enigmatic of the clan. The title of the novel is completely ambivalent. This epic story is full of narratives: objects can be formed from cold, wet material, but to retain their shape, they need to be set alight.

The text of the book is changeable: the readers gradually learn why the father left his sons, how he suffered in the past and why he could not cope with the death of his wife. The novel alternates between two plotlines that develop in parallel with each other and are intertwined with seemingly less significant ones to be integrated into the epic narration (Coats, 2018, p. 147). *Bridge of Clay* embodies several themes. On the one hand, it is the book about a family, love, hate, and forgiveness, and on the other, it explores the challenges of growing up, fate, and the nature of human relationships.

To understand the author's intentions, it is necessary to pick up his emotional state (Knaller, 2017; Safdar et al., 2009), the hidden symbols, narratives, and metamesages. The book features objects that the readers learn about by delving into the text. They are more than just things, and they have to be recognised not rapidly but gradually. Intertwining events and images of the past and present to the sounds of piano music and the metronomic tone of Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* push the readers to immerse themselves into the novel, to turn on the scope of imagination, to become spectators who watch the pictures of the main characters' lives. Like an artist, Zusak produces his pictures in short, accurate metaphors, creating symbols: from general and obvious to hidden and sometimes difficult to see, but subconsciously felt. This book is like vintage wine with a taste that can be sensed only in small sips.

Zusak surpassed himself by writing this novel which should be read both from the beginning and from the end at the same time. The author encourages us to *go back and forth across the bridge* to learn the future through the past when the future eventually turns out to be the past as well.

Bridge of Clay begins with a dedication on the title page: For Scout, Kid, and Little Small, for Cate, and in loving memory of K. E.: a great lover of *language* (Zusak, 2019)¹. The dedication to the living and the dead is a link that connects times; to children, adolescents, and adults – the key to understanding that the author does not limit his readership, but connects people of different ages through the events of the story. Zusak writes *language* in italics, and it becomes clear that language is the principal tool that helps the author emphasise what is meaningful and involve the readers in understanding the story. The novel is loaded with literary devices, showing the author's style, since individualism is a cultural system that favours the self more highly than the collective (Twenge, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to identify and explicate literal and metaphorical symbols as a special category of meaning-making as well as the means of creating a space-time perspective and a perfect chaos in Markus Zusak's *Bridge of Clay*. To accomplish the above purpose, the following methodology must be addressed.

1 Zusak, M. (2019). *Bridge of Clay*. London, UK: Black Swan; hereafter abbreviated as BC.

Methodology

The specificity of the study of symbols represented either implicitly or explicitly in a literary text is premised on the fact that the symbol as a meaning-making device exhibits the properties of retroactiveness in relation to the readers' cultural experience and proactiveness in relation to a text. These characteristics of the symbol ensure both the inclusion of a text in a particular context and the development of its narratives.

Despite the fact that the symbol is not identical to merely artistic imagery, authors often use artistic symbols in order to affect the reader (Watson, 2013; Impelluso, 2004). It should be noted that artistic imagery is not necessarily symbolisation although nothing prevents the writer from loading his artistic images with symbols. Since a symbolic image often arises as a result of using various literary devices, in the study of symbols in the novel the features of their implementation in the text should be taken into account. Unlike an allegory, a symbolic image has no mental expression. It always maintains vivid, emotional associations with a wide range of phenomena (Bertels et al., 2011).

Researchers distinguish two types of symbols. The first includes symbols that have a foothold in the cultural tradition. They are part of a culture, and for the construction of them writers use the language of a culture, and they are more or less common for the readers. Obviously, such symbols acquire individual semantic distinctions close to the writer. They are as if ready-made symbolic constructions that authors can extend and rethink, creating new variations of the symbolic images on their basis, as well as actualising implicit cultural codes, which are defined as "those symbols and systems of meaning that have a specific relevance to members of a particular group or society" (Hyatt & Simons, 1999, p. 24).

The second type includes symbols created without reliance on the cultural tradition. Such symbols arise on the basis of semantic relations within one literary work or a number of works. Zusak's *Bridge of Clay* abounds in such symbols. They require thorough rethinking since they not only express the author's individualised attitude to artistic images and ways of meaning-making in the text but also stimulate the readers to recognise these symbols in the context. The symbols of the novel can be explicated at different levels of the emotional perception of the text that serves as the matrix for creating a perfect chaos.

The methodology of this research is based primarily on the conceptual basis of a hermeneutic approach (Kwon, 2020; Longxi, 2018; Bernard, 1997) that involves revealing indirectly nominated meanings of a text and textual means. It is also based on an ontological approach that has no direct connection with the acquired epistemological experience. Interpreting symbols is regarded as expressed reflection which allows for actualising the perception that connects the readers' experience with the image. Research methods that reveal the nature of the symbol as a succinct element of a culture and identify the author's intentions to use an object as the symbol due to its meaning-making potential are presented by the methods of introspection, systematisation, and interpretation with the elements of semantic and stylistic analysis.

Symbolising the Story of a Perfect Chaos: Between Past and Future

Bridge of Clay or Clay's Bridge?

Clay's bridge/bridge of clay is the central metaphor of the novel. This bridge becomes an image of Zusak's tale wherein some bridges are burned and destroyed while others are built and connect people, the past, and the present. There are two main stories in the novel: the family's previous life and the father's return home after his wife's death. The events develop gradually, which allows the story to be enriched with various details from the lives of the characters.

The father and Clay try to build something grand, like the bridge Le Pont du Gard: "Great wasn't a great enough word to explain that bridge, which also served as an aqueduct. Built by the Romans. Or the devil, if you believed it" (BC, p. 193). Zusak repeats the word *great* with the determiner *enough* and highlights this adjective to draw the readers' attention to the main character the story is revolved around at the beginning of the novel. The sentence fragment disrupts the usual syntagmatic patterns in order to emotionally emphasise the situation and emphatically highlight *the Romans* and *the devil*. Clay sees the title in his father's project: "THE NEW PLAN was six sheets altogether – composed the night before. The first page of that small stack of paper said only one thing, several times. PONT DU GARD" (BC, p. 204). The capitalised representation of *THE NEW PLAN* and *PONT DU GARD* seems to mark the beginning and end of the thought which is concentrated on the phrases and which contributes to the emotional motivation of the message.

