

Ecosophical Resilience: Unveiling Human-Nature Bonds in Anthony's Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the ecosophical themes in Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*, focusing on the interconnectedness between humans and nature amidst the chaos of World War II. It examines how war impacts both the environment and human relationships, drawing from Guattari's principles of ecosophy. The study also considers the resilience and hope depicted in the novel, showcasing how nature and human spirit endure even in times of great destruction.

Keywords: Ecosophy, Human-Nature Interconnectedness, War, Environmental Impact, Resilience, Hope

Introduction:

In the 1930s, Germany was controlled by the Nazi Party, a fascist group that believed in strict government control, military power, and the racial purity of Germans. Led by Adolf Hitler, the Nazis blamed the Jews for Germany's social and economic problems. Hitler declared himself "Führer" and took full control of the government.

In September 1939, Hitler started a war to conquer Europe and expanded German territory. His armies quickly dominated Poland, France, Italy, Russia, and the United Kingdom. However, by 1945, American bombers had destroyed Germany's key military bases in Europe, leading to Germany's surrender in May 1945. World War II deeply affects the lives of Werner and Marie-Laure, the main characters in the novel *All the Light We Cannot See*.

Theoretical Framework:

Definition: Ecosophy or Eco-philosophy is a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. The Term was coined by the French post-structuralist, Philosopher, Psychoanalyst Felix Guattari.

Ecosophy also refers to a field of practice introduced by psychoanalyst, post-structuralist philosopher. This ecological framework understands the interconnections of social and environmental spheres.

According to Levesque, the term "*Ecosophy*" combines the Greek words 'Oikos' (household) and 'Sophia' (wisdom). Unlike the traditional sense of household, in ecosophy, 'oikos' refers to the entire Earth, the environment we all share" (45). Ecosophy emphasizes the deep connection between humans and nature, exploring how we understand and interact with our environment in modern time.

The paper also explores Guattari's principles of ecosophy and their impact on philosophical thought. The philosophical journey is divided into two parts: Mental Ecosophy and Social Ecosophy. The researcher connects these aspects of ecosophy with the main characters in *All the Light We Cannot See*.

War and Environmental Impact:

The novel poignantly captures the devastation of war on both human lives and the environment. The bombings, particularly in Saint-Malo, not only obliterate buildings and infrastructure but also scar the natural landscape. This destruction underscores the broader ecological ramifications of human conflicts. Nature and human are inter-connected during war time which is more common as that of depression, suicide, homicide, violence, racism and degradation. The brutality of war is a driving force that shapes the fates of the individuals and corrupts people into betraying their principles. Marie Laurie, Werner and Daniel Deblanc all had hopes and dreams for their lives. They were the innocent bystanders who got caught up in the tide of a huge and violent war.

According to Guattari, *"The human beings is accelerated because of the technical scientific mutations which distances the human beings from the personal, social and environmental relationships"* (23).

Werner Pfennig, a German orphan with a talent for radios, represents the technological advancement of the time. His journey through the war showcases the conflict between human innovation and the destruction it can cause. His fascination with radios symbolizes both the wonders and perils of technology, reflecting a tension between human progress and ecological balance.

Mental Ecosophy:

As Smith says, *"We need to develop practices that promote new ways of living, where mental health, social relations, and environmental preservation are integrated."* (45)

This quote highlights the importance of a holistic approach that integrates mental health, environmental awareness, and social well-being a concept referred to as "mental ecosophy." Mental ecosophy seeks to create a balance that nurtures human existence by helping individuals maintain healthy relationships with themselves, society, and the environment, even in the face of challenging social events.

The characters of Uncle Etienne, Marie-Laure, and Frederick exemplify this search for mental ecosophy. Uncle Etienne, traumatized by his father's death in World War I, is described as being "76% crazy." His trauma leads him to withdraw from personal and emotional connections with others, causing him to spend 20 years confined to his home. However, when Marie-Laure enters his life, a transformation occurs. He begins to stop retreating into his imagination and instead engages with the world around him. Through this change, he develops a conscientious mind, allowing him to think and reflect in ways he had previously been unable to.

During the war, people were often cut off from their connection with nature. However, after Daniel LeBlanc went missing, Marie-Laure and Madame Manec visited the seashore. This visit symbolizes the deep connection between humans and nature, offering comfort and relief to the young, anxious Marie-Laure in a time of great distress.

The ocean.....The Ocean ! Right in front of her! So close all this time. It sucks and booms and splashes and rumbles; It shifts and dilates and falls over itself; the labyrinth of Saint-Malo has opened onto a portal of sound Larger than anything she has experienced. (231)

The significance of nature is highlighted through the character of Frederick, who finds solace and inspiration in its beauty. Frederick, a supportive friend of Werner, is known for his deep appreciation of nature. Despite enduring numerous struggles and pains during his training, Werner ultimately discovers profound truths about life. His experiences lead him to encourage Frederick to pursue his studies in science and ornithology, underscoring the enduring value of their friendship and their shared connection with the natural world.

“Do you ever wish,” whispers Werner, “that you didn’t have to go back?”

Father needs me to be at Schulpforta. Mother too. It doesn’t matter what I want”

Of course it matters. I want to be an Engineer and you want to study birds. Be like that American Painter in the swamps. Why else do any of this if not to become who we want to be?” (223)

Jane states, *"The interdependence between mental well-being and environmental health underscores the need for a holistic approach that recognizes the mutual influence of these domains. Only by integrating these aspects can we hope to foster sustainable communities and resilient individuals."* (133).

