

"The Little Prince and A Dream Play - Two Symbolic Dreams"

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The story of the little prince is a great lesson about LOVE in its deep and true meaning. It is as beautiful as a good dream and it has the form of a dream. There are some passages that make us laugh and recall good moments of our childhood, as well as others that bring tears to our eyes. There are deep philosophical implications that make us stop and meditate about the meaning of our existence.

*A Dream Play* is not a fairy tale, and it is not as light and easy reading as *The Little Prince*, but it is also a well-formed dream. It is also a lesson about LOVE and, once we go beyond its apparent complexity, we will also stop at some philosophical passages and find ourselves questioning our lives in the same way that the main characters of those two dreams do.

The little prince is an innocent and naive child who grows into a mature and wise being, after getting in close contact with the world of adults. The narrator of the story is also a child figure who goes through the same process of building up and developing his personality from what he learns in his experience with the prince. The processes of development that both go through in their lives involve three stages: anticipation, disillusion, and suffering, which is a direct consequence of disillusion. The narrator works hard in his drawings, anticipating that there will be no doubt as to what they represent. He is disillusioned when he realizes that none of the grown-ups who sees them is able to understand them. He suffers from his disillusion till he meets the little prince, a visitor from another planet who understands exactly what his drawings are. The prince tells him the story of his life and teaches the narrator how to understand himself, how to see the real meaning of things, how to cope with them and grasp what is essential in life.

The prince had also gone through those three stages. In the planet where he used to live there was a flower. He used to water her, protect her in a glass globe, tend her. The flower was close to him - they talked, even argued sometimes. She was good company, but the prince grew tired of her coquettish and demanding ways. So he decided to leave the planet and go on a journey in search of something new. He was eager to increase his knowledge, to become wiser. These had been his anticipations. The flower, which is a personified symbol of the presence of love with lack of understanding, also had

anticipated that the prince would never have the courage to leave her. She was disillusioned and suffered at the moment she had to say good-bye to the prince. Only then she realized how she had been ungrateful and demanding. So she said she would stay without the glass protection and added bravely, "I must endure the presence of two or three caterpillars if I wish to become acquainted with the butterflies."<sup>1</sup> One has to know the bad side of life and suffer for a while in order to have some compensation. Only suffering leads to real happiness, to meaningful wisdom that enables one to recognize and deserve happiness... The prince's disillusion and suffering came during his journey around the universe, through the people, animals, and situations he encountered.

The Daughter of Indra, Agnes, is also a heavenly figure, and an innocent being, who undergoes the three stages of development to become a wise and mature person, after her experience with mankind. As the play opens, she is somewhere between her father's paradise and the earth. The atmosphere is dreamlike, and the air is dense and polluted. Asking her father where she was and what were those unhappy sounds she could hear, he replies that it is the earth, "the heaviest and densest sphere of all that travel through the space"<sup>2</sup>. And his comments about mankind are, "even their mothertongue is named complaint. A race most hard to please, and thankless, are the dwellers on the earth" (p.27). Agnes, however, thinks that her father's judgment is too radical, for she can hear cries of joy and praise. Therefore she makes up her mind to descend to earth to draw her own conclusions about the human condition. She is hopeful, then, "eager to experience life, energetic, and full of curiosity."<sup>3</sup> Her anticipations are optimistic. She sees herself as a symbol of love and, consequently, a bringer and giver of freedom.

At her first sight of the growing castle, Agnes interprets it as some kind of prison and takes it for granted (or guesses with her supernatural power) that there is a prisoner inside it, waiting to be freed by her. The castle grows above the ground because it has been manured. It is something sterile and fixed which is given life, and therefore it grows upward, in the direction of heaven, in an attempt to achieve a superior level, perfection. It represents Agnes's attempt to confirm her anticipations, to fulfill her dream. It is the realization of something which is not likely to occur, and this idea is emphasized by the other features of the castle. It has grown a wing on the side of the sun, too. Where there is light there is life and hope. A wing is a symbol of freedom, since it is the means to leave

the grounds and follow any chosen course. There is also a bud, resembling a crown, at the top of the castle. It is a symbol of spiritual love, which gives birth to a new kind of life. The Daughter of Indra, then, starts her journey on earth, where she will experience disillusion and suffering among humankind.

