Facing Death in The Book Thief: Confronting the Real of the Holocaust and Mortality

Author/Creator
Fincel, Abigail

Abstract
This paper examines the personification of Death in The Book Thief and its impact on young adult readers using Slavoj Žižek’s analysis of the Real and Hayden White’s discussion of how history and its representations in historical fiction shape the present. I argue that Death’s complexity as a character enables him to escort young adult readers from one understanding of reality into a deeper, more complex reality by forcing them to confront their mortality and the Holocaust. In confronting readers with these realities, The Book Thief, through the character of Death, shapes how young readers conceptualize mortality and the Holocaust.

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