

Haunted by humans: an analysis of death

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Prologue: introduction, description, insight. In Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, the prologue not only sets the stage for the novel, but it becomes a springboard for the dually entertaining narration that progresses the story. In it, we meet Death: the blunt and sarcastic commentator that guides a tale of words and thievery. We often associate Death as dark, scary, cruel, and merciless. However, Zusak portrays him in a different light.

Throughout the course of novel, the reader develops a sense of sympathy towards Death. He states, " I am in all truthfulness attempting to be cheerful about this whole topic, though most people find themselves hindered in believing me, no matter my protestations. Please, trust me. I most definitely can be cheerful. I can be amiable. Agreeable.

Affable. And that's only the As.". In this quotation, we catch a glimpse into the stereotyped portrayal of Death and the self-denying hell it puts him into. He did not want this murderous, hateful job, but rather, fate brought him to it, and he has been entrusted with it for centuries.

In this way, Death parallels Judas Iscariot from *Jesus Christ Superstar* who, did not under any circumstances want to fulfill his fated duties, but had to because it was entrusted unto him without moral recompense. Death reflects, "...considering the length of time I've been performing this job. The trouble is, who could ever replace me? Who could step in while I take a break in your stock-standard resort-style holiday destination, whether it be tropical or of the ski-trip variety?.. Needless to say, I holiday in increments." Death doesn't get to take sick days or save up vacation time, nor does he get any compensation for the work he does.

All he is given is the satisfaction of knowing that he is hated, mocked, and falsely associated with satanic beings – which really isn't much satisfaction at all. Aforementioned is the notion of self-denial. I believe Death faces this device on account of all of the erroneous interpretations that surround him. These false perceptions result in a flock of insecurities that, in turn, become Death's motivation for his cynical use of words. Sarcasm – not a scythe – is Death's favorite weapon. It's his go-to mechanism of defiance and entertainment during depressing times in the presence of the dead.

“...Of course, an introduction. A beginning. Where are my manners? I could introduce myself properly, but it's not really necessary. You will know me well enough and soon enough, depending on a diverse range of variables..

.” Apparent to the reader is Death's devout use of color. He uses the discussion of color in almost every description throughout the course of the novel and always identifies with it in times of grief. “ People observe the colours of a day only at its beginnings and ends, but to me it's quite clear that a day merges through a multitude of shades and intonations, with each passing moment. A single hour can consist of thousands of different colours.

Waxy yellows, cloud-spattered blues. Murky darknesses. In my line of work, I make it a point to notice them.” Death's graphic depiction marks a realization for the reader that even Death hates death. He uses color as a sense of distraction from the anguish around him.

Color is a means of escape – ever-changing, vibrant, relatable, but most importantly, perpetual. It is always present, lingering, awaiting him each day. Color brings out the vulnerable side of Death's character and becomes

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suddenly, briefly, relatable. The final notable aspect of Death is his arrogance. He comes across as cocky and quick-witted with his often snarky tone.

An example of this is his use of German words. Occasionally, he denies us the pleasure of a translation of these words, thus, lending a sense of detachment for the reader, almost a sardonic teasing by Death. He is also quite fond of bold-faced type. This seemingly random lettering only adds to the unsettling feeling that results from Death's bluntness. It slows the pace of the novel and often catches you off guard in a world where vagueness is often glorified.

It reminds you that Death is in control of the story, not the reader. " It suffices to say that at some point in time, I will be standing over you, as genially as possible. Your soul will be in my arms... I will carry you gently away. At that moment, you will be lying there (I rarely find people standing up). You will be caked in your own body. There might be a discovery; a scream will dribble down the air.

The only sound I'll hear after that will be my own breathing, and the sound of the smell, of my footsteps." Death knows that in the end, he will be the only one left waiting for you. He is the one that will carry your soul elsewhere. No mortal will be of assistance any longer. And thus, he is superior to such beings. Some may think this cockiness is due to the fact that he believes no one else could be as qualified as himself, however, I believe his reoccurring insecurities force him to adhere to this false facade.