What drives the man and what makes the boy agree to the idea of building the bridge other than a love of art? Without realising it, Clay seeks a rapprochement with his father, and Michael Dunbar also builds the bridge as a tribute to his late wife who once said: "So just don't ever paint me... Do other things instead..." (BC, p. 224). So, the father and son, full of passion with art and the bridge, *build* their dream: "Just like Pont du Gard, there wouldn't be any mortar; it was fit to exactness and form. It glowed in the open like a church" (BC, p. 428). Zusak compares the bridge with the place used for Christian worship to emphasise the importance of the former.

With great effort, Clay builds the bridge: "That bridge was made of him" (BC, p. 428). The 16-year-old boy accomplishes a task which is beyond his strength: "Michael Dunbar counted a hundred and twenty consecutive days that Clay worked on the bridge, and very little sleep, very little eating – just a boy who could work the pulley, and heave stones he had no right to carry" (BC, p. 529). Clay himself becomes the bridge: "He thought of Carey and thought of arches, and again his voice surprised him: 'The bridge will be made of you'" (BC, p. 196). Later, seeing a photo of Clay building the bridge, his girlfriend, Carey, says: "'You,' she whispered, and 'the bridge'" (BC, p. 378).

The Old Remington, Dog Bones, and Snake: Flashbacks to a Previous Life

The novel can be divided into two frame stories of which the first begins with a flashback to the main one: "In the beginning there was one murderer, one mule and one boy, but this isn't the beginning, it's before it, it's me, and I'm Matthew..." (BC, p. 3). Recollections of the traumatic past make the man return to reality: "...and here I am, in the kitchen, in the night – the old river mouth of light – and I'm punching and punching away" (BC, p. 3). The author uses alliteration and assonance (*one murderer, one mule, one boy; in the kitchen, in the night, the old river mouth*), which serve to produce an internal rhyme of the text and, in combination with anaphora, highlight the key emotional and conceptual points and create the image-symbol of the *old TW*. In this example there is a hidden mystery, a growing premonition of the inevitable end of the stories still untold to the readers. The repetition of *I'm punching and punching* is to create a certain atmosphere to make the readers feel like a participant in events as if hearing the sound of a typewriter. One cannot ignore the writer's use of polysyndeton, which gives the whole passage a very pleasing rhythm and unconsciously causes the readers to pay particular attention to each individual item in the list.

Matthew, the oldest brother, is left alone with *the old TW*, and this draws him towards memories of the previous life, a long-lost father and a long-lost grandmother who called this machine the *ol' TW* (BC, p. 3). This was his father's mother's typewriter: "She'd worked for the town's one doctor and spent her days punching away in the surgery, on the old Remington, bullet-grey" (BC, p. 149). Matthew gets to learn the whereabouts of the old typewriter from one of the brothers whose name is not mentioned at first, but the author adds a transparent hint: "who took all of it on his shoulder" (BC, p. 3). Matthew writes the story to be written by Clay himself, but the latter refuses to dig up the typewriter because he knows the following: "For starters, this story wasn't over yet. And even then, it wouldn't be him. The story was his, but not the writing. It was hard enough living and being it" (BC, p. 531).

The story, written by Matthew, a reminiscent of the fragments of thoughts, is to show his first experience in the epistolary genre, and he quips: "If you're like most people, you'll wonder if I'd bother stringing a sentence together, let alone know anything about the epics, or the Greeks" (BC, p. 3).

The beginning of the story is again punctuated by a flashback. Matthew exhumes the typewriter since he decides to put on paper the story of his family, which he metaphorically calls "a family of ramshackle tragedy" (BC, p. 9). Pointing to the pages of its traumatic past, he writes: "I'd driven out the day after my wedding day. Out from the city. Right through the night. Out through the reams of empty space, and then some" (BC, p. 4). Zusak uses the sentence fragment to expand the information in the sentence and intensify the semantic meaning of the secondary components of the sentences.

Representing the city of the hero's childhood ("I'd never set foot in in all my thirty-one years..." (BC, p. 5)), Zusak uses his own epithets – *the straw-like landscape, marathons of sky* and personification – *world had worn them [people] down* (BC, p. 4). Matthew digs up the old Remington, the dog bones, the snake and takes all the things with him, leaving the readers guessing the significance for the narrator of animal skeletons. The writer uses a postmodern narrative device called flash-forward wherein the repetition of *before* indicates the importance of the remains found in the past which affect future developments:

As I drifted off, I thought how before-the-beginnings are everywhere – because before and before so many things there was a boy in that old-backyard-of-a-town, and he'd knelt on the ground when the snake had

killed that dog, and the dog had killed that snake... but that's all still to come. (BC, pp. 8–9)

Michael buries the old Remington after his mother's death and along with the machine he hides his childhood memories: "... and in the old backyard of an old-backyard-of-a-town, he took it there, he placed it there, and buried it in the ground: The TW, the snake, and Moon" (BC, p. 250). Zusak uses the simple constructions *he took it there, he placed it there, and buried it* to indicate the methodically performed actions of a person emotionally numb from grief and loss.

This story is a link that connects generations because it is the father who in his youth buries his "red cattle dog called Moon; named for the full moon camped above the house when his mother brought her home" (BC, p. 162), and the dog died bitten by a king brown snake. As a child, Michael "carried Moon past the clothesline and buried her next to a banksia" (BC, p. 163), and then "he dug a separate hole – a few feet to the right – and in it he placed the snake; friend and foe, side by side" (BC, p. 164). Many years later, little Clay asks his Dad: "Can you tell me all about Moon, Dad, and the snake?" (BC, p. 263), and each time he dives into his father's childhood.

