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Exploring Strength and Resistance: Female Characters in Anthony Doerr's Novel 'All the Light We Cannot See'

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Abstract

This research paper examines strength and resistance in female characters in Anthony Doerr's 'All the Light We Cannot See'. This study reveals the themes of women's independence and perseverance as depicted in the novel through a feminist lens. It focuses on the lives of female characters such as Marie-Laure LeBlanc and Madame Manec, as well as their agency and ability to recover from misfortune in a patriarchal and violent world. This study examines the experiences of female characters such as Marie-Laure LeBlanc and Madame Manec in order to highlight the different ways in which women challenge gender norms and assert their power as they are portrayed in the book. It does this by analyzing their behaviors, relationships, and social roles. The study inspects how individuals behave, interact with others, and play social roles to show how they challenge gender stereotypes and demand agency in a patriarchal and war-torn society. Additionally, the study underscores the complex effects of war on women, demonstrating the fundamental ways in which hostilities upend their lives, shape their experiences, and put to the test their ability to persevere in the face of unfathomable adversity. The experiences of Marie-Laure and Madame Manec, among others, provide a poignant account of the effects of war on the women in the study, highlighting their fortitude, sacrifice, and suffering in the midst of chaos and

destruction.

Keywords: Anthony Doerr's *All The light We Can't See*", Strength and Resistance, Female Characters, Feminist theory.

1. Introduction

Women were portrayed in World War II in Anthony Doerr's novel "All the Light We Cannot See," and their role was rich and multifaceted. The novel does not explicitly focus on feminist issues, but it greatly highlights the independence, strength, and resilience of the female characters. By examining the characters of Marie-Laure and Madame Manec through a feminist lens, we can view their strength, their challenge to societal norms, and their contribution to shaping their destinies amid the turmoil of war. Miss Marie-Laure is a strong and central character who embodies courage and resilience despite her blindness. She challenges the restrictions imposed by her disability. Likewise, Madame Manek's participation in the resistance emphasizes women's active participation in important historical events, transcending traditional gender roles. Ultimately, *All the Light We Cannot See* celebrates the diverse roles and accomplishments of women during a turbulent period in history, challenges gender stereotypes, and showcases their remarkable contributions to the war effort.

2. Literature Review

In her thesis, "The Impact of World War II on Women's Labor Force Participation," Claudia Coldth examines how the war affected women's participation in the labour force and emphasises how it sparked social and economic change. Based on retroactive surveys conducted in 1944 and 1951, Coldth's research shows that although women's employment rose as a result of the war, its direct impact on raising women's incomes in 1950 was less significant than first thought. In spite of this, women's employment and labour market involvement remained relatively stable during the chaotic 1940s, suggesting that the war had a major indirect effect on women's employment [1].

The study by Claudia Goldin and Claudia Olivetti, "Reevaluating the Impact of World

War II on the Labor Supply of Married Women," focuses on married women in 1950 and 1960, reevaluating the impact of World War II on the labour supply of US women. Their study shows how the war affected women's participation in the labour force, especially married white women in the upper half of the educational spectrum. Even though the war was still having an impact on labour supply decisions by 1960, women who had not yet given birth were primarily affected by mobilisation rates in 1950. The study by Goldin and Olivetti advances our knowledge of the enduring consequences of World War II on women's employment [2].

J. Ann Tickner's article, "Redefining Feminist Agendas in Uncertain and Changing Social Contexts", it addresses feminist agendas in uncertain and changing social contexts. J. Ann Tickner's point of view highlights the broader societal implications of feminist movements and the pursuit of gender equality outside wartime contexts.

H. Monica examines Marie-Laure's experiences as a blind teenager in Anthony Doerr's novel *All the Light We Cannot See* in her examination of Marie-Laure's journey in *All the Light We Cannot See*. Herdianti examines Marie-Laure's traits and the five basic needs she struggles to meet during the conflict. Marie's journey, influenced by her father, great-uncle, and Madame Manec, exemplifies resilience and the human cap [3]. In general, the literature review synthesises a variety of sources and viewpoints about feminist agendas and women's experiences during World War II. It offers a solid basis for comprehending the research topic's larger context, which includes literary, social, and historical aspects.

3. Methodology

The research was centered on feminist literary viewpoints and women's involvement during World War II. Effects of the war on women were also covered in this study. This review helps assess Doerr's book within the context of a more scholarly debate by providing theoretical underpinnings and historical context. To analyze feminist themes and how women are portrayed in Anthony Doerr's novel "All the Light We Cannot

See” set in World War II, a qualitative analysis methodology was used in this study. Key quotes and passages relating to female figures such as Marie-Laure LeBlanc and Madame Manec have been found and examined through close reading and thematic analysis in order to illustrate their agency, resilience and representation in the context of war. Therefore, the main methodology used in this study is textual analysis, which entails a detailed study of this novel, its characters, and its themes [4].

