

Childhood in all the
light we cannot see: a
defining moment



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The chain of dependency is innate within human society. As children develop, their attitudes and behaviors are modeled after their parents. This mutual growth has sustained the relationship between a child and his or her parent. In *All the Light We Cannot See* (hereinafter referred to as “the Novel”), the influence of having and lacking parents is evident in the lives of Marie-Laure LeBlanc and Werner Pfennig, respectively. Despite the absence of Werner’s biological parents, the fundamental needs for love and care are upheld by the caregiver of the orphanage, Frau Elena. As proposed by David Suzuki in “Hidden Lessons” (hereinafter referred to as “the Essay”), the natural bond between a child and his or her parent surpasses the integrated relationship between society and its environment. As demonstrated in the Novel, the role of a parent is not bounded by blood; rather, the relationship is nurtured through time and substantive interactions. This bond is evidently present in the development of modern adolescents. Despite the independence that children acquire through age, the Novel and the Essay emphasize on the lasting effects that children experience through the relationship with their parents.

In the Essay, Suzuki stresses the importance of behaving cautiously in front of children. Unconsciously, children are constantly modeling after “the unspoken, negative lessons [that parents] are conveying” (Suzuki 129). Similarly, Werner has prioritized his the importance of his own career due to the disappearance of his father. Through the fear of experiencing the same fate as his father, Werner is desperate to avoid the coal mines. This demonstrates that parental influence can be conveyed through direct and indirect interactions. It should be emphasized that the influence of his father

persists beyond his physical presence. Partially, the relationship has been shaped by a reactionary progression. That is, the relationship develops based on how each party reacts to the other. Unfortunately, this issue is neglected in the Essay due to its emphasis on parental influence over mutual influence. Since Suzuki is targeting specifically young children and their parents, the Essay is not considerate of the independence that older children gain. Through the development of independence, their thoughts become more personal. Likewise, Werner may have grown up without his biological parents, but his limited experience with them creates a foundation for his mindset. As he becomes more independent, Werner adapts according to his relationship with his father rather than abandoning his past. The adaptive characteristic of a parent-child relationship has allowed for a mutual yet independent development for both parties.

Although Werner had lost his biological parents, the role has been fulfilled by Frau Elena after being sent to an orphanage. Throughout Werner's life, he has always been inspired by the words of Frau Elena. Despite the lack of consanguinity, her influence on Werner is substantial. While Suzuki addresses mainly parents, he starts the Essay with the recognition of "a world [that is] conceived, shaped, and dominated by people" (Suzuki 127). This statement implies that human societies are driven through the interactions between individuals. Therefore, the group dynamic of humanity has given substantive qualities to every relationship that each individual partakes in. Due to the unique characteristics of these relationships, it is appropriate to consider Frau Elena to be a parent to Werner, because guardians and foster parents can adequately fulfill the fundamental role that

a parent serves. As a matter of fact, Werner recognizes that Frau Elena is “as close to a mother as he will ever have” (Doerr 86). The emotional dependency that Werner feels is similar to the innate dependency that a child would feel with his or her biological parent. Ultimately, these physical and emotional dependencies create the influential effects that parents and guardians pertain.

Due to the immense influence that parents have, Suzuki reminds his readers to think conscientiously and act accordingly. In the Essay, there is an overt emphasis on being prudent and aware of the future consequences of their actions. However, the parents from the Novel seldom reflect on their actions. Marie-Laure’s father, Daniel, reflects on his choices only before his departure from her. In retrospect, there is always “a fear that he is no good as a father” (Doerr 188). Since it can be difficult to envision the errors of one’s actions, people are often deterred from acting beyond intuition. As Suzuki explains, the generational continuation of ignorance has threatened the environment and the potential survival of humanity. That is, the ideas of one generation can be easily passed onto the next if parents do not reflect on the merit of their own decisions. Due to conformity, the parent-child relationship for one family can be influenced by mainstream society. As demonstrated in the Novel, Daniel may be able to question his actions in retrospect, but there is still an uncertainty from the existing circumstances. Due to the war and his duty in protecting the Sea of Flames, Daniel is forced to abandon his duty of caring for Marie-Laure over the duty of his job. Nevertheless, Daniel still acknowledges his responsibility in protecting Marie-Laure by entrusting it to Etienne, her great-uncle. Similarly, this duty of care is promoted in the Essay

as a means of reminding parents that environmental pollution “ has violated their home” (Suzuki 129). By making environmental issues more personal, Suzuki is able to convey his arguments to his readers. One of the main concerns about climate change is the sustainability of future generations. Although it is difficult for parents to consistently be prudent of their actions, the underlying principle of protection has guided the decision-making in a parent-child relationship.

However, the principle of protection has conflicted with the many aspirations of each party. This is evident in the relationship between Werner and Frau Elena. While they want the best for each other, they still want to fulfill their personal dreams and commitments. The difference is that Frau Elena wishes to continue caring for Werner, yet he wishes to continue his studies.

Interestingly, Werner’s aspirations have been strongly motivated by Frau Elena’s encouragement. In fact, Suzuki suggests that the natural aspirations of children can be completely altered through parental involvement.

