

War, Nature and Resilience: Eco-Critical Poetics of Selected Texts by Anthony Doerr

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Abstract

All the Light We Cannot See (2014) and *The Shell Collector Short Stories* (2011) by Anthony Doerr depict each gender's eco-consciousness about their environmental interaction. This paper argues that Anthony Doerr expresses his spiritual ecofeminist philosophy through his writings and portrays his women as more interconnected with nature than men. His female characters are involved in deeds of nurture and subsiding of war and show a better tendency to conserve nature. Their interconnectedness with nature results in nature favouring their well-being and survival. The male characters are portrayed as perpetrators of environmental injustice and eco-crisis; hence, nature does not favour the well-being of male characters. This paper discusses the novel *The Selected Texts* by Anthony Doerr in light of the spiritual ecofeminist theory by Starhawk. It employs Blue Criticism, Critical Animal Studies, Green Criticism, environmental injustice and eco-crisis as sub-theories to deconstruct the impact of each gender on its surroundings. The text is deconstructed to demonstrate that the text has irreconcilably contradictory meanings rather than a unified, logical whole. In Anthony Doerr's ecological realm, women are much closer to nature than men. Therefore, through literary works, Anthony Doerr reveals that the resilience and survival of women in the literary texts is a metaphor for the strength of Mother Earth.

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INTRODUCTION

Anthony Doerr's *The Shell Collector Short Stories* (2011) and the novel *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) portray women closer to nature compared to men. The women in the short stories and the book deeply long for nature and the natural world around them. They are involved in conserving their environment, forming a vital and profound relationship with the sea, animals, and their natural world. They find themselves to be active participants in subsiding the war. In the selected texts, not only are women portrayed closer to nature, but nature is also portrayed closer to women. Nature seems to favour the well-being and survival of women. On the other hand, men in Anthony Doerr's environmental realm are portrayed as having an ignorant and careless attitude towards their natural world. Where women are portrayed as having a nurturing and conserving tendency, men are associated with technology, weapons, bloodshed, killing and war. Therefore, nature does not favour their well-being and survival. Anthony Doerr adopts a spiritual ecofeminist stance in his selected works. Spiritual ecofeminism finds its roots in the works of authors such as Starhawk, also known as Miriam Simos. The neo-pagan philosophy of spiritual ecofeminism brings together spirituality, feminism and politics. As Zein and Setiawan (2017) explained, spiritual ecofeminism refers to worshipping Gaia, the Goddess of nature and spirituality known as Mother Earth. Wicca and neo-Paganism are influential areas of interest in spiritual ecofeminism (p. 4). It contends that women are much closer to nature than men, so only they can save the planet. In alignment with the theoretical framework proposed by Starhawk, Doerr, in his literary works *The Shell Collector Short Stories* (2002) and *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014), portrays his female protagonists much closer to nature compared to men. His women's actions are intertwined with their tendency to nurture, and nature, in turn,

nurtures these women and nourishes them to develop an unmatched resilience.

This research aims to use Saussure's idea of a signifier having multiple meanings and Derrida's idea that builds upon the idea of Saussure and states that any signified may point to several different signifieds (Dobie, 2012, p. 160). The research uses the methodology of deconstruction since the deconstructive analysis of the text allows new meanings to be found within the text. Hence, this research puts forward the idea that the texts of *The Shell Collector Short Stories* (2002) and *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) by Anthony Doerr, upon deconstruction, reveal new meaning in the text.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Shell Collector: Stories (2002) and *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) by Anthony Doerr are two of the most popular works of contemporary literature. Since their publication, various aspects of the books have been studied from various perspectives. Cindy Bella Difia (2019) discusses Doerr's novel and writes that women, during the harsh and tumultuous times of World War II, developed compassionate and friendly relationships with each other to support one another during the war to resist war and face the time of war (Difia, 2019). Through the character of the blind girl who can survive till she gets old, the female characters are depicted as powerful and strong in the novel (Herdianti, 2020). The character of Marie-Laure is strengthened by her father through his contribution to enhancing his daughter's learning abilities and focusing on how to make life more convenient for her. By exposing her to the wood miniature, her father helps to sharpen her memory and her analysing skills and develops her skills to quickly learn the space she occupies

