

CRITICAL NOTE

Reframing Adolescence: Rereading Saint Exupery's *The Little Prince*

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The philosophical notions of Antoine de Saint Exupery can be reviewed through his literary works. His fictions deeply reflect his philosophical life amid the Second World War chaos. He always believes in the connection between action and contemplation. According to him, he does what he thinks and believes. The harmony between thought and action mostly defines his philosophical beliefs (Harris 141).

His various philosophical beliefs can be traced through his novella *The Little Prince*. Though published some eight decades ago, it still holds importance in those terms particularly in French literary and philosophical circle. His contradictory philosophy can be revealed through the subverted idea of the entire story. The Little Prince, a young boy from a distant star explores his neighbouring planets including Earth. He meets a lot of men on his way. They really puzzle him. Their strange pursuits seem meaningless to him. All of them talk and think about 'matters of consequence'. This attitude of grown-ups is criticised in the text through the Little Prince. He then meets the narrator of the text in the planet Earth. The narrator reflects the image of Saint Exupery – a pilot lost in the Sahara desert. Unlike other grown-ups the narrator reacts to Little Prince in a different yet serious manner. He listens to Little Prince; he agrees with Little Prince, he sketches for Little Prince. These actions create intimacy between the narrator and Little Prince.

The drawings reveal Saint Exupery's cravings for a child's world. He has tried to relive his childhood through these sketches for Little Prince. It plainly insists on the creative mind of a child who neither cares for artistic touch nor any traditional values. All these aspects of the story are critical about the ways of the adult world. The entire story seems like a pun on grown-ups. But strangely this purpose is subverted in the fiction with the persistence of certain characteristics of a child through the action of Little Prince. The Little Prince takes care of his planet with a sense of possession and responsibility: "It is a question of discipline," the little

prince said to me later on. “When you’ve finished your own toilet in the morning, then it is time to attend to the toilet of your planet, just so, with the greatest care” (Saint Exupery 32).

This shows that Little Prince acts like a perfect adult. Though it stresses on the morality of discipline for the children, the idea of responsibility does not go very well with the image of a child. But in contrary, Little Prince takes the responsibility of his planet with much satisfaction. He also possesses a Rose. The flower metaphorically symbolises a female character in the story. Rose represents a complete stereotypical idea of a woman. The nature of being inconsistent and vain marks the character of Rose. Little Prince tends Rose with much ardour though she hurts him with her vain remarks. Rose also seems to be the reason for Little Prince’s leaving his planet behind for exploration. The image of Little Prince portrays the image of an adult who perfectly fulfills both the personal and social responsibility – his duty towards his planet and Rose. This individual perfection leads to the exhibition of heroism. Almost all of Saint Exupery’s protagonists exhibit this particular characteristic (Harris 148). Even the Little Prince’s exploration is presented in an adventurous manner.

The metaphorical narration pictures the Little Prince as a heroic symbol in the story. This heroism is not without the tinge of sacrifice. The sacrificial action is believed to be heroic by the author. The end of Little Prince marks this aspect of heroic sacrifice. The death in the form of sacrifice is portrayed as a kind of triumph (Harris 144). His faith in sacrifice has become ardent during the Second World War. But he is worried about the result of such sacrifice in his later life. His fear for the consequence of war was more than the war itself. He is frightened of the world after the war, particularly Europe. He writes to his mother: “What frightens me more than the war is the world of tomorrow” (Harris 153).

The narrative style of the story has the characteristics of both the fairy tale and parable. The aphoristic narration affords to comprise both these aspects. The adventurous exploration of Little Prince is presented through the images of the narrator. The allegorical teachings of fox and snake are dictated through didactic narration (Mitchell 3). The imagery and allegory are effectively encompassed with natural concurrence through the fantastic and didactic narrative style. The simple sentences accommodate the perspectives of both the narrator and Little Prince. Both of the characters hold resemblance to the personality of Saint Exupery himself.

The allegory used in the story insists on social binary values. The rigid binary system is inculcated on children through the symbol of “The Baobabs.” According to Little Prince, the proper distinction between good and bad seeds can be perceived through acute judgment which prevents the emergence of the bad baobab trees. Another allegorical idea of making a friend is interpreted by fox as a careful process of ‘taming.’ Little Prince neglects all the prospects presented by the grown-ups but he accepts this taming process; that is also a grown-up process in guise. Unfortunately, the philosophy preached by the snake at the end also exhibits this contradiction. It makes Little Prince to act with some serious maturity, which is so unbecoming of a child. His calm acceptance towards an unknown idea of death reveals the paradoxical mind of Saint Exupery. These paradoxical elements in the novella challenge the philosophical oneness of thought and action. The Little Prince is a picture of contradiction – a picture which portrays the imagination of a child and also the refined actions of an adult. The condemnation on grown-ups indirectly insists on perfect adult life. Thus the purpose of the fiction is subverted without the conscious intention of the author.

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