Both the little prince and the daughter of Indra encounter a wide range of characters who are representatives of human types. Since both are living a dream, not only the characters but also the actions are distorted. The stereotypes in *The Little Prince* are sometimes human beings, and other times animals or plants. The characters in *A Dream Play* are usually human beings, but they are distorted in the same way. They play different roles and are sometimes independent characters, other times a single individual. What matters is the circumstances in which they appear, their thematic roles, and what they represent to the daughter of Indra. In order to add more evidence to the dream-like quality and mood, the conceptions of time and space are secondary, if not non-existent. When they are mentioned, it is in order to serve some specific function in the thematic environment.

The first theme that calls our attention in both dreams is the idea that people are imprisoned within themselves, because of their human condition - their limitations, their ego, their distorted values, their incapacity to face the truth and overcome their own misery, created by themselves; yet always blamed on something else, be it a person, an institution, or a circumstance. The officer in *A Dream Play* is imprisoned by his faithfulness to his image of a woman who corresponds to his ideal of the perfect woman, the perfect lover. He has waited for her for seven long years, following a ritual that has become habitual, thus testing his own patience, discipline, and endurance. He is constantly pursued by his dream, and his mood changes from one extreme to another. His clothes express his moods. When he is hopeful, optimistic, he looks radiant, dressed as a prince, a romantic lover. When he is discouraged; he looks miserable, dressed in shabby clothes. Then he feels sorry for himself and complains, "Every joy that life brings has to be paid for with twice its measure of sorrow" (p.30)... "Life has never recognized any duties toward me... it has been unjust" (p.31). The officer will never fulfill his dream, nor will he ever overcome the mystery of the door, which is a symbol of the obstacle that stands between himself and his ideal, between reality and illusion. The obstacle is within himself. Only he could free himself but he is not able to do it. He

is aware of his mistake and limitation ("Nothing ever was as I expected it to be - Because the thought is more than the deed, more than the thing" - p. 41). But it is beyond his weak nature to face the truth and change the order of things. The daughter of Indra remarks that "Men are to be pitied". a statement that she will repeat many times throughout her journey on the earth of men. Her philosophical principle is that "life is hard - but love overcomes everything." This is the truth she will transmit to men. And she will do it by living among them, suffering with them, participating in and sharing their misfortune. By putting the Portress's shawl over her head, she assumes human suffering.

The King in *The Little Prince* is also imprisoned by his illusion of an ideal kingdom of perfect subjects, who obey his orders blindly. He rationalizes upon everything, in the same way that the officer does in relation to his lover. He makes his orders reasonable, and in one point he is right when he says, "One must require from each one the duty which each one can perform... accepted authority rests first of all on reason" (p. 38). But he stands by his dogma and sees nothing else. He doesn't even realize how ridiculous he sounds. He wants freedom but, like the officer, he doesn't even know what freedom is. He doesn't realize that his prison comes from within rather than from without. He gives the prince good advice, "if you succeed in judging yourself rightly, then you are indeed a man of true wisdom... because it's more difficult to judge oneself than to judge others" (p. 39), but he does not apply to himself the advice he gives to others. The prince cannot understand his contradictory behaviour and remarks, "Grown-ups are strange!", a phrase that he will repeat many times during his experience in the world of adults. Like the daughter of Indra, he will suffer among them and share their own suffering.

The next characters that Agnes and the prince meet give them an impression that they are satisfied with what they are. The Billposter of *A Dream Play* has a dipnet and a green cauf, which are all he had always wanted. Even though they came when he was close to the end of his life, he feels some sense of accomplishment. The Conceited Man of *The Little Prince* does not seem to have many ambitions, either. The only thing he wants is to be praised and well thought of by people. But the Billposter is soon disappointed with his dream when he sees it does not correspond to what he had expected, as Agnes tells him. The Conceited Man, in his turn, exhausts the little prince and has to face the reality that comes through the

prince's question, "I admire you, but what is there in that to interest you so much?" (p.42). Their incoherence is incomprehensible to our observers...