Part One begins with another flashback of eleven years previous to the main events of the story. For the first time, the man the brothers call the Murderer (BC, p. 13) appears. The boys gave such a nickname to their father who is completely distraught by his wife's death. The author uses vivid and unusual epithets to describe an emotionally broken person: "But make no mistake – he was a wasteland in a suit; he was bent-postured, he was broken" (BC, p. 13). Love for the boys' mother becomes the essence of his life that costs more than art for him and makes him forget his feelings for his first wife: "He loved her [Penelope] more than Michelangelo and Abbey Hanley combined" (BC, p. 170). Love causes the *birth* of a new Michael Dunbar and *kills* him. Instead, the father *kills* his sons, as it seems to them, by his indifference: "We were boys but also miraculous: We lay there, living and breathing – For that was the night he'd killed us. He'd murdered us all in our beds" (BC, p. 349). But he also became the one "who got everything moving forward, and all of us looking back" (BC, p. 13).

In fact, the parents were like better halves of each other. What one lacked was easily found in another. This is how Zusak describes them, using parallel antonymous constructions:

...he was almost the perfect other half of Penelope; they were identical and opposite, like designed or destined symmetry. Where she came from a far-off watery place, his was remote and dry. Where he was the single son of an only mother, she was the only daughter of a single man. And lastly, as we're about to see – and this was the greatest mirror, the surest parallel of fate – while she was practicing Bach, Mozart, and Chopin, he was obsessing on an art form of his own. (BC, p. 150)

They were the ones who found each other in the huge world by the will of fate: "Sure, they fought sometimes, they argued. There was the odd suburban thunderbolt, but they were mostly those people who'd found each other; they were golden and bright-lit and funny" (BC, p. 265). With the wife's death, Michael lost himself: "Our father became a half father. The other half dead with Penny" (BC, p. 345).

The readers gradually get to know the brothers Matthew, Rory, Henry, Clayton, Thomas (BC, p. 15). They grew up without parental care for eleven years and, as Matthew noted, many considered them "tearaways. Barbarians. Mostly they were right: Our mother was dead. Our father had fled" (BC, p. 15). Zusak uses the sentence fragment to emphasise the noun *Barbarians* and generalise the boys' characters. The sentences *Our mother was dead – Our father had fled* in the form of parallel constructions express the coordinate elements of the message and highlight the most important thing. It is to the grief-stricken brothers that the father returns and asks for help in building the bridge: "I live far from here now, in the country. It's a lot of land, and there's a river, and I'm building a bridge. ...I'll need help to build it, and I'm asking if any of you might –" (BC, p. 85). Zusak uses aposiopesis as the particular rhetorical device to tell the readers that about which he could speak but would not. Alliteration and assonance, taken alternately, add rhythm and melody to the text. The bridge becomes what unites the father with the son: "The bridge was all they had" (BC, p. 398).

A Coming-of-Age Story With Music, Love, Art, and Greek Myths

Describing the furniture in the house, Matthew mentions one element that is the symbol of hopes and expectations for a better future for their late mother: "We had a piano no one played" (BC, p. 15) after their mother's death.

Michael who returns to his sons cannot look at this interior object with composure: "The only thing it didn't do was say *boo*: The piano. The piano. Christ, he thought, the piano. ... His heart ached with such force that he could have burst back out the front door" (BC, p. 33). Zusak uses epizeuxis and personification to describe the piano. This instrument is the symbol of passing time and a link that connects the past and present. Repeating the piano three times attracts special attention and is reflected in the memory of the readers. The author uses *Christ* as an expletive that expresses personal emotions and that is not directed to other people.

As a child, Penelope, the boys' mother, also had an instrument: "The piano was won [by her father] in a card game" (BC, p. 69). The sons do not react so emotionally to the instrument since years pass, and they see it every day and it no longer creates a painful feeling but remains a bright memory of the mother. Instead, the father disappears after his wife's death. When he returns, he cannot distinguish his sons: "The great shame was that he couldn't tell who it was. Rory or me? Henry or Clay? It wasn't Tommy, surely. Too big" (BC, p. 34). Zusak leaves these questions unanswered. Again, the author uses personification when talking about the musical instrument: "And the piano watched him from behind" (BC, p. 36). It looks like a circle wherein the thoughts of the father return to the object, which is the bridge between the happy and the traumatic past and the present.

Finally, the father walks towards the piano: "Rather than open the lid to the keys (no way could he face doing *that*), he exposed the strings from above, and what he found was possibly worse... two charcoal-colored books, on an old blue woolen dress" (BC, p. 41). Zusak writes *that* in italics to stress that there is no such power to force the man to touch the keys which once helped him to propose to his wife-to-be: "She opened the lid and saw the words, on the keys, and they were lettered there simply, yet beautifully: P|E|N|E|L|O|P|E L|E|S|C|I|U|S|Z|K|O P|L|E|A|S|E M|A|R|R|Y M|E" (BC, p. 225). Zusak uses a graphic image in which the capital letters are separated by vertical bars resembling piano keys. The text is perceived as filmed prose wherein events run and dialogues sound. For Michael Dunbar, music becomes the embodiment of his fears. As Lindquist et al. (2015) believe, people who are exposed to labels for the category "fear" prior to listening to unpleasant music are subsequently more likely to engage in behaviour typical of fear.

The musical instrument has different symbolic meanings for the boys and their parents, as Matthew recalls, "Our symbol of boyhood misery. But their island of calm

in the maelstrom" (BC, p. 271). But it is also the symbol of the boys' coming-of-age because everyone thought that "it was Penny's death and our father leaving that made us what we were – and sure, it definitely made us rowdier and harder and hardier, and gave us a sense of fight – but it isn't what made us tough" (BC, p. 282). They were hardened in some way by their mother's death and their father's escape. Zusak exploits the degrees of comparisons to create an ascending gradation that along with polysyndeton "produces the feeling of a deliberately piling up, a one-added-to-another multiplicity" (Harris, 2017, p. 14). Matthew goes on: "No, in the beginning it was something more. It was the wooden, the upright. The piano" (BC, p. 282). It was not the musical instrument itself which hardened the boys but rather the time their mother taught them to play the piano when their friends bullied them, calling the brothers *homosexuals* (BC, p. 283). It made them fight with bully boys. The author metaphorically depicts the coming-of-age of the sons using comparisons: "What else was there, as we skip the years like stones?" (BC, p. 273).

