The World inside the Heart: The Analysis of “The Little Prince”

Author:
Lillian Tsay (蔡曉林)

The Affiliated Experimental High School of Tunghai University

Class H2C

Teacher:
林麗卿老師
1. Preface

In every adult’s mind lives an inner child.

There are many ways to discover the world, and the renowned literary work, “The Little Prince” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, uses the point of view of an innocent child to observe it. Many things appear to be natural and right in the eyes of the grown-ups but curious children can create a different world from what they see.

When I first read this book, I couldn’t help but think, “Is this a true story? It sounds really real to me…” Moreover, what the Little Prince said impressed me a lot, which drives me to search more information about this book’s background. In addition, many metaphors and symbolization were used to express the author’s perspectives on life. Since everybody’s interpretation is different, I wonder what they really mean in Mr. Saint-Exupéry mind. Because of those reasons, I decided to study further about “The Little Prince,” a book that has less than one hundred pages but has a great impact on its readers from all over the world.

2. Thesis

A. Illustrations in “The Little Prince” and their meanings

a. Two interpretations on Drawing Number One (1)

People who see Drawing Number One as a hat usually see things only from the outside; they don’t look further and imagine the symbolism inside the surface of what their eyes can see. They perceive the world as what it is. In a word, they are more superficial and tend to be more narrow-minded. On the other hand, people who think the picture represents an elephant inside a boa constrictor are more imaginative and naïve. Their thoughts and ideas are not changed by the society and preconceived notion yet. They see what people cannot see and hear what people can not hear. They are more open-minded, sensitive, imaginative, and creative.

b. The metaphor of the baobabs. (2)

According to the narrator, the drawing of the baobabs is “the most magnificent and impressive.” The baobabs are symbols of bad habits and laziness
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that will cause disasters. If we do not pick out our bad habits, they might continue to get worse, just like the baobabs that will lead to catastrophes. The seed of the baobabs are not easy to discover, but they actually could split the little prince’s planet once they become gigantic trees. This symbolizes those bad habits and danger that affect us a lot, though we often do not take them seriously. The author is trying to emphasize the power of bad habits. As narrator says, “I was carried beyond myself by the inspiring force of urgent necessity.” (3) The children’s minds are not tainted by the society’s dark side yet, and the author wishes that they could keep their innocence, being aware of small, trivial but harmful things such as the baobabs.

c. The loveliest and saddest landscape. (4)

On the last page of the book, the narrator draws a picture as same as the one on the preceding page where the Little Prince came and left. The star directs to the planet where the Little Prince and his flower belongs to. This picture expresses the center philosophy of the whole book: “What is essential is invisible to the eye.” (5) Although we can’t see the Little Prince in this picture, it is because of our love to the Little Prince that makes this picture even more beautiful.

B. Characters the Little Prince met and their symbolizations

a. The pilot

As the narrator of the whole story, the pilot plays a huge role in expressing what the Little Prince learns in his journey. The story begins with his complaint toward the adults that their ignorance destroyed his imagination and dreams. It is the utter innocence on the pilot’s part that makes him a friend of the Little Prince. However, he is beginning to think like adults as he says, “No, no! I don't believe anything. I answered you with the first thing that came into my head. Don't you see, I am very busy with matters of consequence!” While the Little Prince yells back, “You talk just like grown-ups,” (6) he also confesses, “Perhaps I am a little like the grown-ups. I have had to grow old.”(7) The pilot represents children who are turning adolescents. They are losing their innocence little by little but getting more and more mature, too.

In the end, the pilot apprehends the Little Prince’s philosophy of life that the most beautiful things cannot be seen by the naked eye. He also understands that it is the
time you spend searching for something that makes it beautiful. The Little Prince reminds him of his childhood, and brings back his innocence.

b. The rose

The Little Prince has no friends until the rose appears, so he cherishes the rose as his first and only friend. She is the only thing he can love and be responsible for. However, the Little Prince says, “I was too young to know how to love her.”(8), which means everything he does for the rose is from his blind admiration. When he decides to leave the arrogant and self-centered rose for he starts to doubt the rose’s sincerity, she remorse and says, “Of course I love you. It is my fault that you have not known it all the while.”(9) Perhaps the love between them is complicated, just like Redd Butler and Scarlette O’Hara in “Gone with the Wind.”(10) The rose, like Scarlette, finally understands her feeling toward the Little Prince until he is about to leave her. The selfish, vain, coquettish rose is just like a frog living at the bottom of a well. She has limited visions, both in the reality and in her own heart.