The theme of unfulfillment and failure to find meaning in life is present all the time in the two dreams, but it is made evident in some specific passages. In *A Dream Play* we have seen the examples of the Officer and the Billposter. Several other circumstances may be pointed out. The Lawyer is another sufferer who is also dissatisfied with his life. He is constantly sharing other people's agonies, for it is his job to deal with crimes, vices, only the miseries of his fellow men. He has worked hard all his life, trying to act according to his conscience, but, nevertheless, he is refused his laurel wreath, which would make him worthy of a doctoral position. The Four Academic Faculties, which represent the basic institutions of society, do not hold him worthy. They, too, cannot come to terms with life. As Agnes points out, "Theology, the science of God, is constantly attacked and ridiculed by Philosophy, which declares itself to be the sum of all wisdom. And Medicine is always challenging Philosophy, while refusing entirely to count Theology a science and even insisting on calling it a mere superstition" (p. 49). These sciences, which should unify their knowledge to make men wiser, instead of keeping this objective in mind and going all of them into the same direction, forget men and attack each other. By doing this they confuse men even more. As Agnes later cries out "Instructors of the young, take shame!... Yes, I accuse you - you in a body - of sowing doubt and discord in the minds of the young" (p. 95). They are like the Geographer in *The Little Prince*, who just sat at his desk and thought high of himself, doing nothing. He knew all that had to be done in his field, but refused to do it, claiming that it was the task of explorers, not his.

In *The Little Prince*, the theme of unfulfillment constantly recurs, too. The prince meets a tippler, whose only company is a lot of empty bottles. Drinking does not make him feel any better, but he cannot explain what makes him feel so wretched. Maybe he doesn't even have any more problems than the rest of people, but he simply cannot cope with his human condition. Drinking is the only way he knows to run away from it. It is an attempt to escape into a world of illusions, but it does not prove efficient, and he lugubriously admits, "I drink to forget that I am ashamed of drinking" (p. 43). He is as contradictory as the King and the Businessman whom the prince meets next. The Businessman practically ignores the prince, claiming to be "concerned with matters of consequence" (p. 44). He

says he owns the stars and keeps adding and counting them, and he reasons like the Tippler, saying that he owns the stars that make him rich to buy more stars. The prince thinks it is of no great consequence to own stars since he is of no use to what he owns, and the Businessman has no answer to the prince's argument. The Lamplighter is another example not only of imprisonment but also of unfulfillment. He complains all the time about his duty, longing for rest and sleep (escape), but that only makes things harder. His misfortune, as it usually happens with the type of people he represents, is that he wants to be doing something different from what he has to do. This is a basic conflict in human nature: the ideal life we want versus the actual life that we have to cope with. It is the cause of people's unhappiness that there is never any balance, any way to find a solution.

The Coalheavers in *A Dream Play* also resemble the Lamplighter, in that they are the eternally dissatisfied working class, complaining of their duties. They are also like the Conceited Man, in that they think their work is essential ("We are the foundations of society. If the coal is not unloaded, then there will be no fire in the kitchen stove, in the parlour grate, or in the factory furnace; then the light will go out in the streets and shops and homes; then darkness and cold will descend upon you - and, therefore, we have to sweat as in hell so that the black coals may be had - And what do you do for us in return?" - p. 80). As we have seen, the inability to come to terms with life and with the human condition implies an attempt to escape, to find some way out of bitter reality. The Master of Quarantine, in *A Dream Play*, also tries to escape from the decadent environment he has to live in by blackening his face and wearing costumes. "That is why I go in for masquerades and carnivals and amateur theatricals" (p. 61), he confesses. A vain attempt to run away from reality...