Another symbol of growing up, but mostly of Clay, is the parent's bed which "was perfect, another strange but sacred site: it was a bed, in a field, with the ignition of dawn and distant rooftops; or, more accurately, it was an old mattress, lying faded in the earth" (BC, p. 75). For Clay, it "was keepsake, it was memory" (BC, p. 76). It was there, lying on an old mattress, he could dream and mentally talk to his parents, remembering himself as a child: "He lay down in the dark and he dreamed there, and cared nothing for winning or State. No, he spoke only to another boy, from a small country town, and a woman who'd crossed the oceans" (BC, p. 415). He apologises to his mother and himself for everything: "'I'm sorry,' he whispered to both of them, 'I'm so sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!'" (BC, p. 415). The author uses epizeuxis highlighting the last word in italics. This bed in the middle of the field became the place of his revelations and the meeting place of Clay with his beloved girl: "She'd go there and she'd lie with him. She told him about the horses" (BC, p. 351). The use of simple sentences creates the effect of alternating actions, and the repetition of the personal pronoun *she* sounds like a refrain.

From their late mother, the sons learn about Greek myths and give the names of mythological figures to their pets. A "*stubborn ... but friendly*" mule was named Achilles (BC, p. 383), the fish – Agamemnon: "Its scales were like plumage. Its tail a golden rake" (BC, p. 32), the cat Hector: "...a big grey brute of a cat: a tabby with giant black paws and a tail like an exclamation mark..." (BC, p. 32), the pigeon Telemachus: "...when he stood and walked, his purple head bobbed with great economy, he moved in perfect

rhythm. ... These days we called him Telly. Or T. But never, no matter the occasion, his full, infuriating name: Telemachus" (BC, p. 33). Penelope was raised by her father because her mother had died during childbirth and the girl grew up on the *fast-running Achilles*, the *resourceful Odysseus*, Zeus the cloud-compeller, the laughter-loving Aphrodite, *Hector the panic maker*, the patient Penelope, the thoughtful Telemachus and Agamemnon, king of men (BC, p. 232). The author includes Penelope's perception of mythological heroes in the epithets with which he names each of them. Later, the boys had a dog named Rosy in honour of "*rosy-fingered dawn*" (BC, p. 68) – the epithet their mother used to name the spring of day.

Tommy gives nicknames to the pets. Matthew mentions it this way: "God, how we hated Tommy for those names. The single reason he got away with it was that we all understood: That kid knew what he was doing" (BC, p. 33). Tommy pays tribute to his late mother who left memories of herself to each of her sons: "She would do something once with each of us. Maybe it was to give us one memory that was ours, and ours alone, but I hope she did it for herself" (BC, p. 322). She takes her little son along to "the museum; and his favorite was the hall named Wild Planet" (BC, p. 324). This particular case gives rise to his "love for those animals...; to Rosy and Hector, Telemachus, Agamemnon, and of course, to the great but mulish one" (BC, p. 324).

To describe the love to his mother of the most disobedient of the sons named Rory, Zusak uses comparisons, immersing the readers in Greek mythology: "And looking back, I love the way he called that now – how he stood, and was ready to go to her, to carry her or die for her if he had to; like the Greeks when called to arms" (BC, p. 536). The love to his mother resounds in his desperate address to his brothers: "What'll we do without her, Matthew? What the hell are we s'posed to do?" (BC, p. 537). Not only is pain hidden in Rory's words but also anger towards something that cannot be averted. In particular, this is indicated by obscene language. Swear words allow the free expression of emotion, especially anger (Jay, 2009) and allow more expression of personal anger in particular (Safdar et al., 2009).

Each of the brothers experiences his mother's loss in his own way. Clay's longing for his mother is read in the following lines: "Clay – who was the quiet one, or the smiler – only turned, one last time, and stared across the sunlit district of statues, crosses, and gravestones" (BC, p. 25) – this is how the author depicts a quiet pity of the boy who misses his mother.

The lace of events begins to intertwine in an incredible pattern after the readers get to know the main character, Clay. He is incomprehensible even to his brothers:

What was there to know when it came to Clayton, our brother? Questions had followed him for years now, like why did he smile but never laugh? Why did he fight but never to win? Why did he like it so much on our roof? Why did he run not for a satisfaction, but a discomfort – some sort of gate way to pain and suffering, and always putting up with it? Not one of those inquiries, however, was his favorite. (BC, p. 21)

The author uses anaphora in combination with gradation to build a chain of unanswered questions. The only thing that becomes clear to the readers is the boy's reluctance to reveal himself to his brothers and friends and the base of it is his introversion. He becomes an introvert after his mother's death and his father's escape: "At times he liked to talk to it [city] – to feel both less and more alone" (BC, p. 88).

Zusak does not unfold all the events but gives the readers a hint about the boy's inner strength:

To him, there was no win at the end of this, or a loss, or a time, or the money. It didn't matter how much they hurt him, they couldn't hurt him. Or how much they held him, they couldn't hold him. Or at least, they couldn't quite hurt him *enough*. (BC, p. 51)

The author uses italics emphasising that Clay, after experiencing many tragic events that fell to his lot, becomes one whom the trials only strengthen. He is the one from whom bridges could be built. Zusak exploits polysyndeton to connect words and sentences. The conjunction *or* indicates an alternative, but it also takes that choice away altogether.

The entire life of the boy becomes a kind of preparation for the significant event, the main day in his life: "He only knew that he was working and waiting for the day he'd find out – and that day, as it was, was today. It was waiting at home in the kitchen" (BC, p. 57). The day when the father returns to the boys' lives becomes the beginning of a new life for all of them. Clay ponders over his father's returning that very day and finally guesses: "For a moment he wondered, why now? Why had he come home *now*?"

But then he realized the date. It was February 17" (BC, p. 84). The adverb *now* in italics is used in the anteposition to mention the exact date and related event, and it is their parents' wedding date: "Then the wedding, which went ahead as planned, the following day. February 17" (BC, p. 232).

Art runs through the entire novel with the piano music that Penny Dunbar plays, with a love of architecture that is inherited from his father to Clay, and with Michael Dunbar's creation of paintings. Abbey is painted on Michael's canvases: "...for amongst the kernels of floating dust there were countless sheets of canvas, all stretched over wooden frames. ... On each of them was Abbey, and sometimes she was a woman, sometimes a girl" (BC, p. 223). Love to the girl becomes even more than art: "He loved her with lines and color. He loved her more than Michelangelo. He loved her more than the David, and those struggling, stuated slaves" (BC, p. 170). Zusak uses anaphora in combination with gradation to show the rising emotional significance of each subsequent statement.