A critical analysis method was used, In order to understand the implications of the characters’ experiences to evaluate and understand how women are portrayed in “All the Light We Cannot See” from a feminist perspective. It is important to look closely at the actions, motivations, and personal dynamics of the individuals within the novel while looking at the historical and social background of World War II.

This study involves the use of an interdisciplinary and a feminist approaches to examine the representation of women in the novel and its wider ramifications. It also integrates knowledge from a variety of disciplines, including literature, history, gender studies, and cultural studies.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of feminist themes that exist in “All the Light We Cannot See” by integrating perspectives from several fields.

4. Analysis of Female Characters

4.1 Marie-Laure LeBlanc

Marie-Laure’s portrayal as a bright, courageous, and curious young girl serves as a poignant illustration of resilience and feminist agency against the backdrop of war in Monica Herdianti’s research paper, “Marie-Laure’s Struggle as a Blind Teenager in Anthony Doerr’s ‘All the Light We Cannot See’” [4]. Herdianti’s research suggests that despite the obstacles posed by her blindness, Marie-Laure is driven forward by her unquenchable curiosity and her hunger for knowledge, which enable her to surpass conventional norms and prejudices about women and people with disabilities. As the research report explains, Daniel LeBlanc, Marie-Laure’s father, stimulates her mind from a young age by exposing her to tactile learning opportunities and the world of

Braille literature [5]. Through these encounters, Marie-Laure actively engages with her surroundings and aims to broaden her grasp of the world, showcasing her intelligence and asserting her autonomy.

Furthermore, as Herdianti's research makes clear, Marie-Laure's bravery becomes evident as she makes her way through the dangers of a France devastated by war [4]. Marie-Laure shows incredible bravery in supporting her great-uncle's covert resistance efforts against the Nazi occupation despite the continual fear of danger. Her readiness to take chances and oppose the oppressive powers of war is demonstrated by her participation in delivering secret codes concealed in loaves of bread to aid the resistance movement. Herdianti's analysis highlights Marie-Laure's curiosity as a motivating factor for her pursuit of information and comprehension, which pushes the boundaries of conventional norms and expectations regarding women's responsibilities in times of conflict. Despite the obstacles given by her infirmity and the chaos of war, her passion with snails and other creatures, as well as her natural curiosity, represent her desire to learn about and interact with the world around her.

Thus, Marie-Laure's role in "All the Light We Cannot See," as discussed in Monica Herdianti's research paper, exemplifies the bravery, tenacity, and curiosity of women in times of war and offers a powerful illustration of feminist agency in the face of hardship. Anthony Doerr offers a sophisticated examination of the nuances of female experience and agency in the setting of war through Marie-Laure's journey, as examined by Herdianti, highlighting the tenacious fortitude and perseverance of women in trying situations [6].

4.2 Madame Manec

In Anthony Doerr's book "All the Light We Cannot See," Madame Manec, a devoted and kind domestic worker, stands in for a powerful example of woman autonomy and resiliency against the backdrop of war. Madame Manec's persona serves as an example

of the resilience and agency of women in times of conflict within the framework of the concepts examined in “Unveiling Resilience: Women, Feminist Agency, and War.”

Madame Manec’s unwavering devotion to Marie-Laure and support of her throughout the story, together with her active assistance in resistance efforts against the Nazi occupation, highlight Marie-Laure’s agency and fortitude in negotiating the difficulties of war.

Madame Manec’s character reflects a sense of empowerment and commitment to support those in need and contribute to the resistance movement, despite the perils and sufferings suffered by women during the war [4]. Also, Madame Manec’s nurturing role in Marie-Laure’s life emphasises the value of female support systems and solidarity in promoting empowerment and resilience, especially in the face of hardship. In addition to offering Marie-Laure emotional support, her kindness and concern show how resilient female relationships can be when faced with the difficulties of war.

Furthermore, Madame Manec’s readiness to grant Marie-Laure’s wishes—like allowing her to visit the Saint-Malo beach—demonstrates her dedication to giving Marie-Laure agency and the freedom to follow her dreams in spite of social pressures and the limitations imposed by war. Madame Manec’s role in “All the Light We Cannot See” adds to the general themes of feminist agency, resilience, and women’s experiences throughout the war that are examined in “Unveiling Resilience.”

Anthony Doerr’s portrayal highlights the ongoing tenacity and agency of women in difficult circumstances while presenting a nuanced picture of feminine strength and empowerment.

4.3 Jutta Pfenning

As a symbol of tenacity and rebellion against oppressive powers, Jutta Pfenning appears in “All the Light We Cannot See,” representing the agency of women in times of struggle. Jutta exhibits unyielding independence and defies social standards despite the limitations of Nazi Germany’s patriarchal society, especially by encouraging her

brother Werner to follow his own path. Through Jutta's character, the book highlights the value of support networks and humanises the experiences of victims and survivors while criticising patriarchal structures that enable violence against women during times of war. Jutta's description emphasises the intersections of gender, power, and violence in larger political contexts, which helps to a deeper understanding of the intricacies of sexual assault during warfare and is consistent with feminist studies within the field of international relations.

