

ENGLISH: COMPARISON OF TEXTS

Contradictions of Being Revealed in Through Schindler's List and All the Light we Cannot See.

All humans have an innate fascination with puzzles, problems and paradoxes. This obsession is first realised during our childhood where we grapple with jigsaws and fiddle with word games. As we grow, this tinkering becomes more methodical as we contend with equations and ponder scientific hypothesis. Unlike previous puzzles, the final development is unsolvable, like a jigsaw missing a piece. These puzzles come in the form of paradoxes, contradictions and complexities. Rather than being conveyed through a simple sentence, equation or phrase, these deeper problems are expressed through art. Texts such as *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr and *Schindler's list* by Steven Spielberg are the medium in which the final and most complex problems are delivered. Just as jigsaws teach us to problem solve and word games teach us to spell, paradoxes deepen our understanding of what it means to be human. The contradiction that humans strive to be logical however inevitably succumb to acting on their emotions is faced by all humans and reflected through the actions of LeBlanc and Schindler in their respective texts. The paradox that humans will create the illusion of agency despite any control over their lives is similarly reflected through the actions of Schindler and Werner.

It is the task of art to reveal the universal contradiction that humans strive to be reasonable however fall to irrational emotional impulses. This contradiction is especially evident in the book *All the Light We Cannot See* in which the character Daniel LeBlanc is divided between acting upon his emotions and strong desire to be reasonable. LeBlanc is established as logical man through his dialogue with his daughter: "Use logic. Which way should we go first?". The use of the short sentence emphasises the importance of logic to LeBlanc. The question to Marie reinforces this importance as he sees fit to teach it to his daughter. When confronted with problems of his own LeBlanc separates his emotions from decisions: "Walk the paths of logic. Every outcome has its cause, and every predicament has its solution. Every lock its key". Short sentences emphasise the triad of complementary terms which affirms LeBlanc's consistent and logical approach to all situations. Doerr exposes the contradictions of being as LeBlanc capitulates to his emotions during the chapter "Bath": "He feels ragged.". This short sentence creates a sense of significance in moment and draws attention to the adjective "ragged" which is felt as result of LeBlanc's attempt to resist his emotions. LeBlanc feels "logic has been failing him" as his logical tests disprove his emotional instinct. The personification of logic is ironic and also indicative of how his use of logic was based on an emotional decision all along. By revealing that even the most logical character will eventually surrender to their emotion, Doerr reveals that the contradiction in making emotional decisions rather than reasonable ones is truly universal.

Despite the differences in text type, the contradiction between reason and emotion in human actions is also reflected in the film *Schindler's list*. In this film, Oscar Schindler prides himself on his consistent and unemotional logic, however, ultimately succumbs to his subliminal urge to act on his emotions. A pivotal moment in this change is when he chooses to employ a lady's elderly parents despite their uselessness as factory workers. Schindler is initially positioned in the shadows as he rejects the plea of the lady, during this time, there is no soundtrack playing. These techniques infer a lack of emotion. After the encounter, Schindler visits his accountant, Stern. His office is well lit, foreshadowing a change in Schindler's choice. In addition, the soundtrack of classical guitar begins, slowly building up as emotion begins to shape Schindler's decisions. This music comes to a crescendo as Schindler sacrifices his watch as payment for the dismissal of the elderly couple from the ghetto. The watch is a metaphor of the mechanical and unbiased logic associated with time. By sacrificing the watch Schindler trades a part of his logic for emotion, which grows stronger as

the film progresses. During the scene in which Schindler and his assistant compose the list of Jewish workers to employ and subsequently save, the culmination of subdued emotion comes to the forefront of Schindler's character. The focus and determination of Schindler's more emotional self is reflected in the motif of extreme close up shots on the freshly printed names on Schindler's list. The repetition of this shot reflects how emotionally engaged Schindler has become despite his previously uncaring character. Through the medium of film Spielberg displays the contradictions of being in the evolution of Schindler's character's decisions. However, unlike other texts, this change is seen from a positive perspective, displaying the discrepancies between contradictions themselves.

Art reveals the contradiction that humans create the illusion of free will, even when presented with a loss of control over their lives. In the text *All the Light we Cannot See* the character Werner immerses himself in the illusion of free will after an unfortunate early childhood. Werner's illusion is established during a conversation with his sister about the future. The use of high modality personal pronouns such as "I'll", "you" and "me" as he plans his future creates a sense of confidence and inevitability, revealing the depth of his illusion. In combination with this, the conjunction "or" used when discussing options for Werner's future indicates that they believe they have a choice. This misconception is disproven later in Werner's life, after his request to leave school is denied: "I can make you whatever I want to make you... We serve the Reich,". The repetition of the professor's active first-person voice in the dialogue between him and Werner clearly conveys the lack of choice Werner has in his own life. Despite this, Werner continues to believe he has free will: "it was Werner who pretended there were no choices". The use of the verb "pretended", reveals that Werner believed all along that his decisions were his own, even if they clearly were not. In revealing Werner's flaws, Doerr proves the value of art in its ability to expose contradictions present in our lives as well.

The paradox that humans will create an illusion of choice despite the lack thereof is a universal contradiction explored across text types. In the film *Schindler's list*, this contradiction is explored through Schindler's rise to achieve wealth, power and influence. In this rise, Schindler is very dependent upon other individuals, resulting in the creation of the illusion of agency despite the real power and influence being held by others. This notion is evident during a business meeting between Schindler and his investors. Schindler truly believes he is in control, as represented through low angle shots from the investors looking up at Schindler, using car seats as a framing device. The seats are representative of Schindler's perspective as he chose the meeting's location, while the low angle shots imply that Schindler is in a position of power. After a brief cut, the framing device switches from the seat to the car window, indicating a change of perspective. This perspective reveals a different camera angle in which Schindler's accountant is in the foreground, representing his control over Schindler from an outsider's perspective. This theme is further explored in the final scene of the film, where Schindler collapses at the feet of Stern. Here, Schindler unknowingly positions himself in a way that is reflective of his dependence on his accountant and lack of true power. The cinematic techniques used by Spielberg subtly allude to the illusion of agency created by Schindler and express the significance of art in its ability to do this.

Insight into the complexities and contradictions in human life are invaluable in a modern world, where philosophy and psychology are often overlooked. The wisdom received through texts can better inform our decisions and allows us to better understand our relationships, which in turn makes us improved and more rounded individuals. By understanding that emotion will always conquer reason, we can avoid confrontations before they happen. Art provokes us to indulge in each moment as it happens despite not always be in control, regardless of illusion of free will. Until human societies can properly understand contradictions created by our uniquely human flaws, art will have a central place entertaining, educating and enlightening lives of so many.