As a real artist, Michael contributes more than the reproduction of the image on the canvas; he contributes his very soul: "Penelope realized that anyone who looked at these paintings would know that whoever painted them felt even more than the portraits could suggest. It was in every stroke before you, and everyone left out" (BC, p. 223). But there is one thing that distinguishes Michael Dunbar's paintings from the artists' canvases whose works inspire him: "Sure, he could paint well, often beautifully... And he was truly gifted in only one area, which was something he also clung to. He was good at painting Abbey" (BC, p. 178). Love gives birth to the artist Michael, and it kills him. Abbey leaves Michael, and he drops his drawing: "'You can paint?' 'I could. Not anymore'" (BC, p. 224).

No Penny – No Daisies

The whole novel is a story wherein the Dunbar boys' present life is skilfully described and in which past events are implicated.

In Part Two, the readers are finally introduced to the one that unites the memories of the brothers and their father. She is Penny Dunbar, a mother, wife, *many-named woman*: "First, the name she was born with: Penelope Lesciuszko. Then the one christened at her piano: the Mistake Maker. In transit they called her the Birthday Girl. Her self-

proclaimed nickname was the Broken-Nosed Bride. ...she died with: Penny Dunbar" (BC, p. 65). Each stage of the woman's life corresponds to her nickname: she was born with a Polish surname; got her second name when her father taught her to play the piano, and she could not perform a piece of music perfectly; in the refugee camp she was given the next nickname when she sang congratulatory songs with other emigrants; on the eve of the wedding, she broke her nose and called herself the funny name; the latter was her married name.

The brothers come to their mother's grave and see Clay with a bouquet of tulips. One boy asks: "No daisies?" (BC, p. 136). After all, these are Penny's favourite flowers: "Get daisies if you can, they were her favorite, remember?" (BC, p. 22). The bouquet of daisies was first gifted to Penelope by Michael: "On the return visit, he'd shaved, and brought daisies" (BC, p. 215).

The choice of a flower has a symbolic meaning as the prototype of the boys' mother is hidden in this plant. In many cultures, the daisy is a symbol of family, love, and fidelity. This way the boys remember their mother, so they engrave the following epitaph on her gravestone: "**MUCH LOVED BY EVERYONE BUT ESPECIALLY THE DUNBAR BOYS**" (BC, p. 219). The author uses capital letters in bold emphasising the sons' incredible love for their mother. And this very flower is the symbol of innocence and the same is Penny Dunbar who appears in front of the readers' eyes when she flees Poland: "But now the woman who was nearly twenty-one but appeared sixteen gripped him firmly in the face" (BC, p. 66).

An Epic Poem of Life

Zusak would not be a true writer if he did not create a symbol from the book. So, the symbols that unite time and people are Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, the books that Penny's father quietly packed in her suitcase. Her father, Waldek Lesciuszko, gives instructions to young Penelope, and later as the mother of five sons, she follows them: "I ask you to read it to your own children" (BC, p. 81). The father, sending his beloved daughter into emigre, gives her what is the symbol of unity for them. They are books he wrapped in brown paper, and "on top, in weighty handwriting, it said, FOR THE MISTAKE MAKER, WHO PLAYS CHOPIN BEST OF ALL, THEN MOZART, AND BACH" (BC, p. 79). The author uses capital letters to attract the readers' attention and to evoke their emotions since "emotions and feelings determine the relationship between body,

mind and actions; they influence our modern self-understanding and our understanding of others" (Knaller, 2017, p. 19). This episode can be considered the most emotive in the novel. Modern novels as a rule attract the readers with such plot elements (Thomas, 2015).

Young Penelope reads the same books but in English following the will of the father ("...one day I hope we will see each other again, and you will read these books to me in English" (BC, p. 81)): "She continued mastering the English language as well, feeling it closer every night. Her ambition of reading both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* from cover to cover seemed an increasingly real possibility" (BC, p. 222). It seems that Homer's legendary works become a certain standard, a canvas wherein he writes his story about the Dunbars, turning it into an epic poem. All the epic components are mentioned here: a classic hero, a son who tries to find his father, coming back home. Each story in the novel looks like an epic song. The books remain a bright memory of the boys' mother: "We stamped out knickknacks and *other crap*, but preserved her books and bookshelves. The books, we knew, were sacred" (BC, p. 407). Zusak uses *other crap* in italics, implying that for all the brothers except Clay, books are the symbols of love for a dead mother but not a collection of age-old wisdom.

The main idea of the novel is written on the jacket of *The Quarryman*. This is a book about Michelangelo, and it is read by Clay and his beloved girl Carey: "EVERYTHING HE EVER DID WAS MADE NOT ONLY OF BRONZE OR MARBLE OR PAINT, BUT OF HIM... OF EVERYTHING INSIDE HIM" (BC, p. 126). The use of capital letters is a technique that the author repeatedly uses to draw the readers' attention to the main idea.

The Quarryman unites Clay with his father, Clay with Carey, Clay with Abbey, and Michael with his first love Abbey: "It was milestones, too, and birthdays, and one in particular, when she gave him a book – a beautiful hardcover with bronze lettering – called *The Quarryman*, and Michael staying up reading, while she slept against his legs" (BC, p. 174). Abbey is Michael's first wife who later left him. This is Abbey who, meeting Clay, hands him his father's book, given her at the moment of breaking up: "I think I know why you came here, Clay: She left and came back with *The Quarryman*" (BC, p. 493). Only after Clay's death does Abbey write him a letter: "*When I met you both, I should have told you – that you reminded me of Michael and me*" (BC, pp. 495–496). Zusak uses italics to highlight the letter to grasp the readers' attention. Thus, through time and space, the book connects two couples, becomes both men's passion, and determines

their future destiny. The book is very important in Clay and Carey's life, and it becomes clear from the following words: "...they could never know what it would mean" (BC, p. 498) and "In between, as you might guess, the one constant – the thing they loved most – was the book of Michelangelo, whom she lovingly called the sculptor, or the artist, or his favorite: the fourth Buonarroti" (BC, p. 498).

