

# Writing, Rewriting, and Rewiring: Ideologies and Palimpsests in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*

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## Abstract

Focusing primarily on the various sociological perspectives presented in *The Book Thief* (2005) by Markus Zusak, my research analyzes the effectiveness of propaganda on a society in turmoil. In his novel, Zusak narrows the overwhelming scope of the depravity of the German nation during the reign of the Third Reich to focus more microcosmically on the way in which words may be stolen, contorted, nurtured, and bound together into the physical manifestations of opposing ideologies. I further explain how those artifacts of complicity and dissidence comprise the foundation of a society's collective sociocultural consciousness. In my presentation, I compare Zusak's fictional—though not inaccurate—perspectives to Eric A. Johnson's nonfictional accounts of what everyday life was like for the Jewish German population before and after the rise and fall of the Third Reich, collected in *What We Knew: Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany* (2005). In addition to analyzing the ideologies presented in *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler and connecting them to the events and anecdotes of those fictional and nonfictional accounts, I examine Michael H. Kater's *Hitler Youth* (2004) and his discussion of how these ideologies were inculcated in German children and adolescents. Importantly, Zusak's novel is written (ostensibly) for a young-adult readership, an age group represented in the world of the novel as the most ethically and psychologically vulnerable population under the Third Reich. My research investigates how *The Book Thief* actively reflects and interrogates the susceptibility of societies with preexisting systemic prejudice and socioeconomic divides to inflammatory rhetoric.

*Keywords:* Nazi Germany, Third Reich, palimpsest, propaganda, adolescence, literature