despite her blindness (Anghel, p. 292). The characters of Marie-Laure and Etienne make significant contributions and play major roles when the resistance movement takes place. All the tasks finished and accomplished by the old ladies contribute significantly to ending the war (Rachmawati, 2019, p. 22). The characters of Marie-Laure and Werner Pfennig are shown as opposites. In the beginning, Werner is a curious boy who is very interested in technology, but during the war, he goes on to fight something he detests, which results in his death. On the contrary, Marie-Laure is a fearful, blind girl who, by the end of the novel, emerges a victor and a survivor (Bilova, 2016, p. 44). Upon a closer reading of the text of the novel, it is revealed to the reader that “beyond an eye-and-mind” reading, it requires the reader to activate his sense of “touch” (Goh, 2019, p.247). In the short story “Caretaker” (2002), the reader learns that in Anthony Doerr’s world, nature has the power to heal. Similarly, the photographic image of nature can have an effect as well. In “Mkondo” (2002), Naima feels alive again upon her interaction with the artistic portrayal of nature (Lin, 2022, pp. 298-299). In the short story “The Hunter’s Wife” (2002), nature holds great importance since it explores the relationship the hunter has with nature. He sees nature as a powerful force that cannot cheat and that cannot be cheated (Lin & Cicek, 2020, p. 454). Although many have been conducted many researches over the years on the selected texts, the studies which look at the text of *The Shell Collector Short Stories (2002)* and *All the Light We Cannot See (2014)* by Anthony Doerr through the lens of spiritual ecofeminist literary theory are almost non-existent. This research is aimed at correlating the survival of female characters with their interconnectedness with nature.

DISCUSSION

Animals, Sea and Environment: Females' Relationship with Nature and Resilience in Anthony Doerr's Works

There is a sharp contrast between how the male characters and the female characters interact with the natural world around them in Anthony Doerr's works. The female characters are fearless around nature in the face of disaster, whereas the male characters are fearful, sceptical, and agitated in the natural world. Doerr highlights the resilience and survival of the female characters to portray a similar quality of resilience in Mother Earth.

Women's Relationship with and Through Water

In the short story "The Shell Collector" (Doerr, 2011), the imagery is embedded with the shell collector's love for the sea world. The short story is the tale of an old, blind man who collects shells and snails in Africa. He lives in isolation and his world of seclusion comes shattering down when he cures two females, Nancy and Seema, with the venom of a cone. The short is analysed critically by using the work of Sidney I. Dobrin, who uses the term "blue criticism" to expand the eco-critical lens and to "include the matters of the ocean" (Dobrin, 2021, p. 8). Dobrin writes in her book *Blue Ecocriticism and the Oceanic Imperative (2021)* regarding the water body acting and behaving in Magaret Cohen's *The Novel and the Sea (2010)* as if it holds free-will of an individual, "Second, the ocean is cast as a force against which protagonists often struggle. Ocean, in these narratives, is cast as an antagonist" (Dobrin, 2021, n.d). However, in the short story, the sea becomes a friend to the female characters, aiding their well-being and survival. The female characters of Doerr are more interconnected with the marine world, particularly the marine objects, and the sea world seems to favour their wellness and survival. The shell collector heals Nancy with the venom of the cone (p.18).

On the other hand, the shell collector is fearful and sceptical. He is not a stern believer in the healing power of the cone (p.19). Analysing through the lens of blue criticism, the sea in Doerr's dystopia acts as a living individual and makes its own decisions. The marine objects extend their helping hand to aid women in need, but not the men. Drawing upon Dobrin's view of the ocean as a force, against which men must persevere, the ocean is recognised as an individual capable of acting against man. In Anthony Doerr's marine tale, the deeds of favour and hostility carried out by the sea become more patent. In line with Doerr's spiritual ecofeminist philosophy, the sea aids women's well-being and survival, but it has a contrary impact on men in the short story, perpetuating Doerr's eco-philosophy. The resilience and survival of Nancy and Seema not only reflect the spiritual ecofeminist ideology of Anthony Doerr but also correlate the well-being, survival, and resilience of the female characters with qualities similar to Mother Earth.

"A Tangle by the Rapid River" (Doerr, 2011) is another marine tale where the blue, flowing river leaves Mulligan baffled. The marine world, in Doerr's world, favours the woman. The tale of infidelity also narrates the story of power. Mulligan tells his wife he goes fishing when he actually goes to see some other woman. He uses fishing as an excuse and it is fishing that leaves him in a state of bewilderment. Full of anger over Mulligan's adulterous deeds, the fish shakes Mulligan's world of lies and infidelity. It seems that the river is alive and aware of Mulligan's extramarital affair, and it takes it into its hands to avenge Mulligan's wife. Drawing upon blue criticism and Dobrin's (2021) idea to analyse the matters of the ocean, Doerr's blue world is alive. Like an individual holding emotions, it favours and takes sides, supports and acts like a companion, and sometimes it gets angry and lashes out. Dobrin writes regarding Stefan Helmreich's stance on the ocean, "We

witness a resurgence of an apocalyptic notion that the oceans will not wash away our sins but rather drown us in them” (quoted. in Dobrin, 2021, n.d). Much in line with Helmerich’s idea of the ocean being a conscious entity that is capable of drowning men in their sins, Mulligan of “A Tangle by the Rapid River” (Doerr, 2011) faces the wrath of marine life. It favours Mulligan’s wife, the woman and threatens Mulligan.