As the little prince proceeds on his journey, suffering from his disillusion and claiming that "Grown-ups are very strange!", the daughter of Indra also continues with her painful visit to the earth remarking that "Men are to be pitied!". They find it more and more difficult to understand human nature, as they participate in, observing and sharing, human suffering. The little prince experiences suffering more concretely as he actually arrives on the earth, and realizes that "men occupy a very small place upon the earth, even though they imagine that they fill a great deal of space and fancy themselves as important as the baobabs" (p. 57). A snake tells him that it is very lonely to be among men. A flower tells him that men have no roots and that makes life very difficult. A mountain just echoes whatever he says. And he concludes that the earth is dry,

pointed, harsh and forbidding. Here we are reminded of Agnes's first impression of the earth, when she told her father that the air was dense and polluted, and that human speech, from the distance, sounded unhappy. The prince, who had many times recalled and missed his flower, regretting to have left her, finds himself in a flower garden, and learns that she is not the only one of her kind in the universe. He cries with disappointment, because it is not easy to have to admit that the things we thought were great and unusual are simply banal and common. We see that the prince is growing and developing into a whole human being, like a teenager when he first starts analysing and actually seeing the world in a new perspective. One cannot avoid deception and suffering when an illusion is unmasked giving room to the though reality...

The daughter of Indra also experiences real suffering when she is seen as a common housewife, unable to cope with the everyday problems and with the disintegration of her marriage with the Lawyer. Their life together has become unbearable, no matter how hard they try to make it bearable. Their unsuccessful marriage is symbolized by the image of a pin, which the lawyer explains to the officer, "You see two prongs, but it is only one pin. It is two, yet only one. If I bend it open, it is a single piece. If I bend it back, there are two, but they remain one for all that. It means: these two are one. But if I break - like this! - then they become two". (. 58). They cannot be two in one and have inevitably to separate. The officer remarks, "The hair-pin is the most perfect of all created things. A straight line which equals two parallel ones" (p. 58). This is how marriage should be but most of the times ins't. Another human institution that disillusion Agnes. The lawyer does try to help Agnes, when she is playing the role of his wife, by showing her the truth and trying to help her face reality. But it is simply too much suffering for her...

Agnes departs from the lawyer in search of Fairhaven, but she finds herself in Foulstrand. It is a quarantine station, a place where the sick are kept and, ironically enough, where the rich people are found - Men who have abused the privileges of being materially powerful and had to face the results of their own unconsciousness. The kind of disease most of them have is canker, which destroys without compassion. Money, then, proves useless in their case, and they have to watch the gradual disintegration of their bodies. As with the Businessman, the King, and the Conceited Man, in *The Little Prince*, their possessions and pride were proved useless. When Agnes finally reaches Fairhaven, she also meets suffering. A couple ("He" and "She")

who seem to be very happy and perfect are condemned to go to Foul-strand. When they claim that they have done nothing to deserve suffering, the Master of Quarantine, without further justifications, simply remarks, "It is not necessary to have done anything wrong in order to encounter life's little pricks" (p. 65). "She" turns out to be the Officer's lover and that makes suffering worse for all of them. The Officer, who had set up new objectives to his life, is twice disillusioned. His anticipation of a life of work as a teacher, followed by a peaceful retirement, is also displayed as an unhappy and "dreadful" phase (p. 66). Agnes has once more to admit that "Life is evil! Men are to be pitied!...

To illustrate that certain things in life are inexplicable, there is a short dialog between the Officer and a Teacher about the logic of facts. Their conclusion is that "logic itself is silly and the whole world is silly" (p. 71), while suffering cannot be avoided, it is part of the human condition. Another married couple who also seem to be very happy, affirm that "at the heart of happiness grows the seed of disaster" (p. 72). This truth makes people even fear happiness because "the presentiment of the coming end destroys joy in the very hour of its culmination" (p. 72). The Lawyer returns later to reinforce this truth - "Pleasure seems to decay, and all joy goes to pieces. What men call success serves always as a basis for their next failure. All life is nothing but doing things over again" (p. 75). Ironically enough, the man whom they point out to be "the most envied mortal in this neighborhood" (p. 72) is a blind man. He has many material goods and properties, but he cannot see, and this is enough reason to bring suffering. He cannot even see his son who is departing, and he concludes, with the wisdom of Tiresias in his blindness, "Meet and part. Part and meet. That is life" (p. 74).

