"Pain, Death, and Nazis: The Surprisingly Beautiful Function Death Plays as Narrator in Markus Zusak's The Book Thief,"

Sarah K. Johnson

**Keywords**
The Book Thief, Markus Zusak, Death, Pain, Suffering

**Abstract**
Death, pain, illness, and war often feature heavily into the plots of Young Adult fiction, and Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief* is no exception. However, by presenting Death as the narrator of the novel, Zusak allows an outside, impartial view of humanity's pain, its causes, its effects, and its meanings. Through a close reading of *The Book Thief* this paper discovers that Death as a narrator reveals that pain is both unavoidable and necessary to life. Furthermore, though most everyone fears death, life, not death, causes the true pain. Through Death's haunting narration, pain confers eventual strength, endurance, and power. The sophisticated portrayal of universal pain through Death allows this paper to delve further into the intricacies of pain than one might be able to in other Young Adult novels.

**BYU ScholarsArchive Citation**
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studentpub/128

**Document Type**
Other

**Publication Date**
2015-03-11

**Permanent URL**
http://hdl.lib.byu.edu/1877/3348

**College**
Humanities

**Department**
English

**University Standing at Time of Publication**
Freshman
event of death, Zusak exposes unique and surprising truths about pain. Death reveals three truths about humanity’s anguish: pain exists universally; life, not death, causes this suffering; and agony ultimately brings strength. Death proves that pain is a universal and essential characteristic of humanity through the idea of leftover humans, the death of Liesel’s brother, Werner; the suffering of Liesel’s Jewish friend, Max; and Frau Ilsa Hermann’s pain.