Similarly, Dorotea of “So Many Chances” (Doerr, 2011) finds her strength in the sea, and the sea, like a true friend and companion, provides her with emotional support. The sea changes her from a fearful little girl into a fearless individual ready to face life’s challenges. The story’s portrayal of the blue world further strengthens Doerr’s spiritual ecofeminist stance. Dorotea experiences a transformation through her interaction with the sea, highlighting the connection Dorotea forms with the sea. Dobrin (2021), in her work on blue criticism in *Blue Ecocriticism and the Oceanic Imperative*, explains regarding the portrayal of the ocean in the literature of the twentieth century that Margaret Cohen’s novel *The Novel and the Sea* (2010) depicts the ocean as a force of nature against which man must persevere (quoted in Dobrin, 2021, n.d). Dobrin points out that the ocean, like an individual, possesses consciousness and decides to act as an antagonist in the literary texts. In the short story, the water body becomes a friend to Dorotea, the female protagonist. The sea and Dorotea form a harmonious relationship with one another. Their harmonious relationship is based on companionship through adversity and mutual understanding. Such a portrayal of the sea world by Doerr as a woman’s well-wisher and friend further strengthens the spiritual ecofeminist ideology of the author. Dorotea, Doerr’s protagonist, is close to nature, and she feels that she is a part of the ocean.

The plot of the short stories “The Shell Collector” (Doerr, 2011), “A Tangle by the Rapid River (Doerr, 2011), and “So Many Chances” (Doerr, 2011) hints towards Anthony Doerr’s spiritual ecofeminist philosophy. Laila Fariha Zein writes in her article “General Overview of Ecofeminism” regarding spiritual ecofeminism that “Starhawk calls this an earth-based spirituality, which recognises that the Earth is alive, that we are interconnected, as well as a community” (Zein, 2017, p.4). The author Zein goes on to describe that spiritual ecofeminism “celebrates the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centred on goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system” (Zein, 2017, p.4). Doerr, in his literary works, appreciates and celebrates the nurturing and harmonious relationship women hold with the natural world around them.

Women’s Relationship with Animals

“The Hunter’s Wife” (2011) discusses the influence of animals on the hunter’s wife, Mary Roberts. She is a compassionate woman whose touch nourishes and nurtures life. Her empathy for the dead bird is described by Doerr in the following lines of the story: “Oh, wow,” she moaned. “I can *feel* her.” (p.50). Mary finds herself so close and occupied with the animals around her that even the verses and poetry express her sentiments of affection for the natural world. She writes, “*Snail: sledges down stones in the rain./Owl: fixes his eyes on hare*” (p.59). Kenneth Shapiro (2020) discusses the influence of animals upon humans in his article “Human-Animal Studies: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, Troubling the Future”. Shapiro contends that Human-Animal Studies (HAS) is aimed at studying the presence and influence of animals as a way of looking at the world around us. Its objective is to study how animals figure in our understanding and

the influence they hold on us and the world around us. Shapiro goes on to discuss that “[A]nimal ‘mind,’ or the meaning of animal behaviour, is not hidden somewhere inside the animal but is co-constructed relationally in interspecies interaction” (Shapiro, 2020, n.d). In human-animal interaction, the meaning of animal behaviour is co-constructed, which implies that the meaning an individual attaches to animal behaviour heavily depends on his/her own understanding of the world around him. Since Mary Roberts extends a compassionate and nurturing hand towards animals, she forms a harmonious relationship with the animals around her. Mary Robert’s relationship with the animals is depicted as harmonious. The support and compassion Mary extends towards animals build a nurturing relationship between her and the animals. The female protagonist’s interaction with the animals around her also builds upon the spiritual ecofeminist philosophy of Doerr. Spiritual ecofeminism commends the feminine qualities of empathy, nurture, and emotional intelligence, which are the defining and inherent qualities of Mary Robert’s character. These characteristics enable her to develop feminine wisdom and critical insight into the interconnectedness of humans and life and the natural world around them. The compassion of animals and environmental stewardship of Mary Roberts facilitates her liberation and qualities of wisdom, strength and resilience. Such attributes in the female character of the short story are reflective of Anthony Doerr’s perspective on women. He asserts that the attributes of resilience, perseverance, nurture and instinctual prowess in women are perfectly harmonised with similar attributes in Mother Earth.