c. The king

In my opinion, the king is a symbol of rules and laws the society creates as they are reasonable but don’t allow any disobedience. Also, the rat the king mentions is like an invisible hole in those systems that are believed by the adults. Moreover, the king asks the Little Prince to judge himself, saying that a man of true wisdom can judge himself rightly, which means a wise man does not need any regulations to discipline him. Moreover, although the king has powers, he is very lonely. He wishes the Little Prince to stay with him. It is a mock to those people in power: the author wants to explain that being powerful or rich will not assure your happiness.

d. The conceited man

The conceited man is similar to many grown-ups; they only listen to what they want to hear. They prefer to hear adulations rather than the truth. They can not face the reality bravely but bury themselves in reveries. The conceited man doesn’t care for anything else except himself, which makes his life empty and boring compared with many children!

e. The tippler

A happy person will want to keep his good memories instead of forgetting them but the tippler says he drinks so that he may forget. Therefore, we can tell that the tippler is very unhappy, lonely and deeply troubled. But he escapes those facts through a useless method, drinking. The kind Little Prince feels bad for his situation that he is
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trapped in an unhappy world created by him forever. The tippler can never escape his sorrow, shame and sadness by drinking because it cannot help him escape his jail, but the tippler doesn’t know that, so do many ignorant adults.

f. The businessman

The businessman claims that he owns the stars in the sky and he counts the number of the stars and put his calculations in his bank. He says owning these stars makes him rich so that he can buy more stars. According to him, he thinks he owns the stars because nobody before him claimed to own them. However, the Little Prince doesn’t agree with him. He thinks when a person owns a thing; he is of some use to it, just like his planet and himself. He cleans the baobabs and waters his rose, but the businessman does not do any good to the stars by counting them!

g. The lamplighter

The lamplighter has no freedom at all; all he can do is obey others’ orders instead of living his own life. He is symbolic of many grown-ups nowadays; they can’t live their lives and pursue their dreams but follow endless orders. The time on the lamplighter’s planet is running very fast, which reflects every adult’s pace. However, the lamplighter sacrifices his freedom to serve the others, and unlike other grown-ups, he is not always thinking about himself or escaping the reality. He is the only grown-up the Little Prince appreciates.

h. The geographer

To the geographer, matters of consequence are eternal things that change rarely. He thinks that those things are worth recording because they last a long time. Flowers are beautiful, but they fade too fast that the records have to be changed. The geographer thinks it is no use recording things that only exist for a short time; this is how he values things. However, he neglects one important thing: he only values one thing in a single angle. For instance, flowers may not have a long life, but they bring beauty and fragrance to the world!

i. The snake

In the Bible and many stories, a snake is a symbol of evil and the dark side. According to the snake itself, “I can carry you farther than any ship could take you. Whomever I touch, I send back to the earth from whence he came” (11), which hints that it can bring people death. The author said the snake looks like “a golden bracelet”; maybe it is directed to life and death’s never-ending circulation and transmigration.

Nevertheless, to the Little Prince, the snake might be a helper instead of a murderer.
After all, the snake brings him back home so that he can see his beloved rose again.

j. The fox

In most stories, foxes are characterized as being sly and cunning. The fox in “The Little Prince”, on the contrary, is no crafty character but a wise one. He is the mentor who teaches the Little Prince the most important principle in the story, that through the process of taming and being tamed, people establish an invisible relationship that can make one’s life even more beautiful.

In addition, the fox teaches the importance of proper rites, as he says, “They (rites) are what make one day different from other days, one hour from other hours.” (12) Human has freedom, but we need rites and rules to define our relationships with the world.

Last but not least, he told the Little Prince the theme of the whole story, to look with his heart at all times, and the most beautiful thing in the world cannot be seen by the naked eye.