Clay is like an alter-ego of his father since their destinies are similar, their bond is strong, and the longing of the son for the father cancels out the betrayal of the latter: "Clay searched for him after a week" (BC, p. 357). Fear as the most intense negative emotion in its psychological impact is a universal experience (Sik, 2019; Tudor, 2003). Therefore, the choice of the means is necessary for its representation in a literary text and depends in no small way on the author's worldview and experiences: "As I said, he went Dad! DAD! WHERE ARE YOU, DAD?!" (BC, p. 358). Zusak uses capital letters in combination with exclamation and question marks to describe the boy's fears.

The boy tries to find support from his father because the memories of his mother are too painful: "Like all of us, Clay missed him in a strangely worn-out way. It was hard enough missing Penny" (BC, p. 357). The similarity of the son to the father is noticed by Michael's ex-wife Abbey. She is the one the young man comes to with his girlfriend Carey: "She shook her head and laughed, at herself: You remind me of me and him. She thought it – he could tell – but didn't say it" (BC, p. 493). And they are united by a love of art: "The *David* and the *Slaves*. He loved them like his father did" (BC, p. 352). The author makes it clear that the son and the father are mentally and outwardly so similar that only together they can build something significant.

The Amahnu: Where the Stories Come Together

Clay is the son who agrees to his father's adventure of building the bridge across the river. This river is the symbol of Michael's first love as this is the place where he and Abbey spent their honeymoon: "It was driving back, a few days later, and stopping halfway, where the river was awesome, something insane, raging downstream – a river with a strange name, but a name they loved – the Amahnu" (BC, p. 174). The author uses various adjectives – *awesome*, *insane*, *raging* – to show the changeability of the river at different seasons. And again, Clay's thoughts about the river sound like a refrain to his father's words: "It had a strange name, but he liked it" (BC, p. 145). Zusak notes the significant role of the river in the boy's life: "The Amahnu would be his [Clay's] future"

(BC, p. 237). At the bottom of the dried-up river he digs the ground, mourns his girlfriend's death, remembers the traumatic past, plays football with his father and brothers, and it becomes the challenge to test the strength of the bridge.

Life is like a fast river that carries people's fate on its waves and helps them to understand something important for themselves. So, it is in Clay's life: "He was caught somewhere, in the current – of destroying everything he had, to become all he needed to be – and the past, ever closer, upon him" (BC, p. 101).

The elements are able to harden materials and souls. The steel is quenched with water and the fire cements clay. Carey, trying to encourage the boy, gives him a lighter. In the letter to Clay, she explains her gift:

As for the Zippo, they say you should never burn your bridges, but I offer it to you anyway, even if only for luck, and to remember me by. Also, a lighter sort of makes sense. You know what they say about clay, don't you? Of course you do. (BC, p. 127)

Between the Doors: Connecting Past and Future

The door appears in Zusak's novel as the symbol of the boundary between the past and the future. Michael Dunbar paints Abbey in his final assignment:

He found an abandoned door and painted her, both sides of it. On one panel she was reaching for the handle, on the other she was leaving. She entered as a teenager; the girl in school uniform, that bony-yet-softness, and endless hair. Behind it, she left – high-heeled, in a bob, all business – looking over her shoulder, at everything in between. (BC, p. 179)

He receives his result and reads: "*Door idea fairly cliché. Technique proficient but no more, but I admit I want to know her. I want to know what happened in between*" (BC, p. 179). And between the doors, there is an entire life of people who later disperse and who each choose his or her own way: "To be fair, there was nothing malicious in Abbey Dunbar, but as time widened and the good moments shortened, it became clearer, each day, that their lives were going separate ways" (BC, p. 187).

Blaming himself for Carey's death, Clay finally dares to come to her coach Ennis McAndrew and her parents. The door in front of him may split up his life: "For this door, it did get glorious, and it was all in the showing up for it" (BC, p. 464). He blames himself but Carey's parents and her coach do not see him guilty of her death as "It was they who brought her to the city. It was they who knew the risk" (BC, p. 465). Zusak uses anaphora in parallel constructions to arrange the message and create the effect of frozen moments in time. The writer writes simple sentences with a single independent clause to express a complete thought. Ennis McAndrew tries to calm Clay down in his own way: "'You have no idea what I've seen jockeys get up to over the years, and they did it' – he was suddenly so empathetic – 'for things worth much less than you'" (BC, p. 466). The coach addresses the boy using the personal pronoun *you*, which is "a decisive step in the transition from the authorial to the figural domain". Using the personal pronoun rather than the character's name "facilitates the transfer of the reader to the consciousness of the character of the reader's empathy with the character's situation" (Stanzel, 1986, p. 189).

Death Knows Everything

Death is an ontological characteristic of a person as a living being, therefore, limited by a chronological framework. The encounter with death, awareness, and experience of this event makes one a person of culture, and the inevitability of such a meeting is the most reliable and at the same time the most mysterious knowledge. Death is a symbol, the only content of which is death itself. Zusak skilfully and step by step introduces the image of death into the plot of the novel. Everything finds its end with the relentless passage of time. Content-enhancing and rhythmic-melodic functions are performed in the text by parcelled constructions: "And like that, the time flowed by: They planted things in the garden. Half of it lived. Half died" (BC, p. 249). Some researchers assert that Zusak uses metafictional strategies in depicting death to allow the readers to confront difficult topics (Steyn, 2018, p. 28).

From the very moment of birth, a person begins his or her preparation for death. The writer recalls how Penelope found out about her next pregnancy: "After four years of teaching, she came home one evening with a pregnancy kit..." (BC, p. 252). In a few lines, the author writes: "The metronome went click" (BC, p. 253), and a bit later: "And death came walking with us" (BC, p. 253). Zusak closes the life cycle from birth to death. It is inevitable. Michael Dunbar's mother meets her death: "She'd died at the dining

room table, most likely late at night, having just typed a letter to a friend" (BC, p. 249). Death came to the boys' mother invisibly and slowly: "So she dropped an egg between Rory's toes. So she lost control of a plate... She'd started leaving us that morning, and death was moving in: He was perched there on a curtain rod. Dangling in the sun" (BC, p. 298). The writer uses personification each time to describe the approaching of Penelope's death: "But of course, looking back, death was out there too that night, perched high up with the pigeons, hanging casually from the power lines. He was watching them, side to side" (BC, p. 333).