In “Mkondo” (2002), Doerr portrays women in a similar light. The female protagonist, Naima, finds her interaction with nature liberating. Being in an urban environment after her marriage to Ward, she feels suffocated and decides to bring nature home to

herself. Since Naima associates freedom, liberty, contentment and happiness with animals, she looks for ways to keep them in her house, close to her (Doerr, 2011, p.198). As Kenneth Shapiro writes in his article “Human-Animal Studies: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, Troubling the Future” (2020), “there is no residual consciousness” (n.d). Shapiro puts forward the contention that in human-animal interaction, the only meaning that is embedded in an animal’s behaviour is not inside the animal but is co-constructed through the human-animal interaction. In Naima’s case, her interaction with animals co-constructs the meaning of the animal’s behaviour. Since Naima finds joy in her interaction with animals, the meaning of the interaction is co-constructed through this interaction. Through the character of Naima, Anthony Doerr comments on women’s ability to save the environment, which aligns with Starhawk’s work on spiritual ecofeminism. Kenneth Shapiro’s contention in his article “Human-Animal Studies: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, Troubling the Future” (2020)” states that there is no residual consciousness and the meaning of animal behaviour is not hidden somewhere inside the animal but is co-constructed relationally in interspecies interaction, Naima’s interaction with animals is significant and consequential. Anthony Doerr stays consistent in his pattern of story writing, aligning with his spiritual ecofeminist philosophy, and noticeably associates Naima’s quality of nurturing animal life in her surroundings with the nurturing potential of Mother Earth.

In his short stories, Anthony Doerr takes up the role of an anthrozoologist to portray to the world the impactful relationship humans hold with animals. Drawing on Shapiro’s idea of the impact animals have on us and the world around us, Mary Roberts and Naima Ward become epitomes of a portrayal of the mystical yet vitalising relationship humans have with animals.

Women as the Epitome of Nurture and Resilience

“For a Long Time, This Was Griselda’s Story” (2011) is the story of a mother and two sisters. When Griselda flees away from her house, abandoning her mother and sister with the metal eater, the mother drowns in despair. Griselda’s younger sister, Rosemary, sacrifices her life to become a caretaker to cater for the situation. Rosemary gives up her childhood and takes the role of nurturer at a young age. Her consistent struggle through harsh circumstances turns her pain into power. She compares her pain to eating metal, “You think eating metal is any harder than what I do, than what each of you do?” (p.113). She considers her own resilience superior to metal-eating. Rosemary’s resilience is described by Doerr: “her hair trembling on her head like flames...quaking-an image of power and fury” (p.113). She resists and conquers. She is a woman of utmost resilience and bravery.

In his short story “Caretaker” (Doerr, 2011), Doerr again portrays his female characters as nurturers who are close to nature. The short story begins with a description of Joseph’s mother’s kind and nurturing nature. She likes gardening and holds a certain pride in her ability to grow a beautiful garden. She stands resilient in this time and encourages her son to stand strong. Doerr’s female character remains fearless, as narrated by Doerr, “We must persevere.” (p.131). Doerr portrays her resilience and bravery as superior to that of Joseph, her son. She continues to support him by nurturing and nourishing him, qualities inherent in Doerr’s women. Ann B. Dobie writes in her book *Theory Into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (2012) regarding each gender’s interaction with the environment. According to Dobie, Green Criticism deals with contemporary ecological issues by exploring the links between gender and landscape. Interestingly, in his literary

pieces of *The Shell Collector Short Stories* (Doerr, 2011), Doerr dives deep into the subject of how both genders interact with the natural world or the environment around them. Green Criticism delves into questions such as “What are the links between gender and landscape?” (Dobie, 2012, p.246). Joseph’s mother is close to nature; she has a garden, and Doerr portrays her as being full of resilience and strength. There are several other instances in the short story where Doerr employs his female characters to carry out the deeds that nurture life. The ones who try to save the whale’s life are his women. During the difficult times, he remembers how his mother nurtured her garden.

Another female character, Belle, is a woman who nurtures those around her and keeps her ground. When Joseph finds her, Belle is in a state of despair. Joseph saves her life, for which she is grateful to him, and she expresses her gratitude by providing him with food. Belle not only tries to become a nurturing figure for Joseph, but she extends her nurturing hand towards plants in Joseph’s garden as well. Later, as if Belle’s touch enhances the life of plants, Joseph’s garden blooms: “The garden explodes into life” (p.161). The women, Joseph’s mother and Belle, are shown as women of valour, strength, and resilience. Their actions echo in the mind of the reader forever as actions of utmost bravery. Drawing upon Ann B. Dobie’s explanation of Green Cultural Studies in her book *Theory Into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (2012), the realisation hits the reader that in Anthony Doerr’s dystopia, the female characters' interaction with their environment is different than that of men. They are resilient women who survive and overcome the traumatic experiences of hard times. It seems that their interconnectedness with nature results in nature favouring these women’s well-being and survival. Their resilience and nurturing tendencies metaphorically debate that Mother Earth

possesses similar qualities of unmatched strength, resilience and nurture.

