

Ariana Rubio (10L Latymer Upper School) review of 'All the Light We Cannot See':

Anthony Doerr's 'All the Light We Cannot See' is a technically flawless masterpiece. The novel employs the use of a variety of effective literary devices in order to convey the protagonists' struggles during the Second World War. Undoubtedly a worthy candidate of the awards, it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction; its lasting popularity is a tribute to its captivating style and intricately complex plot: which encompasses both the brutality of the Holocaust and the delicacy of human emotion.

The title is, arguably, a masterpiece in itself. The subtle iambic metre incorporated hints at Doerr's poetic style, and obviously alludes to the hidden side, that which is not visible at first glance.

There is a rich range of characters in the novel, and the two protagonists are particularly interesting to analyse. Marie-Laure LeBlanc is the daughter of a museum locksmith, living in Nazi occupied France. Marie-Laure is blind from the age of six, yet can sense ever her father's 'hands flutter between his pockets'. The juxtaposition of her complete inability to see and her capacity to discern her surroundings, especially in regards to emotions, is the most obvious embodiment of the title. She can see the undercurrent of emotions that lurks beneath any situation, and can sense the coming of World War Two. The second protagonist, Werner Pfennig, is a young German orphan with an aptitude for science. He repairs a radio, and his fascination of the invisible radio-waves' ability to transmit information again links to the title. Doerr gives the boy humanity, and you sympathise with him as he joins the military. Werner has 'a shock of white hair' which is very Aryan, and he seems like the ideal Nazi: clever- he excels at his elite school and aspires to become a scientist- and Aryan. But, some may automatically assume that everyone who joins the Nazi's is utterly inhumane, Doerr allows us to see the process, and that Werner isn't to blame, again illustrating that not all is at it seems.

Werner and Marie-Laure are two sides of a coin: she helped broadcast Allied intelligence, he joined the Nazi's, her compassionate father is reflected in his moral sister, and she is blind literally, he figuratively. For Werner, he can see the visible light, but not the emotions that Marie-Laure can sense, and thus they represent the two types of light.

Another important theme in the book is the significance of the seemingly insignificant. Once again, you have to look carefully to find this. For example, Daniel LeBlanc painstakingly creates an exact replica of their vicinity for his blind daughter, in order for her to be able to go out alone. The third person narrator notes that it is perfectly accurate, except for the lack of the crowds of people. While seemingly innocuous, the model foreshadows reality- people soon start to flee France, and the town is nothing more than a ruin in rubble, completely empty. Like so many things, the model has a double meaning. The meticulous attempt to predict everything for

Marie-Laure represent humanity's attempts to calculate and predict everything, a recurring theme in the novel. For example, Werner thought he had 'figured out' everything after studying physics, but it was not so. His school-friend, Frederick, remarks that 'your problem is that you still believe you own your life.' This can apply to the millions of people who were coerced by Hitler, and let's us see that it is not their fault.

Set during World War Two, it was always going to be a tragic book. The abruptness of Werner's death demonstrates the brutality of war, he never gets to become a scientist, he never marries Marie-Laure, and those dreams that never see the dawn of day are what make the novel so heartbreakingly human.

When writing about Marie-Laure, Doerr utilises a distinct number of complex literary devices, such as anaphora. The striking prose mimics the girl's view of the world, every noise and every knock sticking firmly in her memory. Whilst writing about Werner, Doerr employs the use of short, static sentences that echo the technology of radio that he is so fascinated by. The novel is divided into very short chapters, which make for a compelling narrative, the prose so enriched by literary devices that its alive with imagery. The short phrase 'all light is invisible' can be interpreted to mean that nothing you see is as it seems, and everything must be looked for in order to truly see it, which is perhaps the most important theme of the book.

The diamond, oxymoronically named 'Sea of Flames', represents war. Von Rumpel ceaselessly searches for it, convinced it will cure his cancer- and ultimately drives him to murder and to his own death. It also represents the waste, and futility, of the war, so much effort was wasted in attempting to get the jewel, and was it worth it? After all, it is just 'a random piece of carbon'. Von Rumpel dies in his pursuits of it, yet Werner leaves it in favour of the box and the key- to preserve and honour his memory of Marie-Laure, subtly insinuating the worthlessness of it. Alternatively, the diamond serves as a symbol of beauty, coexisting in the world of war. This juxtaposition is reflected by the contrast of the red centre in the deep blue diamond.

To conclude, Doerr tells the story caught in the crossfire of the tragedy of war, using a multitude of literary devices to effectively illustrate his points- most of which have hidden meanings. The brilliant title encourages the reader to read between the lines and see the hidden messages, only a fraction of which I have touched upon here. Doerr somehow manages to merge the utter inhumanity of war with the intensely personal stories of two teenagers into a meaningful novel of magnificent proportions.

magnificently long and gripping story

extraordinary ability