5. Feminist Themes in the Narrative

Feminist themes run throughout Anthony Doerr's novel "All the Light We Cannot See," which challenges traditional gender norms and emphasizes the independence and resilience of female characters against the backdrop of war. Marie-Laure and Madame Manec are examples of strong female characters in the book who actively reject the German occupation of France by challenging social norms [4]. Their actions matter and highlight how important the role of the feminist movement is in combating injustice and promoting justice in times of crisis. In addition, Marie-Laure's love of reading and insatiable curiosity enable her to face the difficulties of war with courage and resilience, demonstrating the transformative potential of women's education demonstrating the transformative potential of women's education [5]. The story challenges social norms, promotes equal access to knowledge and learning opportunities, and celebrates women's empowerment through education by showcasing Marie-Laure's intellectual curiosity and will to learn despite her blindness.

All the Light We Cannot See reveals how the female characters enjoy deep bonds of sisterhood and solidarity with each other, supporting and comforting each other through the experiences of war. This representation highlights the perseverance and strength of female bonds, and highlights the value of sisterhood and solidarity in overcoming difficulties and building resilience and challenge in the face of persecution and war. Furthermore, the novel's heroines display fortitude, courage, and strength in the face of difficulties, refusing to let their gender or cultural norms define their identity. The

novel demonstrates women's resilience throughout the war, demonstrating their ability to overcome challenges and assert their agency in the struggle for freedom and justice.

Overall, *All the Light We Cannot See* presents a rich tapestry of feminist ideas, presenting women as strong, independent, and powerful people who question gender expectations, claim their authority, and courageously and tenaciously negotiate the difficulties of war [5].

The novel's heroines, by virtue of their actions and experiences, add up to a nuanced examination of feminism within the context of war, highlighting the transformative potential of women's agency, solidarity, and resilience in the face of hardship.

The novel's female protagonists, by virtue of their deeds and experiences, add to a nuanced examination of feminism within the framework of warfare, illuminating the transforming potential of women's agency, solidarity, and resilience in the face of hardship.

6. Impact of War on Women

All the Light We Cannot See brilliantly examines the complex ways in which war affects women, illustrating the fundamental ways in which hostilities upend their lives, shape their experiences, and put their ability to persevere in the face of untold adversity at their fingertips. The turmoil and carnage of war have a profound impact on female characters like Marie-Laure and Madame Manec, who suffer loss, displacement, and constant threats to their safety and well-being. For example, Marie-Laure's life changed completely when she and her father had to evacuate Paris to avoid advancing German forces and taking refuge in Saint-Malo. Fearlessly opposing the occupation, Madame Manec risks her life to avoid being imprisoned and subjected to torture by the Germans [2].

Beyond danger and displacement, women who experience war also suffer from emotional and psychological stress brought on by separation, loss, and the savagery of fighting. As Marie-Laure adjusts to her father's disappearance and faces the difficulties of being blind in the midst of the turmoil of war, she goes through a deep period of grief and loss [4]. Comparably, Madame Manec struggles with the anxiety and worry of

living under occupation while working for justice and freedom, exposing the emotional cost of resistance activities.

The female characters in the book exhibit incredible fortitude and strength in the face of hardship, refusing to let their situation define them or give up despite the enormous obstacles they must overcome. Marie-Laure creates deep connections with people like Etienne and Werner, who provide her support during the worst of the war, and she finds comfort and meaning in these interactions. Madame Manec is a living example of bravery and tenacity since she spearheads resistance movements, encourages others to take up the battle against injustice, and personifies resistance and fortitude in the face of insurmountable obstacles.

“All the Light We Cannot See” presents a moving depiction of the effects of war on women by emphasising their resiliency, sacrifices, and difficulties amid the chaos and devastation of combat through the experiences of female characters like Marie-Laure and Madame Manec.. Their experiences demonstrate the human ability for optimism, courage, and compassion in the face of unfathomable suffering, and they serve as potent reminders of the lasting strength and endurance of women during times of conflict.

7. Conclusion

In Anthony Doerr’s book “All the Light We Cannot See,” World War II is central to the study’s exploration of feminist perspectives. The study explored the themes of women’s strength and resilience in the book from a feminist perspective, looking at the lives of female characters such as Marie-Laure LeBlanc and Madame Manec. Their deeds dispel prejudices and show that women can actively shape their own futures even during times of crisis. The story challenges social norms, advocates for equal access to information and learning opportunities, and praises the empowerment of women via education.

Additionally, studies have demonstrated the complex effects of war on women, illustrating the significant ways in which hostilities upend their lives, mold their experiences, and put their ability to persevere in the face of unfathomable adversity to

the test. “All the Light We Cannot See” presents a moving depiction of the effects of war on women by emphasizing their resiliency, sacrifices, and difficulties amid the chaos and devastation of combat through the experiences of female characters like Marie-Laure and Madame Manec. In general, this study advances our knowledge of feminist themes and the effects of war on women in literature by illuminating the transformational potential of women’s agency, solidarity, and resilience in the face of hardship.

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