Anthony Doerr shares the same spiritual ecofeminist philosophy in his Pulitzer winner *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014). The women in the novel are incredibly resilient, nurture those around them, adapt to chaotic surroundings, and have marvellous survival instincts. The story begins with the description of The Sea of Flames. The stone granting immortality in Marie-Laure's palm foreshadows Marie-Laure's resilience and survival. Frau Elena is another character in the novel whose nurturing tendencies and motherly affection are matchless. She is a woman devoted to nurturing, and in an orphanage, she extends motherly warmth to motherless children. Doerr's portrayal of women in the light of kindness and compassion towards those around them continues to preserve his spiritual ecofeminist philosophy.

Marie-Laure's character is the epitome of resilience. She is struck with utter despair when the illness of blindness strikes her at a young age. Even though Marie-Laure is struck with the life-straining illness at a young and tender age, she overcomes, learns and adapts. Soon enough, she can manage her own life, and she walks around with little support from her father. However, the times of despair come again with the commencement of war. Marie-Laure is perplexed and baffled by what is happening around her. However, in a moment of utter chaos and devastation, she tries to bring herself some calmness on her own. Marie-Laure's traumatic circumstances become the tale of her strength, recovery and resilience when she learns to soothe herself and decides to save her life despite death chasing her. Consistent in his pattern, Doerr yet again portrays his female protagonist, Marie-Laure LeBlanc, as a woman of resilience.

Another female character, Madame Manec, continues to nourish and nurture. She helps Marie-Laure and becomes her caretaker in her hour of need. Madame Manec extends motherly warmth toward Marie-Laure, and her kindness does not escape Marie-Laure's vision. Marie-Laure welcomes the motherly presence with open arms, and Madame Manec becomes an important nurturing and guiding force in her life. As long as Marie-Laure stays in Saint-Malo, Madame Manec's treatment of Marie-Laure stays consistent. Madame Manec, along with other women in the novel, plays a vital role in helping the war subside. The female characters stay resilient. Madame Manec's uplifting words still echo in Marie-Laure's ears after years of enduring trauma. When her father, Daniel LeBlanc, is nowhere to be found, Madame Manec encourages her to be hopeful, "*You must never stop believing*" (p.493). Contrary to the male character Etienne, Madame Manec only instils hope in Marie-Laure. Madame Manec, a compassionate and resilient woman, becomes a source of hope and belief for Marie-Laure. However, the traumatic experiences Marie-Laure undergoes leave her shattered. It takes her years to teach herself to live with the hollowness. All in all, she manages to survive. Her resilience is described by Doerr in the following lines: "She lives to see the century turn. She lives still" (p.527). Anthony Doerr commends women's strength and resilience through Marie-Laure's character.

Anthony Doerr portrays women as playing an active role in subsiding war and, hence, becoming figures that conserve the environment. Interestingly, Anthony Doerr's take on contemporary environmental issues aligns with the questions explored by Eco-Criticism or Green Criticism. Green Criticism deals with questions such as how each gender interacts with their environment (Dobie, 2012, p.246). Looking through a gendered lens, it seems that Doerr considers women much closer to nature and carrying out tasks that

subside the war and nurture life. His perspective and philosophy regarding resilient and nurturing qualities do not remain nuanced since he blatantly shares his ecophilosophy through his selected literary works. The literary theory of Green Criticism also asks the question, “Is landscape a metaphor?” (Dobie, 2012, p.246). The ecophilosophy of Anthony Doerr in his novel *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) stays aligned with his spiritual ecofeminist perspective in his short stories collection *The Shell Collector Short Stories* (2011). The feminine qualities of resilience and nurture in the female characters serve as a metaphor for the resilience and nurture of Mother Earth. Mother Earth, the ever-nurturing presence, allows nature to bond with women and grant them similar qualities.

By portraying his female characters as more interconnected with nature, the author takes up the role of a spiritual ecofeminist. Starhawk’s spiritual ecofeminist philosophy is better understood through her verse: “She is alive in you as you in her/Warm your human hands at the watchfire/See the stains on the cloak/Feel the wounds too deep for healing” (quoted in Sarrgison, 2001, p.58). Interestingly, Starhawk’s spiritual ecofeminist philosophy aligns perfectly with Doerr’s depiction of women in his fictional world. “She is alive in you as you in her” refers to the communion between earth and the woman, which is a similar ideology perpetuated by Doerr. The lines “See the stains on the cloak/Feel the wounds too deep for healing” refer to the traumatic experiences women endure. It further encourages the women to celebrate those experiences while they go on to conserve the natural world around them. Their interconnectedness with human, animal, and plant life is vitalising. Mystically, they also gain their feminine strength and resilience through such an interaction. The natural world aids their survival. Doerr’s school of thought connects such life-giving attributes of womanhood as symbolism for the qualities of Mother Earth.

Through such a depiction of women, Doerr correlates feminine valour and nurture with qualities similar to Mother Earth.

Men, on the other hand, play an opposite role. They play an active role in bloodshed, murder and killing and they are more associated with weapons and technology. Since they are the active participants in war and play their role in environmental injustice, contrary to the role of women, and hence, nature does not favor their well-being and survival. Anthony Doerr's men are fearful creatures full of cowardice. An explanation follows.

