



From Obscurity to Prominence: The Evolution of The Protagonist in Markus Zusak's "I Am the Messenger"

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to excavate the transformation of the protagonist Edward Kennedy from Markus Zusak's *I am the Messenger*. The transformation of Ed Kennedy is a profound way to understand the process of the minds of young adults. It not just illustrates the journey of the character but also deals with his emotion and experience throughout the narration. The journey from ordinariness to extraordinary purposes leads the protagonist to understand his self-worth. The collective combinations of his experience are for the study in this research paper.

Key words: Transformation, Ordinariness, Extraordinariness, Individual Journey, Evolution

Human beings need transformations in their life. The transformation can be either personal or social but it will lead them to be satisfied in their life. Their growth in personal, social, intellectual areas is possibly attained by self-discovery. Once the potentiality of the self is attained the individuals can evolve themselves and get into new perspectives of life. The first point for self-discovery is realising the ordinariness of their lifestyle. Once the realisation hits them heavily, they can find ways to transform into desirable persona. In Markus Zusak's *I Am the Messenger*, Edward Kennedy is a nineteen years old protagonist who works as a cab driver. He is a complete symbol for ordinariness, awkwardness and aimlessness. He has an impassioned life that does not give him any hope to lead with fulfillment. He even says in the novel, "I Cook. I eat. I was but I rarely iron. I live in the past and believe that Cindy Crawford is by far the best supermodel. That's my life" (ITM 25, 26). He has a miserable familial condition that his father died months back; his two elder siblings are married and living in neighbouring cities and his younger brother too has got a girlfriend and goes to the university. Comparatively, Ed Kennedy is a complete broke who does not have any hope. He believes no good thing has happened in his life so far. His mother also has been showing a sip of partiality to him which makes him keep a distance from his family. His ultimate solace are reading books, walking around the city and playing cards, the sledge game, with his friends Marv, Ritchie, and Audrey. He lives in a small apartment with his dog doorman. Though Ed Kennedy lives an ordinary life, he has an innate quest to overcome it. He realised his life has to be changed. So he considers the message as a call of action. He says, "There's something in me that advises me to throw it out – to throw in the bin and forget about it. Yet, I also feel pangs of guilt even for thinking of discarding it like that. Maybe it's meant to be, I think" (30). Nguyen Van Bung in the paper *Some Jiddu Krishnamurti's Viewpoints About Awareness* says:

According to Krishnamurti's point of view, in order to be enlightened, one must realize it. Self-awareness means that each person must autonomously conduct his own quest to reach the truth. Self-control has to be progressed from low to high, going into the deep layers of consciousness, with a state of free, unified consciousness to attain insight. Self-awareness does not mean completely independent from the world, from others, but can intelligently grasp knowledge and existing realities. (271)

Nobody wants to remain the same but simply waits for the situation that demands them to get into action. The situations force the people to step out of their comfort zone and allow them to work for either themselves or for others. The moments come in the forms of opportunities or setbacks. For Ed Kennedy, the moment comes in the form of challenges. The distinct difference which the researcher finds in the novel is the point of transformation in his life. The novel starts where Ed with his friends Marv, Ritchie and Audrey is caught in a bank robbery. He became the reason for the robber to get caught by the police which happened with his blind bravery followed by his luck. A threat the protagonist Ed receives from the bank robber turns his life upside

down. The first time a small fear comes out is when he recollects the threat personally at some point of time. From the moment he gets cards through the mail and Ed is a different person after he receives the cards.

Growth is affirmed when the transformation is in a positive and natural way. Ed Kennedy was a different person before the messages and he turns out to be a completely different version of his past after the messages. It is understood by observing Ed Kennedy closely, any achieved thing has two sides, a beginning and an end. Ed Kennedy also has two phases of life Now and Then which affirm the transformation. Before the messages arrived, Ed was an ordinary guy who did not have any direction to his life, self-image and social connection except his comfort zone. Ed Kennedy also witnesses his entire family is happy and all family members leading their own lives. He had no possible choices and chances to start life at that time. He was not guaranteed with his job and had no vision for the hopeful future. He had no goals but leisure time activity, gambling, as his escape. He was passive in his life not by taking any needed decisions that would benefit him as his younger brother. He avoided all positive sides of his youth and keeping himself busy as a vandal. He was discontented with his life as a loner and keeping himself busy by taking care of his aged dog Doorman. Except his Mom, who rarely visits him and his friends he has no places to be comforted with. These things solidly prove that he is a boy of miserable lifestyle and lives a very ordinary life. His faithless and ordinary life is the major reason he follows the messages and finds them interesting. He, in the process of helping people, understands that the messages are giving meaning to his life. It becomes possible for him because he believes in the little action that seems to be meaningful. Jiddu Krishnamurti's one of the lectures confirms:

Human beings are in despair, there is great sorrow in themselves, frustration, and there is chaos about one. The more you observe and go into it, not intellectually, not verbally, but actually discuss, observe, act, enquire, examine, the more you see how confused human beings are. They are lost. And those who think they are not lost because they belong to a particular group, circle, and feel the more you practice, the more you do certain things, the more you do social work, or this or that, the more they are sure that the world is going to be saved by their particular little actions. (Public Talk 6 Bombay)

The same Ed who becomes a different person after the messages. He finds the sense of purpose from the messages. He helps the woman who has been constantly raped by her husband by threatening him at 45 Edgar Street. He helps the old lady, Mila Johnson, who lost her husband sixty years back by pretending to be her husband at 17 Harrison Street. He helps a sixteen year old girl, Sophie, an athlete by removing her shyness at 6 Macedoni street from his first card Ace of Diamonds. He helps the church run by Thomas O' Reilly by bringing new followers, Helps Angie Carusso, a desperate single mother by proving she deserves more, and gets beaten by the bully Gavin Rose by making him listen to her mother's words. Only through the messages he gets to know about his mom's romantic interest; helps the needed people to celebrate Christmas. The messages only help him to notice the needs of his friends who have been with him so many years. The messages pave him ways to detect the family of his friend Marv and help the family to reunite again; to make Ritchie realize to go job and become a responsible person and importantly, to propose his lady love Audrey. At the end of the novel, he realizes that he is not just the messenger but the messages.

He gets the sense about his missions through which he gets his vision of life. His suffering to focus on his own life is changed and the same person, Ed becomes more focused on the lives of different people. He finds out his Self-Image through his confidence and the empowerment he attains through his missions. He develops his social connections and he deepens his relationships with others. He even realizes that he can be a force for good things that makes him extraordinary in the end.

His transformation in the novel *I am the Messenger* is a journey from passivity and low self-esteem to proactive engagement and self-discovery. Before receiving the messages, Ed is a symbol of ordinariness, drifting through life without direction. After the messages, he becomes an extraordinary individual discovering his capacity for empathy, bravery, and meaningful action. Life consists of two distinct spaces—the before and the after. But more than these two endpoints, true transformation happens in the process. It is in the struggle, the uncertainty, and the effort that real change takes place. The past is a memory, and the future is a vision, but the present, the journey itself is where growth unfolds. In the poem *If*, the poet says:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss, And lose, and start again at your beginnings And never breathe a word about your loss; If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew To serve your turn long after they are gone, And so hold on when there is nothing in you Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'. (Kipling) Humans evolve not simply by reaching an outcome but through the experiences, challenges, and realizations they encounter along the way. 'During' is where perspectives shift, strength is built, and identities are reshaped. To embrace transformation, one must engage fully in the process, allowing the discomfort, learning, and progress to shape them. The journey is not just a path to change but the journey is the change itself. Ed Kennedy confesses, And that's when I realize.

In a sweet, cruel, beautiful moment of clarity, I smile, watch a crack in the cement, and speak to Audrey and the sleeping Doorman. I tell them what I'm telling you:

I'm not the messenger at all.

I'm the message. (450)

The states 'Before' and 'After' help him to classify the two different personalities of himself. Before the messages, Ed was an absolute ordinary boy who turns into an extraordinary one after the messages. Remarkably, the state which is in between the two others 'before' and 'after' is 'during'. The true transformation

and evolution of the protagonist from the confusions and chaos to his clear and matured version happens only during the process.

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