Although “ all scientists were fascinated with nature as children,” many of them are changed by the “ hidden lessons” that parents give (Suzuki 128 - 129). Likewise, the disappearance of Werner’s father has also influenced his aspirations. Rather than inspiring Werner, his father indirectly warns him of what to avoid. Due to the mutual yet independent characteristic of the parent-child relationship, each party has his or her own interpretation of the relationship and how to contribute to it. While Werner’s father is no longer with him, Werner still interprets his view of reality through the memories of their past relationship. Due to a mutual influence on each other, personal aspirations merge into common goals and vice versa. Although Frau Elena

was reluctant to let Werner leave, it is ultimately agreed that it is the most beneficial toward Werner's future. Again, the principle of protection gives priority to the long-term happiness of the child. The process of compromise has shaped the aspirations of each party while maintaining satisfaction between them. By finally acknowledging Werner as being self-sufficient, Frau Elena accepts that she has fulfilled her duty of care for Werner. Effectively, the adaptation of personal aspirations helps settle the relationship to a state of mutual happiness.

However, mutual happiness is not eternal, and when there is a loss thereof, a desire for status quo is created. Since Marie-Laure and Daniel were happy with their life in Paris, they are shocked by the fact that they are fleeing from it. During their time in Paris, Marie-Laure “presume[s] she would live with her father in Paris for the rest of her life”; thus, she does not aspire for anything more (Doerr 72). It is until they fled Paris that they aspire for a status quo in their life. This suggests that mutual happiness allows for personal happiness, and if removed, their personal aspirations become a demand for nostalgia. To the child, the relationship outlines an ideal standard of life. When Werner lost his father, he tries to convince himself that eventually his “father might come shuffling out of the elevators” (Doerr 86). Mainly, Werner is trying to help his sister, Jutta, accept that the unfortunate had happened. Both Werner and Jutta have trouble with accepting a reality without their biological family. Likewise, Marie-Laure is in despair from the disappearance of Daniel. In both situations, the loss of a parent has a negative effect on the child. However, an important stage of the parent-child relationship is accepting the reality of death. Although death is

part of the cycle, it does not signify any loss in the value of the relationship nor the amount of influence that it has had on the child. Instead, these obstacles evoke each party to appreciate and to long for the pleasant memories from their relationship.

While Suzuki emphasizes on the negative influence of parental involvement, the Novel highlights the encouraging and inspirational influence that parents provide. As a matter of fact, Suzuki acknowledges that the “ efforts to teach children to love and respect other life forms are priceless” (Suzuki 129). That is, negative behaviors can only be avoided and corrected through positive parental involvement. There is little doubt about the impact that parenting can have, but there is a strong debate about which parenting style is the most effective. Terms such as “ helicopter” and “ free-range” parenting are used to classify the level of parental involvement. Helicopter parenting is described as being over-protective; while, free-range parenting is described as being neglectful (Sauriol). Arguably, Marie-Laure is raised by an helicopter parent and Werner is raised by a free-range parent. According to Suzuki, it is not about the level of parental involvement; instead, it is the implications that are conveyed to the child. As stated by Sauriol, balance is the most important part in parenting. While Daniel is a protective father, Marie-Laure is more confident and independent than what is suggested by stereotypical media. Naturally, the question of parenting style is based on compromise between the child and his or her parent. In terms of Marie-Laure, it is natural for Daniel to be concerned due to her blindness. Likewise, Marie-Laure accepts and appreciates the level of care that is provided to her. In accordance to the principle of protection, all forms of parenting are in the

best interest of the child. The question lies on whether the parent has an healthy interpretation of what is beneficial for the child.

Nevertheless, most modern families maintain a nurturing and pleasant parent-child relationship. In fact, modern adolescents are delaying their departure from the parental home. It implies that they have a stronger attachment and dependency than preceding generations. According to the 2011 Census of Population, 42.3% of those who are aged 20 to 29 remain or return to the parental home. In comparison, the statistics from 1991 and 1981 were 32.1% and 26.9%, respectively. This trend in modern society provides a mutual benefit to the parent and the child. That is, the child gains from the emotional and financial support that are provided by the parent; while, the parent gains from the contributions that are made to the household (Milan and Bohnert). Similar to the attitude of Marie-Laure, modern adolescents are more willing to live with their parents. It does not necessarily mean that modern adolescents are any less independent; rather, they are becoming more defined by their parent-child relationship.

Since parents are the primary agent of socialization, moral principles are learned from childhood through family interactions. During Werner's moral dilemmas, he imagines " his mother and father ... watching him through the rattling window to see what he would do" (Doerr 251). The implication is that personal morals are ultimately a manifestation of parental ideals. When Werner was attending the National Political Institute of Education, his personal morals persist despite the teachings from the school. This justifies the willingness to stay in the parental home, because children are already accustomed to the family in which they grew up in. Although parents may <https://assignbuster.com/childhood-in-all-the-light-we-cannot-see-a-defining-moment/>

conform to society, children are primarily influenced by their parents instead of the society in general.

Throughout the lives of children, experience shapes the various aspects of their personalities. As warned by Suzuki, parental involvement may unconsciously tarnish the natural progression of their growth. However, the parent-child relationship is an essential part of every child's life. Doerr effectively exhibits that the fundamental element of love is innate within humanity as the parent-child relationship transcends consanguinity. In modern society, the natural bond within families are ever growing as adolescents delay their transition into full independence. While children will grow to be discreet individuals, their personalities shall be a manifestation of the qualities that are modeled from the substantive interactions with their parents. As the issue of child development lies in the hands of parents, every moment is crucial to the potential of the future generations.

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