

Sophia Weller

Mrs. Rutan

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Zusak makes Foster Look Like Less of a Jerk

Literature is about more than words on a page. It critiques, teaches, and expresses the author's feelings. The stories always have a deeper meaning and give insight on the world around the writer. While Thomas C. Foster tends to be bombastic in his book, How To Write Literature Like a Professor, he gives the reader theories on how to properly comprehend and analyze literature. Many of his ideas are proven true in Markus Zusak's The Book Thief, a World War II story about a young orphan girl, Liesel, living in Nazi Germany.

Zusak's main characters-- Leisel and Rudy-- discover a fallen airplane which helps prove Foster's theory of flight. Foster plainly states, "...flying is freedom...freedom not only from specific circumstances, but from those more general burdens that tie us down," (Foster, 127). Zusak proves this theory by taking the freedom away. A US plane crashes and Rudy, Liesel, and the rest of the crowd watch the pilot die. He was a slave to war, and was only released when death "...jostled [the man] free," (Zusak, 491) after the failed attempt of flight. Germany during World War II-- the time period of the book-- is very much controlled by the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler which causes Liesel to be

forced to frequently take cover in a bomb shelter with her community, wondering if she will survive the night. Zusak proves that flight symbolizes freedom by showing that failed and/or harmful flights symbolize freedom being taken away. Max, a fugitive Jew hidden by Liesel's family, is described as having "feathered hair" and in his book for Liesel depicts himself as a bird, yet he had almost no freedom. As stated in his book, "*The Standover Man*", "Now I live in a basement. Bad dreams still live in my sleep," (Zusak, 234). He lives in fear, hiding underground fighting death, which is the opposite of flight, and therefore lack of freedom. It's like Max is a caged bird in a room with a cat; the potential is there, but if he gets out, surely he'll be killed. By showing the absence of flight, Zusak proves Foster's idea that in literature, flight represents freedom.

Foster's theory on baptism suggests that when a character gets wet, it means he or she is going through a major change, "Symbolically, that's the same pattern we see in baptism: death and rebirth through the medium of water," (Foster, 155). A classic example to prove this theory correct is Liesel's first bath at her new home; it shows her leaving her old life and transitioning to the new. After the bath, she is ready to begin go on with her life-- her new life (Zusak, Part 1). Rudy saving Liesel's book is a key example of a character shift through baptism. Rudy found Liesel's treasured book in the river and, "soon, he peeled off his coat and jumped in, wading to the middle of the river," (Zusak, 302). It was this moment when Rudy shifted to a more victorious role, "after months of failure, this moment was his only chance to revel in victory," (Zusak, 303). Foster's theory can be proven true because both Liesel and Rudy are "reborn" after entering a body of water.

Communion is one of Foster's key theories, "...breaking bread together is an act of sharing peace, since if you're breaking bread you're not breaking hands," (Foster, 8). Throughout The Book Thief, Liesel rolls cigarettes for her Papa. While it isn't food, rolling cigarettes is, in fact, a form of communion. It was when she was rolling that she had the easiest time adjusting to her new home; she feels the most at peace, (Zusak, Part 1). When Papa is painting windows black, to make money and help those stay hidden from bombers, sometimes his clients couldn't pay. He would do the painting for "half the price of a cigarette," (page 355). Even though he could have fought for the money he deserved, he peacefully declined by "sharing peace". The most noticeable point of communion is when Rosa, Liesel's foster mom, promises Max, "You will be fed, as best I can," (Zusak, 207). Foster says, "The act of taking food into our bodies is so personal that we really only do it with people we're very comfortable with," (Foster, 8), so the fact that Rosa not only vows to feed Max, but also eat with him shows that she is accepting of him. Foster's theories on communion add deeper meaning to The Book Thief.

Finally, Foster points out the format of a "vampire" story: "...an older figure representing corrupt, outworn values; a young... a stripping away of [his or] her youth, energy, virtue...the death or destruction of the young [man or] woman," (Foster, 19). An obvious form of vampirism is the Hitler Youth leaders on their students, forcing them to shed their personalities and conform to the ways of the Nazis. It is clear Hitler Youth is "sucking the life" out of Rudy when, "...he'd been returning home from meetings in a considerably worse state than he'd left," (Zusak, 268). Hitler Youth manipulates the

participants to flow as one body for the Nazi Party (Zusak, 269-271) which is a way “...society...battens on and consumes its victims,” (Foster, 20). Hitler Youth, as a whole, benefits from the destruction of German children, which coincides with Foster’s theory on vampires.

Four of Foster’s theories are notably applicable in Zusak’s book. Baptism and communion are purposefully incorporated to demonstrate character development, mood, and to further expand upon situations. Flight, or the lack thereof, expresses the reality of danger and loss of freedom of Liesel and her peers. Foster’s ideas on vampire stories help to show how deadly-- literally and metaphorically-- the Nazis are. By digging deeper into Markus Zusak’s The Book Thief with theories from Thomas C. Foster’s How to Read Literature Like a Professor, the reader can understand the deeper meaning behind the book; violence is strong, but love and peace are stronger.