Realising one's uniqueness allows one to see human life in the life of the world, and the death of the world in human death. Penny accepts her death: "And Penny, so slim and stoic: She steadied toward matter-of-fact. Her own eyes green and wild. Her hair was out and open, and she repeated herself, she said it: "Boys, I'm going to die" (BC, p. 334), but her sons and husband experience grief differently: "He [Rory] roared into Clay's chest, straight through the buttons; he shouted right into his heart" (BC, p. 334); "I see Henry near the toaster, speechless when it counted. I see Tommy all numb beside him, looking down at the blurry crumbs. I see our father, Michael Dunbar, unfixable, at the sink" (BC, p. 334); "And me [Matthew], I'm in the middle, collecting a fire up all of my own; paralyzed, folded-armed" (BC, p. 334).

Another encounter with death awaits Clay. It is the tragic death of his beloved jockey girl: "Carey, of course, went to trackwork, where in the dawn, the old stager, War of the Roses, returned from the inside training track – but returned without his rider. She'd fallen on the back straight" (BC, p. 436). Zusak does not use a lot of words but describes nature to convey the suffering of the boy: "The sun was cold and pallid. The sky of the city was quiet" (BC, p. 436).

Death knows all the past and future events but is it possible to predict or feel death? Carey's mother, whom the writer calls Catherine the Great and Belligerent (BC, p. 443), foresees her daughter's tragic death: "That's our *daughter* in there, and I want her to live – not go through the hell that you did, or what the boys will..." (BC, p. 444). The author uses italics to distinguish the *son–daughter* opposition. She accepts that her husband and sons could be maimed in the race but not her only daughter. The mother's words are in Clay's mind after Carey's death: "I want her to live. I want her to live" (BC, p. 444). Contact repetition is felt like an echo that vanishes.

How do children guess their mother is going away? Zusak gives his answer: "You know your mother's dying when she takes you out individually" (BC, p. 320). Inevitability is clear to children but at the same time it is a stage of their maturing: "It was hard enough missing Penny. At least with her you knew what to do with it; the beauty of death – it's definite" (BC, p. 357). The author uses the oxymoron *the beauty of death* as a way to attract the readers' attention, embarrassing them and evoking unusual associations in their minds.

Clay is able to sacrifice himself for the sake of those he loves, even to descend into the realm of Hades to return his mother and beloved girl to life: "I'd go to hell just to make them live again – and we could both go, you could go with me – one of us for one of them. I know they're not in hell, I know, I know, but –" (BC, p. 523). The emotion of despair, insecurity, fear of being alienated by the father he has just found is heard in Clay's words, but love wins: "He stopped and bent, then called again. 'Dad, you have to help me'" (BC, p. 523).

The Metronome Clicks

The metronome goes click to the life of the novel's characters second by second, moment by moment, beginning with Penny's childhood when her father taught her to play the piano: "Her father cleared his throat. The metronome went click" (BC, p. 69).

Later, an adult Penelope uses this device to teach her students: "She brought a metronome in from home. The kid would stare, incredulous, saying, 'What the fuck is that?' To which Penny would answer flatly: 'Read in time with this'" (BC, p. 252). The writer uses obscene words to show more emotions and draw the readers' attention to represented narratives (Bertels et al., 2011).

Penelope teaches her students to read texts using the metronome and while visiting her in hospital, they offer to breathe, listening to its countdown: "They'd brought her in the metronome, and it was one of the boys who said it. I think his name was Carlos. 'Breathe in time with this, Miss'" (BC, p. 314). So, Penny's days drop one by one to the sounds of the metronome, counting down the ones left to live: "The metronome went click. ... And death came walking with us" (BC, p. 253). The device appears again when death first casts a dark shadow over the woman's figure:

"That morning, they were reading with the metronome – the old familiar trick – when Penny got up for a thesaurus. Next, she was shaken awake" (BC, p. 301).

When the Sun Goes Down With a Flaming Ray

The sun in Zusak's novel is the symbol of life, or it is life itself that lights both happy and tragic days. Sometimes the writer uses his own epithets to describe the celestial body: "The woman came closer and I noted the teeth of her now, how they were white-and-gleaming-but-yellow; a lot like the swaggering sun" (BC, pp. 4–5). The use of personification is also striking as the sun seems to observe the events taking place in the characters' lives: "There was tea and Scotch Fingers, and sun clapped hard at the window" (BC, p. 6), "The sun was still all over it, but reclining, leaning west" (BC, p. 7), "... the sun still high, and aching" (BC, p. 13), "He watched the sun, grazing amongst the skyscrapers" (BC, p. 23).

Penelope realises that she is in a strange and distant place comparing the sun at home – "In her former country, in the Eastern Bloc, the sun had mostly been a toy, a gizmo" (BC, pp. 65–66), and abroad – "It was so hot and wide, and white. The sun was some sort of barbarian, a Viking in the sky. It plundered, it pillaged. It got its hands on everything..." (BC, p. 65). Once in another country, fleeing Poland, the country is described as "ice and snow, and all those years ago" (BC, p. 73), and she leaves the warmth that eventually, metaphorically, burned her.

Mentioning the sun, Zusak uses personification in combination with metaphor when describing the unconsciousness of Carey's father: "She went to his boots to loosen them, and now he screamed in pain. The sun flopped down and swallowed him" (BC, p. 427).

The heavenly body seems to be a doctor: "The sunshine bathed the animals, but beat Clay up in the face. Soon it would soothe the soreness" (BC, p. 291). At the same time, it is a witness of Penelope's slow dying ("A week later, she was in the hospital; the first of many visits. ... The sun was setting behind her" (BC, p. 305)) and of happy moments in the characters' lives as on Michael and Penelope's wedding day ("They walked down the center of the church, where the doors were held open, to a white-hot sunlight in front of them" (BC, p. 233)). Nothing can interrupt the sun's rising and shining in the sky. It observes both births and deaths. The heavenly body sees Penny's funeral:

"The funeral was one of those bright-lit things. The sunny hilltop cemetery" (BC, p. 343), and later Carey's funeral: "And the funeral? It could only be one of those bright-lit things, even if they held it indoors" (BC, p. 448). In both examples, the author uses the same epithet *bright-lit thing* to describe the sun.