Agnes longs for the heights where she came from... But first she goes into "the solitude and wilderness" of the shores of the Mediterranean. There she will recover "her own self" and leave her message of truth with the Poet (p. 76). (We are reminded here of the talk of the prince in the desert, with the narrator of *The Little Prince*, where he also transmits to the narrator his message of truth). Agnes takes the Poet to "the place where the King of the heavens is said to listen to the complaints of the mortals" (p. 82). She shows the Poet her image of humankind. "Everything on earth that is not burned, is drowned - by the waves. Look at this... See what the sea has taken and spoiled! Nothing but the figure-heads remain of the sunken ships - and the names: Justice, Friendship, Golden Peace, Hope - this is all that is left of Hope - of fickle Hope - Railings,



tholes, bails! And lo: the life buoy - which saved itself and let distressed men perish" (p. 85). The poet tries to understand the daughter of Indra. He has the sensitivity of an artist, and is thus closer to heaven, to elevated thoughts that go beyond the limitations of common people. He is beyond the common reality of humankind and is able to express it in a poem, which he defines as "a written supplication from humanity to the ruler of the universe, formulated by a dreamer" (p. 86). Poetry is the same thing as dream - "more than reality," as Agnes puts it. Agnes's suffering is close to an end. She can no longer bear her present condition, and she tells the poet she will ascend ("As soon as I have consigned this mortal shape to the flames - for even the waters of the ocean cannot cleanse me"- p. 86).

The little prince is also discouraged with life. He has learned many things, but the true lesson comes from a fox. Foxes are known for being sly, cunning, and devious animals, and it was not without purpose that Saint-Exupéry chose one to play an essential role in the prince's development. They meet each other when both feel sad, bored, and lonely. The fox asks the prince to tame him, and it takes a long time for the prince to understand what the fox means. At first he replies that he has no time to tame the fox, because he is looking for friends and still has many things to understand. This situation is common in our every day life. Thousands of times we look for something which is beside us all the time and yet we do not perceive it. We usually think that what we long for is very distant from us, and that is why we miss so many good opportunities in life. The fox, then, starts his lesson to prove how wrong the little prince has been. (There is some connection here with the role that the lawyer plays in the daughter's life, when he wants to show her the truth). The fox says, "One only understands the things that one tames," and then he adds, "Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends anymore. If you want a friend, tame me..." (p. 67).

And the fox teaches the prince how to tame him. It will demand patience and will power... They will have to start out by being distant from each other and remaining silent ("Words are the source of misunderstanding", the fox says - p. 67)... It is a long process of acknowledgment. Everyday they come closer, become more acquainted, and gradually tame each other. A true friendship ties them together and they are happy. But the day of departure comes very soon, and the fox is sad. The prince cannot understand his friend's sadness, and the fox uses his cunning methods again. He tells the prince to go over to the garden and think about his flower among

some other flowers. Only by comparison is one able to discern things and draw conclusions. Talking to the flowers, the prince realizes how important and unique his own flower is. And the fox explains to him: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye... It is the time you have wasted for you rose that makes your rose so important" (pp.70-71). We have to agree with the fox as the little prince does. Many times we forget this truth. The earth is indeed full of people who reason all the time but forget to feel... People who give too much importance to their work and neglect their feelings, thus becoming materialists, making their lives empty of real sentiment... People who think they love but who do not feel responsible for what they have tamed...

The little prince is certainly wiser and richer when he leaves his friend, as Agnes is when she leaves the Poet. But they still have more to endure. Agnes wants to see the mystery of the door solved before she ascends. She thinks that behind the door she will finally find the solution to "the riddle of life", but there is nothing behind it. and the Dean of the Faculty of Theology says, "Nothing! That is the solution of the world-riddle. In the beginning God created heaven and the earth out of nothing -" (p. 96). Agnes admits that they have said what the world-riddle is, but they have not understood it. And only to the Poet she explains it: "The world, existence, mankind, are nothing but a phantom, an appearance, a dream-image... a dream of truth! There you have suffering as a liberator. But this craving for suffering comes into conflict with the craving for enjoyment, or love - do you now understand what love is, with its utmost joys merged into its utmost sufferings, with its mixture of what is most sweet and most bitter?" (pp. 100-10,). She also explains her position as a woman, and what her mission on earth has been: "Can you now grasp what woman is? Woman, through whom sin and death found their way into life?... Conflict between opposites produces energy, as fire and water give the power of steam -..." (p. 101). And when asked from what she suffered most of all while on earth, she replies, "From - Being..." (p. 102).