C. Philosophies in “The Little Prince”

a. Children’s wisdom

Can innocence and wisdom exist both at the same time? There is no denying that many mature people are wise and outstanding. Great literary masters, philosophers and artists are all grown-ups. “The Little Prince” is not telling its readers to act like immature children and never grow up but to keep their mind full of imagination and pure love. Take the businessman and the Little Prince for example. The former is older and has seen more than the Little Prince, but he knows nothing. On the contrary, the latter, who is only a child, appears to know how to love and give. In this case, we all agree that the one with wisdom is not the rich man but the innocent child, just as the Chinese literary master Han Yu says, “My teacher knows the knowledge, does whether he is younger or older than me matters?” (13)

b. The real meaning of “existence”

“If I have told you these details about the asteroid, and made a note of its number for you, it is on account of the grown-ups and their ways.” (14) By naming the Little Prince’s planet, “Asteroid B-612”, depicting the businessman’s meaningless accounting, the author made many sarcastic comments toward the grown-ups to mock that they only believe in things with numbers or an exact proof. In this society, most people only believe in things with photographs and statistics. How do we prove someone, for example, the Little Prince that whether he exists or not by just telling people his stories?
In the philosophy novel, ”Sophie’s World”(15), Sophie and her mentor try everything to prove that they are more than characters in a novel, but notions that will never die and have an impact on the reality. René Descartes once said, “I think, therefore I am.”(16), therefore, Sophie and her teacher use many philosophers’ theories to prove that they were right. If we prove the existence of the Little Prince by using their method, we can say that the Little Prince does influence this world greatly because his story touches a lot of readers’ hearts. Maybe we are not sure if he is a fictional character or a real boy, we are certain that his spirit exists in many people’s minds for good.

c. The relationships and bonds through tame.

Human beings cannot isolate themselves from the world. We need to have friends, and through “tame”, and we form invisible ties. Just like the fox says, “tame” is an action too often neglected. (17) To us, every passerby seems to be the same, but to their friends and family, they might be the most important people in their hearts because they have spent time on each other and established special connections. For people who are tamed, their lives tend to be more beautiful as many things they see can bring the thought of who they love.

Sadly, nowadays, many grown-ups are so busy with their jobs that they lose sight of the importance of taming. They do not want to sacrifice their working time to make friends and take care of their family. As a result, people live their own lives and isolate themselves from other people, from this world, which in turn transforms the world into a colder place.

d. What is essential is invisible to the eye

Eyes cannot see everything, but we often rely on them too much. As the saying goes, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” and “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” are good examples about people’s preconceived notions on appearances. The Little Prince fell in love with his rose as he exclaimed, “Oh! How beautiful you are!” (18) Nevertheless, his love and devotion toward the rose is a kind of blind admiration on account of the flower’s beauty. It was not until he meets his guidance, the fox, who told him, “What is essential is invisible to the eye.”(19), that he truly understands what lies in his devotion.

The most beautiful things, such as hope, dreams, friendship and love cannot be seen by the naked eye, in order to “see” them, we have to use our hearts to feel them. Although the Little Prince’s rose looks as same as millions of other roses, she is the only rose who the Little Prince spend time on and take care of. People nowadays are
trying not to waste any time on things rather than work, but it is the time the Little Prince spent that makes his flower special, and it is also the time the pilot and the Little Prince spent that makes the water of the will different. Sometimes it is those invisible things that make our worlds even more beautiful.

e. The discovery of one’s self.

“Look up at the sky. Ask yourselves: is it yes or no? Has the sheep eaten the flower? And you will see how everything changes...” (19) the whole story ends with these words. In short, the whole story is based on the Little Prince’s journey of self-discovery. Along with the pilot, he transformed himself from an innocent boy into those who understand life. The author gave the readers an unknown ending, hoping them to find it in their own imagination in order to arouse the missing utter innocence inside every adult’s mind.

3. Conclusion

When we were children, we always long for being mature; when we grew up, we wish to be young again. Just like the pilot, I think I found my lost self through The Little Prince, who taught us that life is more than money, power or success. He also told us that we see things with our spiritual eye. What’s more, he taught us the importance of friendship and love.

Life can be lived in many ways, some emphasizes the material life while others care about the spiritual life, and The Little Prince is the latter one. In this century, people often feel deeply stressed and unhappy, thinking they don’t have enough. They thought more money or more power will make them better. However, what they really lack is the eyes in their hearts, which will make their worlds more beautiful.

4. Reference

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