A Twirling Button: Hesitating to Come Back

The symbol of the inevitability of changes in the girl's life is the button that is waiting for its time in the pocket of "an old blue woolen dress" (BC, p. 41). Fleeing the totalitarian country, Penelope is wearing this dress: "She was in a blue woolen dress with fat, flat buttons" (BC, p. 79).

This button becomes the symbol of indecision and at the same time determination of the girl. When deciding to return to the father, Penelope is stricken "with indecision, twirling one of those buttons, center-chest" (BC, p. 91), and finally she had the button "in front of her, in the palm of her right hand" (BC, p. 91). The twirling button becomes the symbol of burned bridges and the impossibility of her returning back home. That is why "she'd never had the heart to mend it" (BC, p. 408), and after her death, the button kept in the pocket of the said dress along with Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and a pack of cigarettes, were *buried* in the piano.

Last but Not Least

What can a clothes peg mean? At first glance, this object is small and insignificant, but not on the pages of the novel. For the first time since the escape Clay met his father, and "reached inside his pocket again, and when he pulled it back up, there were pieces; he held them out in his hand. They were warm and red and plastic – the shards of a shattered clothes peg" (BC, p. 61). Later, the readers learn about the symbolic meaning of this peg and why the boy carries it in his pocket. Such a peg Clay suddenly finds in his hand on the day of his mother's funeral: "On the day of her death he'd found a peg in his hand, and he clenched it now till it hurt; then returned it soon to his pocket" (BC, p. 344). It is in Clay's pocket after his mother's death as a memory of the darkest day in his life: "Again, the peg was there. He slept with it, it never left him" (BC, p. 348). This peg is found in a gift box by her parents under Carey's bed. It is Clay's gift: "...it was something she'd actually stolen, and he would never know exactly when. It was pale but green and elongated. She'd been here, 18 Archer Street. She'd stolen a Goddamn

peg" (BC, p. 467). It is like a talisman for Clay: "Why is it, she [Carey] asked, 'that every time you're uneasy, you reach for whatever you've got there?'" (BC, p. 482).

The clothes peg means a lot to the son and his father as it is also the symbol of their secret. It does not leave his father even after many years of separation, and he paints "a sketch of a boy in a kitchen, who was holding toward us *something*. The palm was open but curling. If you looked hard you could tell what it was: The shards of a broken peg" (BC, p. 551). This object is the last thing the boy's mother sees before her death: "Clay could be totally certain; the last thing Penelope had seen in the world was a length of that wire and its color – the pegs on the clothesline, above them" (BC, p. 557). And later "When he came back out to the clothesline, he reached up for the first of his pegs" (BC, p. 558). Zusak skilfully combines small and seemingly insignificant details and significant symbols in his novel. They are intertwined to create the design of the novel.

The most significant symbol of the novel is Clay's bridge, the perfect clay bridge that could withstand the ferocity of a river and that is diligently being built by Clay and his father throughout Zusak's novel, uniting the brothers. All the time, both father and son realise that the flood is coming, and they should finish the construction on time. They live in Spartan amenities, come up with a plan, prepare the elements of the bridge, and work tirelessly. Eventually, Clay completes the construction, returns home, and the readers learn how his mother dies. She struggles against cancer and slowly dies. She is given six months after surgery and chemotherapy, but she lives for three more years until she feels death's coming and asks her husband to take her home. She dies in the arms of her beloved husband.

When a flood occurs, the brothers all watch the bridge together as it withstands the storm. After that, Clay leaves home as if leaving behind the pain of the past. And only a few years later, Matthew returns to the old house to dig up an old typewriter and to write Clay's story.

Conclusion

Symbolising ideas enables the author to express something beyond the empirically presented in the text since the symbol is one of the main constructive elements of a literary work, which combines imagery and its expressive means into a holistic system.

The ways of representing narratives in Zusak's *Bridge of Clay* via symbolic forms are expressed in the text by direct and indirect nomination. The semantic potential of the symbol, which is realised by the interaction of symbols with each other and other meaning-making elements and structures of the text, is clearly traced in the novel and is expressed in the author's intentions.

A hermeneutic interpretation of symbols as meaning-making textual components capable of realising the associative-semantic system of the author's and the reader's narratives objectifies the emotional dominance of the novel. Explicating the role of the symbol as one of the hermeneutic intratextual mechanisms of meaning-making determines its artistic potential. Applying the method of interpretation to the symbol to be a special element of the semantic sphere of the text demonstrates the flexible nature of symbols as indicators that are focused on the context, which should not only be indifferently perceived by the readers, but which also needs to be comprehended, evaluated, and interpreted.

The system of symbols in *Bridge of Clay* is designed to immerse the readers in the atmosphere of a perfect chaos, and it is a special kind of both noetic and noematic means with culturally determined interpretations implemented in the context. Clay, the most determined of the Dunbar sons, managed to build the bridge as the principal symbol of unity of his family, as the link to their traumatic past, and the hope for a better future. It is a miracle and nothing less. Symbolically, it is a bridge made of clay. At the beginning of the story, the clay is soft and fragile, but later on, it hardens and becomes a more stable structure. It is Clay, a boy tormented by a long-buried secret, who accepts a surprising request from his father.

A perfect chaos is built in the novel, in particular, through a space-time perspective, which creates the effect of a broken narration when the readers do not completely understand where and in what period of the characters' lives they will be in a moment. The symbols, invented by Zusak, are included in this story as unconditional elements of the realisation of an artistic idea and dynamic schemes for the interpretation of the text. This provides a systematic understanding of the implicit symbolic narratives of the text, expressed symbolically.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions: Conception/Design of Study- O.B., A.B.; Data Acquisition- O.B., A.B.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- O.B., A.B.; Drafting Manuscript- O.B., A.B.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- O.B., A.B.; Final Approval and Accountability- O.B., A.B.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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