Men as Perpetrators of Environmental Injustice in Anthony Doerr's Works

In the selected works by Anthony Doerr, the male characters are fearful, sceptical, and agitated in the natural world. His men are associated with technology, weapons, war, fear and terror. Doerr's idea of men as perpetrators of environmental injustice can be explained by drawing upon the theory of environmental injustice explained by Nicole Kirbert. Kirbert, in her article "Green Justice: A Holistic Approach to Environmental Injustice", writes that environmental injustice has a direct link with the unjust treatment of and disproportionate burden placed on the weaker members of society, such as women, minorities and the poor (Kirbert, 2001, p.172). The portrayal of men in Anthony Doerr's dystopia as individuals who cause significant harm to their environment and the natural world reveals that the author considers men as perpetrators of environmental injustice. In the selected works, the male characters' ignorant and careless use of weapons perpetuates eco-crisis. They are disengaged from their natural world. Their disregard and mistreatment of their environment perpetuate environmental injustice. For this reason, nature does not facilitate their well-being and survival. The author's contrary depiction of

women in his selected works reflects his spiritual ecofeminist ideology.

Men in Relation with Water

In the short story, *The Shell Collector* (Doerr, 2011), the shell collector is fearful and sceptical. He expresses an utter disbelief in the healing power of nature contrary to Nancy's ideas. He refuses to offer treatment twice since he does not believe that nature would offer the same luck to Seema. In the short story, the venom of the cone cures Nancy and Seema. However, men's sceptical nature leads them towards death, and the venom of the cone does not cure them. Josh, the shell collector's son, dies when he is bitten by a cone. The agony of the shell collector is narrated by Doerr: "Then his body abandoned him" (p.36). The sea leaves the men lonely and dying. Like an individual free to make his decisions, the sea decides not to offer healing to Josh or the shell collector through its cone. The shaky belief in the healing power of nature brings death to the men's house. The male characters sketched by Doerr portray disbelief in the wonders the natural world can perform on human life. For this reason, it seems, nature refuses to help them in times of need. Contrary to the healing wonder it performs on women, men's cynical and unconvinced attitude leads nature to bring them to their deathbeds. Doerr instils in his women qualities of unmatched valour, resilience and nurture and, therefore, perpetuates his spiritual ecofeminist ideology through his literary works.

Men in Relation with Animals

Compared to his wife, Mary Roberts, the hunter is a man of a shallow nature whose interaction with the environment is contrary to how his wife interacts with animal life. The hunter kills animals

for a living and it does not bother his conscience (p.42-43). The hunter archetype is explored by Royal B. Hassrick. In the light of human history, the leadership of a man involved some factors, such as success in hunting and fame as a warrior. The experience is demanding yet rewarding (2012, p.15). Vittorio Bufacchi writes in his article “Why is Violence Bad?” (2004) the definition of violence as described by John Harris, “An act of violence occurs when an injury or suffering is inflicted upon a person or persons by an agent who knows (or ought reasonably to have known), that his actions would result in the harm in question” (quoted in Bufacchi, p.169). The hunter qualifies as a perpetrator of environmental injustice by involving himself in rituals which lead to violence against animal species. Environmental injustice is explained by Kaitlin Kelly-Reif and Steve Wing as “relationships in which populations benefit from practices that harm other populations are environmentally unjust” (n.d). The hunter archetype causes significant harm to the animals through violence. It further leads to the demolishing of animal species and, therefore, causes grave injustice to the environment. Contrary to her husband, Mary has a gentle heart, and her actions towards the animals are compassionate. Mary Roberts is confident about her interaction with nature, “I have a talent. A gift” (p.66). To this, Doerr states the hunter’s response as follows: “A gift for hocus-pocus.” The hunter is sceptical, arrogant and ignorant; he is a non-believer. Mary Roberts lives with the hunter, the killer, the butcher and the murderer. She watches him commit blood-smeared deeds. Throughout the story, the hunter is portrayed as a man of ignorant nature and a perpetrator of environmental injustice.

In the short story “Mkondo” (Doerr, 2011), Naima decides to keep hawks at her house, surprising her husband, Ward and her neighbours. The men in the short story shoot the bird and kill it. Drawing on Richard T. Wright’s work on eco-crisis in his article

“Responsibility for Ecological Crisis” (1970), Doerr’s men cause significant harm to the environment and natural world through the use of weapons. They have the potential to use technological advancement to disseminate evil in society (p.852). The men hold the rifle, and they kill the bird and play their role in bloodshed and killing of the weaker species that cannot act in its defence. Therefore, the men with their rifles and gunshots are the perpetrators of eco-crisis environmental justice. The men in Doerr’s world experience an utter failure to form a close-knit relationship with nature. In the short story, Ward cannot comprehend Naima’s attraction to the life of wilderness and nature. Whereas Naima wants to bring wilderness and nature to herself in Ward’s house so that she can live close to nature, Ward is angry, and he expresses his frustration to Naima, “What will you haul in here next? A crocodile? An elephant?” (p.201). Naima’s closeness and interconnectedness with nature and Ward’s ignorance and agitation are aligned with the spiritual ecofeminist theory by Starhawk, who emphasises that women are much closer to nature than men.

Men in Relation with Weapons, Technology, and War

According to the framework proposed by Wright, ecological crisis or eco-crisis is brought about by the misuse of technology in the hands of man. He writes, “Technology is dangerous in the hands of this imperfect species, for evil enters when the technological impulse coupled with human carelessness and ignorance lead to environmental deterioration” (Wright, 1970, p.852). Interestingly, Doerr’s male characters present themselves as perpetrators of eco-crisis since their use of technology and weapons causes significant harm to the environment. Such is the portrayal of men in Anthony Doerr’s short story “The Caretaker” (Doerr, 2011). In the scene of war, men are the active participants. The policemen bomb the scene

and contribute to the ecological crisis. They induce fright and terror in the weaker population. “Policemen splash past the house in stolen vans, the barrels of their guns resting on the sills” (p.131). The male characters bring about destruction and chaos; they are involved in bloodshed and killing. They are associated with weapons and act as perpetrators of eco-crisis.

When Joseph is looking for his mother, he ends up in a place where he experiences the trauma of soldiers preparing sixteen-year-old boys to kill and murder. The scene holds significance since it articulates Anthony Doerr’s eco-philosophy. He associates men with barbaric tendencies and weapons. The instance is narrated as follows: “On it are a dozen boys, perhaps sixteen years old, lounging on lawn furniture with assault rifles in their laps” (p.134). The men are not frightened by weapons; instead, they are in charge of the weapons. When a suspect is brought in front of Joseph, he lifts the pistol and murders the man in a rush of emotions (p.135). Men in the short story use weapons to breed evil and perpetuate eco-crisis, as explained by Wright in his work on ecological crisis; ignorance and “human carelessness” coupled with technological advancement in the hands of “imperfect” species of man leads to environmental deterioration (Wright, 1970, p.852). Joseph’s character can be analysed as the perpetrator of the ecological crisis since his use of weapons leads to murder. Doerr writes about Joseph’s character, “He was a criminal; his mother was a gardener” (p.152). The blatant contrast between his depiction of male and female characters gives the reader an insight into Doerr’s spiritual ecofeminist philosophy. He extends similar ideas on environmental consciousness in his other literary works.

“For a Long Time, This Was Griselda’s Story” (Doerr, 2011) is a tale of the absurd gift of a man who could eat metal. The instance

where Griselda sees him eat metal is narrated as follows: “He produced a razor...Then he swallowed it” (p.99). Doerr continues to portray his men as capable of deeds that spread awe and terror. In Doerr’s dystopia, whose sole aim appears to be the appreciation of nature through vivid imagery of nature, the ability to eat metal is portrayed more as a curse than a gift. The male character indulges in eating metal. To the female protagonist, Rosemary, whose resilience and nurture are remarkable, the ability to eat metal is outrageous and monstrous. Doerr portrays the metal eater not only as an ignorant man in whose eyes the ability to eat metal is a gift he goes on to display ostentatiously but also as distant from the realities of life.

Similar is the plot of *All The Light We Cannot See (2014)*, where men are more occupied with technology, bombing, killing and mass destruction. The novel begins with the talk of war. The German troops are active participants in the war. The male characters are occupied with technology, machinery, and weapons in the novel. Surprisingly, all male characters in the novel can be analysed as the perpetrators of eco-crisis and environmental injustice. The description of the men in the novel is mingled with the imagery of weapons. The introduction to the character of Frank Volkheimer is narrated as follows, “sits in a tall-backed armchair upholstered in golden silk with his rifle across his huge thighs” (p.14). Doerr turns imagery grim and wilting as he explains men’s interaction with their fellow men and their impact on the environment. It is expressed through Werner’s thoughts, “He sees a forest of dying sunflowers. He sees a flock of blackbirds explode out of a tree” (p.15). Nature’s imagery turns dark as if it is displeased with the deeds of men. Not only does Doerr ingeniously foreshadow potential technological advancement holds to bring about eco-crisis, but he also uses his male characters to portray them as its

