

LEM Notes for Best Book Club reading: **All the Light We Cannot See, Anthony Doerr**

Meeting: May 2015 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne's

As seduced by its numerous charms as the Pulitzer Prize judges ...

But ...

The meeting of Werner and Marie-Laure was too long in coming

Unconvincingly contrived

And then too soon over.

Character development is minimal. The 'good' characters are unwaveringly good and we don't know how they came to be this way and what enables them to always pass the test: Frederick, Jutta and Marie-Laure

The death of Werner is sad but not sad enough. Marie-Laure's survival is predictable and somehow not enough of a salvation (Maybe not?)

Why so many lists of things?

Why so many (13 chapters) short sub-chapters with headline titles? — **the 13 lock boxes for the Sea of Flames diamond**

Why the zig-zag timeline? — **spiral staircase — the spiral maze in the Jardin des Plantes**

What is the meaning of the ending? Eternal souls all present. A Christian message? What about chance and physics?

Myth or history? Or both? — **to mythologize is truly to remember**

Dense with metaphors. What do they all mean? Does the density illuminate or complicate?

Light

The electromagnetic spectrum

Colours especially White— LeBlanc and Werner and Jutta's white hair, white pillowcase as the flag of surrender

The sea

The moon

Fog/ the fog of war

Birds/Leaflets

Bees

Shells

Spirals: radio tuner, whelks, "circling the drain" — the look of someone (never a German soldier) who has nothing left p228, Frederick's drawings of "spirals, messy, heavy-leaded corkscrews" p521

Triangles

Locks

Keys

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea

Grottos

Wardrobes

"Flames"

"Music" — Clair de Lune — See "Moon"

Ghosts

Earth, Air, Fire, and Water

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Numbers especially 3 and 4

Great quotations:

“This, she realizes, is the basis of his fear, all fear. That a light you are powerless to stop will turn on you and usher a bullet to its mark.” P160

But God is only a white cold eye, a quarter-moon poised above the smoke, blinking, blinking, as the city is gradually pounded to dust.” P393

P445 “Again she opens the model house and tips the stone into her palm. What would happen if the goddess took away the curse? Would the fires go out, would the earth heal over, would doves return to the windowsills? Would Papa come back?”

ML inspired by the end of *Twenty Thousand Leagues*—But let me tell you (says Ned Land, the Canadian harpooner to Professor Aronnax) that if we're caught, I'm going to defend myself, even if I die doing it.” “We'll die together, Ned my friend.” (Says Professor Aronnax) slots the record on the spindle of Etienne's electrophone, turns on the microphone and the transmitter, and turns it up as loud as it will go. “If the German is in the house he will hear it....She locates the knife...sits with the diamond inside the house in her pocket...” “Come and get me.” P 453

—Volkheimer hears the music and is inspired to blast their way out of the Hotel basement

—Rumpel hears the music and hallucinates about his daughters

—Werner freed from the basement sets off to save ML —“They said what he needed was certainty. Purpose. Clarity. That pigeon-chested commandant Bastian with his grandmother's walk; he said they would strip the hesitation out of him. *We are a volley of bullets, we are cannonballs. We are the tip of the sword.* Who is the weakest?”

“She can hear a scuffle and then the shot comes like a breach of crimson light: the eruption of Krakatoa. The house briefly riven in two.” P466 – ML is reborn —“Six trillion cells get crushed in the vise of our mother's birth canal and we howl. Then the world starts in on us. Marie-Laure slides open the wardrobe. Werner takes her hand and helps her out.” P468

He says, “You are very brave.”...She says, “When I lost my sight, Werner, people said I was brave. When my father left, people said I was brave. But it is not bravery; I have no choice. I wake up and live my life. Don't you do the same?” He says, “Not in years. But today. Today maybe I did.”p469 (Your soul is a chosen landscape —first line of the poem Clair de Lune)

P476 From her coat, she takes some small wooden thing and sets it in the water. She speaks lightly, her voice echoing: “You need to tell me, is it in the ocean? It must be in the ocean.”

ML is the Goddess of the Earth and Werner is the God of the Sea and her gift to him is the Key to the Grotto= Sea of Flames:

— a priest had a dream. In the dream the Goddess of the Earth told him she'd made the Sea of Flames as a gift for her lover, the God of the Sea, and was sending the jewel to him through the river. But when the river dried up, and the prince plucked it out, the goddess became enraged. She cursed the stone and whoever kept it. ... The curse was this: the keeper of the stone would live forever, but so long as he kept it, misfortunes would fall on all those he loved one after another in unending rain.” ... But if the keeper threw the diamond into the sea, thereby delivering it to its rightful recipient, the goddess would lift the curse.” P21

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Werner writing about the sea to Jutta: *Sometimes I catch myself staring at it and forget my duties. It seems big enough to contain everything anyone could ever feel.*" p508

"She reaches for his hand, sets **something** [the key] in his palm, and squeezes his hand into a fist. "Goodbye, Werner." P 477

p480 the hard corners of the little wooden house clamped in the other. When he (Werner) has the strength he fiddles with it. Twist the chimney, slide off the three panels of the roof, look inside. Built so cleverly."

... Werner steps on the mine...and "disappears in a fountain of earth." – echoes the last line of Claire de Lune the poem...

"And the fountains sobbing in ecstasy. The tall slender fountains among marble statues."

Over time, thinks ML events that seem jumbled either become more confusing or gradually settle into place. The boy saved her life three times over. Once by not exposing Etienne when he should have. Twice by taking that sergeant major out of the way. Three times by helping her out of the city." P515

Jutta finds ML at her laboratory in Paris and gives her the wooden house— P515 And the model house? Did Werner let himself back into the grotto to retrieve it? Did he leave the stone inside?

"Once she is out of his sight, he turns and lets himself back through Harold Bazin's gate. ...She sees him solve the puzzle of the little house. **Maybe he drops the diamond into the pool among the thousands of snails.** The he closes the puzzle box and locks the gate and trots away. Or he puts the stone back into the house. Or slips it into his pocket....Something drops into her palm. An iron key. P518-9

P520 – Sea of Flames – "Crawled over my snails. It stirs among the pebbles."

Marie-Laure ——— John, the Canadian

|
Helene
|
Michel

"She lives to see the century turn. She lives still. ...And is it so hard to believe that souls might also travel those paths? That her father and Etienne and Madame Manec and the German boy named Werner Pfennig might harry the sky in flocks, like egrets, like terns, like starlings? That great shuttles of souls might fly about, faded but audible if you listen closely enough? They flow above the chimneys, ride the sidewalks, slip through your jacket and shirt and breastbone and lungs, and pass out through the other side, the air a library and the record of every life lived, every sentence spoken, every word transmitted still reverberating within it." P529