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### Bringing Death to Life: The Personifications of Death in Zusak's The Book Thief, Moore's A Dirty Job and Pendle's Death: A Life

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(2018) ENGX54 20172

Division of English Studies

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#### Abstract

This essay examines the personifications of Death in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), Christopher Moore's *A Dirty Job* (2006) and George Pendle's *Death: A Life* (2008). The personifications are analysed in terms of gender, anthropomorphism, (im)mortality, agency in conceptual death and attitude towards their occupation as Death. The personifications are also compared to previous portrayals in relation to fear, denial and acceptance of death. The essay is based on a close reading of the three literary works, and it is argued that the authors give Death human characteristics, force Death to reflect on mortality, and disconnect personified Death from the responsibility of conceptual death in order to portray Death as a humane, likeable and... [\(More\)](#)



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2018

**type**

M2 - Bachelor Degree

**subject**[Languages and Literatures](#)**keywords**[personification](#), [death](#), [The Book Thief](#), [Zusak](#),  
[A Dirty Job](#), [Moore](#), [Death: A Life](#), [Pendle](#)**language**[English](#)**id**

8933851

**date added to LUP**

2018-02-20 11:29:58

**date last changed**

2018-02-20 11:29:58

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Death ends the story by telling us about Liesel Meminger's death, how she lived a long life in Sydney with her husband, three children, and many grandchildren. When Death goes to collect her, he sets her down so they can walk together for a while. He shows her *The Book Thief* and wants to ask her so many questions about humans. He cannot understand them, how they can contain so much lightness and darkness. He doesn't ask these things, though. INTRODUCTION Personifications of death frequently appear in children's and young adult's literature. These characters, in embodying the final event in a person's life, are powerful mediums for introducing young readers to challenging topics such as human nature, suffering, and death. I argue that Zusak uses the personification of death to confront young readers with the Real of mortality and the Holocaust. In confronting them with these experiences, *The Book Thief* upsets the nature of realities previously undisturbed by such detailed descriptions of mortality and the horrors of the Holocaust. Death personified does not symbolize the end of life, but a transition from one life into another. Death is our guide and narrator to *The Book Thief*. But don't go cowering under the covers on his account. For one thing, Death ain't the bad guy (that would be Hitler). For another, Death is in some ways pretty human—especially considering how inhumane a lot of the homo sapiens running around in *The Book Thief* are. For example, Death has real feelings. Now, check out what Markus Zusak himself has to say about his oh-so-humane version of Death: I guess there's a little bit of death in me, but it's probably true for everyone. I think I just applied the thought of how scared I am of death and reversed it. I thought, 'What if he or she or it is haunted by everything he sees humans do?' In that way, he's also like all of us, because we all have the same reactions to each other's behavior. Death: Here is a little information you should know: this book is filled with many interesting facts. Very relevant THE BOOK THIEF: A Summary. Liesel: Hi, I'm Liesel. I have no personality, but I'm a cute little girl. Death: Her name is not Liesel. Her name is THE BOOK THIEF and I shall name her that for the rest of the book. Liesel: Even though I stole, like, 3 books in total or something. Death: Shut up, Book Thief. They're not quite inseparable, but they definitely support each other. With *The Book Thief*, Markus Zusak has shown he's a writer of genius, an artist of words, a poet, a literary marvel. His writing is lyrical, haunting, poetic, profound. Death is rendered vividly, a lonely, haunted being who is drawn to children, who has had a lot of time to contemplate human nature and wonder at it.