perpetrators. Doerr narrates the utter devastation and destruction brought about by men in the city. Their use of weapons leads to the exploitation of nature. In the light of Wright's explanation of eco-crisis, it stems from "human greed, carelessness and ignorance" (1970, p.852). The careless and ignorant attitude of men towards their environment and their use of explosive weapons lead to environmental degradation, whereas the female protagonist, Marie-Laure, continues to find herself being a friend to the objects of the natural world around her, "Marie-Laure finds the trunk of the chestnut tree that grows past her fourth-floor window, its bark beneath her fingers. Old friend" (p.41). Meanwhile, Werner Pfennig stays occupied with technology. Other men in the novel exhibit a similar interaction with technology. The description of Hans Schilzer and Herribert Pomsel is given in the following lines: "They carry slingshots, fashion spears, and rehearse ambushes from behind snowbanks." (p.42). There are numerous other instances in the novel where Doerr portrays the male characters as more occupied with technology, weapons, violence, terror and utter ignorance, "Machinery hums in the distance: pistons throbbing, belts turning. Smoothly. Madly" (p.64). In another instance, the description of a lance corporal is described as follows: "A lance corporal with a pistol on his belt" (p.80). Doerr describes the idea under which young boys are trained, "You will become like a waterfall, a volley of bullets" (p.136). Men in the novel are portrayed as having formed a peaceful relationship with weapons. Hence, they are associated with violence and carrying out terrorising acts of brutality. The description of Frank Volkheimer is stated by Doerr in a similar terror-invoking tone, "There is a rumour that he crushed a communist's windpipe with his hands. Another that he grabbed the muzzle of a stray dog and cut out its eyes just to inure himself to the suffering of other beings" (p.152). Without any fear of

consequences they bestow upon their surroundings and environment, Anthony Doerr's men go on to cause chaos.

The male characters exhibit a hostile attitude towards their environment. Instead of embracing nature, they try to control and colonise it. They try to colonise the land, weather and moon. Apart from the misuse of weapons, the male characters are full of fear and cowardice. Doerr's men do not exhibit a similar strength of character as Doerr's women. They seem incompetent compared to women. An instance of Marie-Laure's great-uncle Etienne is stated in the following lines: "Her uncle seems almost a child...she can almost feel the terror pulsing inside him" (p.157). Etienne remains immersed in his fear and is unable to overcome his traumatic experiences.

Since the male characters in the novel behave in an aggressive and unsympathetic manner towards nature, nature does not favour their well-being and survival. Amidst WWII, Werner Pfennig's death is finally announced. Doerr describes the fragility of other male characters in the following words, "terrified, homesick, with trembling eyes" (p.488). Doerr portrays his men as weak, trembling creatures who do not withstand the test of time. To extend the argument, Daniel LeBlanc's survival is not facilitated by nature. When Etienne and Marie-Laure dive deeper into the investigation, they find out that Daniel LeBlanc had died of influenza (p.511). In consistency with Anthony Doerr's pattern, the male character does not survive. Another male character is Fredrick, with whom Werner Pfennig forms a fast friendship. Years after the war, the memories overwhelm him (p.521). The traumatic experiences manage to overwhelm him, and his mind copes by erasing memories. Like all other male characters, he, too, remains

preoccupied with the past and does not overcome the traumatic experience of war.

Interestingly, the sole survivor of the war who overcomes her traumatic experiences is Marie Laure LeBlanc. Her triumph is described in the following lines: “We rise again in the grass. In the flowers. In songs” (p.529). Her resilience is unmatched since the male characters in the novel do not possess such an ability to overcome traumatic experiences. Another female character who goes on to live a long life is Jutta, Werner’s sister, who crosses paths with Marie Laure in later years. Through the unmatched survival abilities of his female characters, Anthony Doerr becomes the perpetrator of his spiritual ecofeminist philosophy. Marie-Laure Leblanc’s resilience and survival through the setbacks and turbulent times perpetuate Anthony Doerr’s spiritual ecofeminist philosophy. It is noteworthy that the survival of his female protagonist is a metaphor for the resilience of Mother Earth. Just like Marie-Laure learns, adapts, and overcomes her traumatic experiences, Mother Earth endures and stays resilient in the face of war.

CONCLUSION

The deconstructive analysis of the selected texts by Anthony Doerr reveals that Doerr remains consistent in his pattern of portraying his women much closer to nature compared to men, who play an active role in perpetuating environmental injustice and ecological crisis. Contrary to the impact of nature on women, his men are impacted negatively by nature. Their doom seems to be brought about by their deeds. By portraying his female characters as more interconnected with nature, the author takes up the role of a spiritual ecofeminist. Starhawk’s spiritual ecofeminist stance can be articulately recounted through her verse: “*She arises in you/As you in her/Your voice becomes her voice/Sing!*” (quoted in Sargisson, 2001, p.57).

Starhawk's vision of a woman's communion with the earth also expresses her opinion and her desire. The theorist's ideology relies upon romanticising and embracing womanhood. The feminine experiences instil in women the tendency to conserve and preserve nature. Anthony Doerr, in his literary pieces *The Shell Collector Short Stories* (2011) and *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014), perpetuates his spiritual ecofeminist philosophy.

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