

*The Book Thief by Markus Zusak, Doubleday 2007.*

*This has to be one of the most original novels published so far this year, and it may well hold that accolade through till December!*

*The Book Thief is set in Nazi Germany and follows a familiar path as a German family gets enmeshed in the straitjacket of a totalitarian society that goes from being a victorious conqueror sweeping all before it to a defeated and pulverised pariah. In a rich cast of characters is the book thief herself, Liesel Meminger, her foster parents Rosa and Hans Huberman, and the citizens and neighbours of the town of Molching, close to Munich. There is also a significant Jewish character called Max Vandenburg, but to say more would be to give the plot away.*

*Markus Zusak has created a world of great power and pathos, and a series of characters about whom one really cares; much is conveyed through the economical use of language, and one of the stories within the story, that of the Word Shaker, is a little bit of genius.*

*Zusak's narrator is Death, and a surprisingly sympathetic narrator he is too, as well as being a very busy one.*

*This is one of those precious stories that you read and find hard to move on from—I hope above all that it is made into a film.*

*Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh*