

ENGLISH – ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE ESSAY

'All the Light We Cannot See demonstrates that no one has control over their own life.' Discuss.

In his intricate and thought provoking historical narrative *All The Light We Cannot See*, author Anthony Doerr explores the degree to which the protagonists have control over their lives. While characters can be objectified by the society around them to the point where they believe they lack control over their lives, belief that one controls their life stems from innate strength as well as a loving upbringing.

Doerr employs Frederick to demonstrate how societal pressure can leave an individual at the mercy of fate. At Schulpforta, Frederick objects their brutal treatment of the prisoner by passively defying his superiors and saying he "will not" abuse the prisoner. However, due to the compromised morals characteristic of a society in the midst of a war as large scale as World War 2, he is brutally savaged for his morality and defiance, leaving him with little more than his brain's "basic functions." Despite all this though, Frederick glumly says to Werner that his biggest issue is that he still believes he "owns [his] life." Doerr demonstrates the nexus between societal pressure and control, in that Frederick, despite seemingly being the master of his own downfall, still believes he has no control over his life, therefore alluding to the effects of a society rife with injustice that belittles one's actions in order to maintain the status quo. This view is cemented when Madame Manec tells the parable of the frog in boiling water, in which "the frog cooks," therefore exemplifying Doerr's view that an individual only has as much control as the society around them permits. Thus, Doerr utilises Frederick to depict the effects of a flawed society on an individual's ability to control their own life.

Doerr utilises Werner to show that innate strength is greater than societal pressure, and thus he is able to grasp control over his fate. Initially, Werner "pretended there was no choices" and as a result, he believes his work at Schulpforta is "pure math," in order to follow his dreams and become an engineer. This blind acceptance, like the treatment of Frederick, was characteristic of the historical context, in that that Werner's scientific curiosity was exploited in order to further the war efforts of Nazi Germany. However, the false nature of Werner's control is revealed to him upon the shooting of the little girl by Neumann Two, reigniting his once present morality and reinstating the control over his actions. This is exemplified when his conscience implores him to "do something," in order to save Marie-Laure. Therefore, Doerr explores how an individual with innate strength can overcome the influence of a flawed society when exposed to inhumanity. This is also foreshadowed when Frederick's mother says that "the Schwartzenberger crone will be gone...[and] then we'll have the top floor." This also ignites Werner's humanistic side, as he realises that the comfort, luxury, and pride of this moment, and by extension the war, come on the backs of others who are being harmed. Thus, Doerr uses Werner to show how innate strength can overcome societal pressure when individuals are exposed to inhumane acts, thus allowing individuals to regain control over their lives.

Doerr uses Marie-Laure to show how an empowering upbringing can facilitate one's control over their ultimate destiny.

His support is first evident when Marie-Laure loses her sight and yet, he tries "to stay optimistic," and trains her to "guide herself without the need of sight." In painting their relationship like this, Doerr shows Daniel's devotion to his daughter, hence implying the presence of a seemingly unbreakable bond between father and daughter, and thus suggesting that Marie-Laure has been raised in a loving environment, and hence that there have been fewer external influences to deprave Marie-Laure. Furthermore, Marie-Laure's love of marine science is used by Doerr to allude to how her upbringing has led to her desire

for stability and consistency in her life in a time of inherent chaos. This is particularly evident in the symbol of the whelk, to which Marie-Laure gains an admiration for due to its ability to withstand predators and remain attached to rocks, all the while maintaining its beauty. Doerr uses this to demonstrate how Marie-Laure's upbringing has allowed her to withstand the propaganda and influence of a corrupted society, thus allowing her to exude the rare sense of control she has over her life. All of this amounts to a nonchalance in Marie-Laure that is characteristic of an individual who has acute control over the life, whether they acknowledge it or not. This nonchalance is epitomised when she says that what she has done "is not bravery," and that all she does is "wake up and live [her] life." Thus, Doerr demonstrates how a loving upbringing can foster one's control over their life, even if it be born out of oblivion.

Overall, Doerr contends that if characters are at the mercy of society, they are also left to the mercy of fate. However, this can be overcome through innate strength as well as an empowering upbringing. Thus, Doerr alludes to the notion that individuals only have as much control over their life as they believe, regardless if this level of control is accurate or not.