The little prince also adds more to his knowledge, this time from the men he has wanted so much to meet. At a railway station he is amazed to see how often trains come up and down, carrying people from one place to another. The Switchman, who resembles the Portress of a *A Dream Play* in their function of observing people, tells him, "No one is ever satisfied where he is... They are pursuing nothing at all..." (p. 73). "Only the children

i.e., the innocent know what they are looking for...", is what the prince concludes. The Merchant makes him see that the artificiality of modern life on earth is something pitiable. Men invent things with the excuse that they are saving time, but they neglect the face that nature can supply them with all they really need. And that real pleasure derives from the simple and natural things. The little prince has kept the secret that the fox taught him fixed in his mind. And when he transmits his knowledge to the narrator of the story, who had been busy all the time trying to fix his airplane, he makes some other analogies that make him even wiser: "What is essential is invisible to the eye"... Then he looks at the sky and says, "the stars are beautiful because of a flower that cannot be seen"... He looks around him, and concludes, "What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well..." (p. 75).

The narrator also makes some analogies and all of a sudden he understands everything and admires the prince. Now he can understand what is essential in the prince, because he is looking at him with the heart. Knowledge has also brought the narrator some disillusion. He feels grief, but accepts the prince's criticism of what he had considered so great - his drawings. He is learning how to overcome his selfishness. He feels sorrow, but accepts the facts that he will have to part from his friend. And he concludes, "One runs the risk of weeping a little, is one lets himself be tamed..." (p- 81). We can immediately see some connection here with the passage of *A Dream Play* in which the Blind Man recalls the wisdom of a child. At the moment of his father's departure, when he was asked why man has to weep when he is sad, the child had given a brief explanation, "Because the glass in the eyes must be washed now and then so that we can see clearly" (p. 73).

In the place where the narrator sees the prince for the last time there is the ruin of an old stone wall. A wall can signify some kind of imprisonment, but it is contrasted with the mood of the prince's departure, which represents freedom. The prince is now free to leave his human form, and go back to his planet and to his flower. Now he will be able to love her deeply and thoroughly. The narrator also feels a sense of accomplishment and realization. His heart is full of love for the prince, and gratitude for all he has learned. The moment of departure, with sadness at first, turns out to be like the blossom of a flower - gratifying, meaningful, and beautiful. It all depends on the way we look at things...

In the place where Agnes, the Daughter of Indra, leaves the earth to return to her father's world, the growing castle consumes

itself in fire, as if to represent Agnes's death as a human being. Agnes puts her shoes into the fire, and all her fellow sufferers during her experience on earth contribute to increase the fire she has started. But it is also a moment of freedom. The bud on the apex of the castle opens into a gigantic chrysanthemum. The flower springing out of the flames symbolizes Agnes's liberation from the human condition - from suffering. What causes suffering is the human condition. The Daughter of Indra is freed from flesh and is thus freed from suffering. The chrysanthemum will remain, as the little prince will also remain in the stars, to prove that LOVE overcomes everything. By assuming the human condition, Agnes and the little prince assumed human suffering, an act of renunciation which only LOVE is able to accomplish. They did not abolish suffering, but they showed, through their example, that there can still be hope. They accomplished their mission in their journey, leaving behind them the products of their message for life - LOVE, symbolized by the stars and the chrysanthemum. They will remain, to prove that love, though it cannot solve everything, is the salvation of humankind, the only way life can be endured, the only way to achieve the real freedom...

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Antoine de Saint Exupéry. The Little Prince, trans. Katherine Woods (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>August Strindberg, The Dream Play, IN. Plays by August Strindberg. trans. Edwin Bjorkman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 26.

All page numbers refer to the above editions.

<sup>3</sup>Maurice Valency, The Flower and the Castle, An Introduction to Modern Drama, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 332.

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