Despite the widespread destruction, there are moments in the novel that highlight nature's resilience. The sea, birds, and gardens continue to exist, offering a glimmer of hope and continuity amidst chaos. This resilience can be seen as a metaphor for the enduring spirit of humanity and the possibility of regeneration.

War and Social Impact:

The novel portrays the impact of the German occupation on French towns like Saint-Malo. The fear, suspicion, and resistance efforts illustrate how war disrupts the fabric of everyday life, leading to a breakdown of trust and security within communities.

The destruction of Saint-Malo during the war can be compared to the miniature model created by Daniel LeBlanc. The real Saint-Malo experienced significant social impact due to the war, with the city suffering extensive damage. Many lives were lost, and people faced severe shortages of food, water, and shelter. Amidst this devastation, Marie-Laure, the young girl, attempts to cope by drinking large amounts of water to avoid hunger, illustrating her struggle to endure the hardships of war.

The cadets from the Nazi military unit lack humanity, significantly affecting both nature and society. In the chapter "Entropy," the text reveals the cadets' brutal behavior towards others. They kill a man who stole bread out of hunger, leaving his body to be desecrated by rats, insects, and worms, showing their complete disregard for human life.

The war also highlights the disparity between the rich and the poor. For instance, the character Claude lives a privileged lifestyle far removed from the struggles of ordinary people. While common folk face severe shortages and hardships, Claude enjoys ample meat, nutritious food, butter, and electricity. In contrast, those on the fringes suffer from mass deaths, contaminated food, and severe mental and physical stress.

Social Ecosophy:

According to Guattari, *"It is a question of forging new analytical practices and new collective arrangements that generate processes of singularization, in order to combat the standardizing and homogenizing effects of mass culture."*(58). This quote reflects Guattari's belief that social ecosophy involves resisting the homogenizing forces of mass culture by fostering diversity and individuality within social structures, which in turn nurtures a healthier relationship between society and the environment.

Social Ecosophy is a concept that combines ecological thinking with social philosophy to address the interconnectedness of environmental and social issues. It emphasizes the need to understand and address the complex relationships between human societies and the natural environment, advocating for a holistic approach to sustainability and well-being.

The novel emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms. The characters lives are intertwined with each other and with the natural world, suggesting a shared responsibility to protect and cherish the environment. This interconnectedness is a core principle of ecological philosophy.

The relationship between Marie-Laure and Werner, though brief, emphasizes the shared humanity that transcends national borders and conflicts. Their connection in the midst of war challenges the idea of absolute good and evil, showing that individuals on both sides of the conflict are often victims of circumstances beyond their control. Even-though, they are culturally and socially different from each other, both the characters were empathetic towards interconnections between human beings and nature.

Social Ecosophy : Hope and Resilience

Madame Manec and her friends, who run a bakery, hold great hope for the future despite the war. The novel reveals a secret revolution led by these women, who embed coded messages and clues in ordinary loaves of bread. Each day, Marie-Laure receives a loaf with hidden codes from them. She then gives the bread to Uncle Etienne, who decodes the messages using a secret transmitter at his home. These acts of resistance and cooperation illustrate the hope and resilience of the women involved.

Marie-Laure's blindness forces her to navigate the world in darkness, but she does not let this define or limit her. She develops an acute sense of her surroundings, guided by the miniatures of Paris her father builds and the books she reads in Braille. Her resilience is seen in her determination to live as independently as possible, even under the most difficult circumstances. *"The girl sits with her back against the stone, a low ocean sighing beneath the rock, and tries to calm the disorder inside her head."* (350). During the bombing of Saint-Malo, Marie-Laure is trapped and alone in her great-uncle's house, yet she remains calm and composed. Her ability to maintain her composure and think critically about her next steps is a testament to her resilience.

"He says to himself: You have been saved." (492). Werner clings to his love of science and radios as a beacon of hope, believing that they can offer him a way out of the coal mines and a chance at a better life. This hope drives him, even as he is pulled deeper into the war machine. *"Open your eyes and see what you can with them before they close forever."* (510). As Werner becomes increasingly aware of the moral complexities and horrors of the war, he struggles to hold onto his humanity. His decision to help Marie-Laure, despite the risks to himself, reflects his deep-seated hope for redemption and a better world.

"Radio: it ties a million ears to a single mouth." (310). The radio is a significant symbol of hope in the novel. It represents the ability to connect, educate, and inspire people across vast distances, even in times of war. Werner's fascination with radio, and Marie-Laure's use of it during the siege, show how this technology becomes a lifeline, offering hope and the possibility of rescue.

"This...is in your heart. This is something all your own." (502). Marie-Laure's reading of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* over the radio during the siege is an act of defiance and hope. It reaches Werner, providing him with the strength to continue and ultimately leading him to her.

A COMPARITIVE APPROACH

The Researcher compares Liesel from "**Book Thief**" to Marie-Laure in "**All the Lights we cannot see**". Both characters experience profound loss. Liesel loses her brother early in the story and is later separated from her biological mother. She also faces the constant threat of losing her foster parents. Marie-Laure, on the other hand, loses her eyesight at a young age and is later separated from her father, who is her primary caregiver. Despite these losses, both girls demonstrate remarkable resilience. Liesel finds solace in books and words, while Marie-Laure relies on her knowledge of her surroundings, books and radio.

Conclusion:

All the Light We Cannot See is interpreted through an ecosophical lens as a profound meditation on the interconnectedness of humans and nature, the dual-edged nature of technological progress, and the enduring hope and resilience that persist even in the darkest of times.

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