

Research Article

The Little Prince of Saint Exupery: A Mourning Work

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Abstract

Antoine de Saint Exupery writes *The Little Prince* in 1943. He lives in New York with his wife Consuelo. He draws little fellows on table cloths and napkins and his editors suggest him to write a tale for children illustrated by him. *The Little Prince* is the story of a little fellow coming from an asteroid, who becomes the friend of an aviator who crashed in the desert with his plane just like Saint Exupery. The little fellow dies at the end of the tale, bitten by a snake and returns to his asteroid. I asked myself like Freud for *Gradiva*, if Saint Exupery had not lost a brother or a friend in his childhood. Yes he did, like Jensen the author of *Gradiva*, the story of a young girl who relives in Pompei. The tale of the *Little Prince* repeats a great friendship of the childhood and is a mourning work. The *Little Prince* reminds me the *Gradiva* of Jensen and the link made by Freud between the revival of a young girl in Pompei and the life of the author. The function of writing is to symbolize, to recreate, to repair. In the *Little Prince* there is also a mourning work.

Keywords

Mourning, Literature Creation, Art Creation, Symbolization, Daydream, Applied Psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

In *The literary creator and fantasy*, [3] Freud asks himself the question: where does the literary creator take his material? I answer: in the present events, the past events and also the depth of his unconscious.

I will show you how the trauma can arise in the writing of a novel, how the unconscious desire of the author allows him the revival of a great friendship with his brother who died at age sixteen. *The Little Prince* [11] of Saint Exupéry is the repetition of a great fraternal friendship interrupted by death, that of the brother then that of the little Prince who returns to his asteroid.

I associated with Freud's text *Delusion and dreams in Jensen's Gradiva*. [1] Freud makes a link between the reliving of a young girl in what can be considered a cemetery and a sister he could have lost in his youth. It is an ingenious intuition:

Jansen has been brought up with a young girl who died of tuberculosis at age eighteen.

In 2022, it was the eightieth anniversary of the publication of *The Little Prince* written during the 1942 summer in New York. It is the worldwide best seller book after the Bible. Thomas Pesquet took it with him on the orbital station!

A Jean Claude Idée's play revealed to me the context in which had been conceived the *Little Prince*, staging Saint Exupéry and his wife Consuelo on the terrace of a colonial house with his friend Denis de Rougemont. Saint Exupéry's mistress Sylvia Hamilton appears at the end and Saint Exupéry gives her the manuscript of *The Little prince*. The play reveals us many elements on the bursting of the creative process.

In an exhibit at the Museum of Decorative Arts I found a lot of drawings from Saint Exupéry before and while conceiving

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The Little Prince revealing the evolution of the pictorial creative process.

In my childhood, the Little Prince was offered by the author to my parents when they lived in Washington. Saint Exupéry spent evenings and nights talking with my father, an aviator like him.

I deliver to you what is at the origin of this text: a play, an exhibit and childhood memories.

2. Method: The Writing of the Little Prince

2.1. Exile in the United States

In November 1940, Saint Exupéry left France for the United States to encourage the Americans to enter the war with the intention of spending a month there. On the boat he meets Jean Renoir who becomes a friend and wants to do a movie about his book *Wind, Sand and Stars* [10]. In 1942 he still lives in the States, in New York. He wants to leave and fight for his country against the Germans but he is forty-two years old and it is no longer possible for him to pilot fighter planes. He knows that a landing is being prepared in North Africa but does not know the date.

His wife Consuelo lives in the south east of France. He learns that she has a love affair with a man in Marseille. He sends a telegram and asks her to come to New York. When arrived he rents an apartment on top of his and Consuelo feels humiliated. Numerous arguments with broken dishes occurs. Consuelo lives her life with her surrealist friends. When Antoine wants to join her, he finds the apartment empty. He becomes depressed, runs bars to get drunk, hangs out with whores and also takes drugs.

2.2. Conception of the Work

He goes through a depressive period despite the success of *Wind Sand and Stars* (American version of *Terre des Hommes*). His publishers are worried and suggest he write a new book. They see him drawing little men on paper napkins and tablecloths. They think of a children story, an aviator in the desert and he could do himself the drawings.

Saint Exupéry, surprised at first, finds the idea attractive because he spent a year at the Beaux Arts when he was a teenager and it reminds him his beginnings at Aeropostale.

Consuelo encourages him in this path. The summer heat is unbearable in New York and Antoine asks her to find a rental on Long Island. She discovers a colonial house in a large park and the owner, great reader of Saint Exupéry lends the house for the writing of his new book.

2.3. Gestation and Delivery

The couple will find themselves in a heavenly place where

they will spend happy days. Antoine works in the big office. and Consuelo paints in a wing. They bathe early in the morning. Antoine offers a dog to Consuelo and they run him on the beach. It is a new honeymoon, eleven years after their marriage in 1931. A friend Denis de Rougemont comes to join them on the week-end and they play chess. Maurois and his wife are the only other visitors. Saint Exupéry awakes them at night to read what he has written. At the end of the summer the tale is almost finished. He will end it at fall.

You can understand the process of creation in a wonderful house and park in Long Island, a new honeymoon with his wife and friends to listen to his creative work. This work will be a great success all over the world! The publishers had a brilliant idea to give this inspiration to the creator.

3. Result: A Tale for Children, a Philosophical Story for Adults

This is a text that can be red or “un-red”, in the meaning of André Green [4]. This is what we call a novel “à clef” which has a hidden meaning and proceeds by association of ideas, metaphors and symbolization. It is a daydream.

It is the story of a friendship between a pilot and a Little Prince from an asteroid. The aviator is broken down in the desert and has eight days of water supply to repair the engine. There is a vital risk. I associate on the airplane crash in the Libyan desert that almost cost Saint Exupéry’s life.

The Little Prince looks like Antoine as a child but also like his brother François, two years younger, blonde with tousled hair. The aviator and the Little Prince are going to look for a well. They will find it on the eighth day and quench their thirst at the same source. The aviator repairs his engine and the Little Prince tells him that he is going back to his asteroid. A snake bite and the death of the Little Prince will separate them. Despite his publisher’s opinion (an end finishing by death is not possible in a tale for children) Saint Exupéry holds on... This means that it was important for him! Death is symbolized by a yellow lightning, the snake near the ankle of the Little Prince. The last has soothing words:

“When you are consoled, you will be happy to have known me. I will look like I was in pain, I will look a little like I was dying, don’t come and see that. I can’t take this body, it is too heavy. It will be an old abandoned bark”.

4. Discussion

The Little Prince of Saint Exupéry reminds me the Gradiva of Jensen and the link made by Freud between the revival of a young girl in Pompeii and the life of the author. Freud writes to Jensen a letter and asks him if he did not lost a sister in his youth. At first, Jensen denies and then remember that he was brought up with a dear friend and she died of tuberculosis at age sixteen. Freud makes a link between the novel of a writer and his life. What a genial intuition and interpretation!

So I ask myself the question: did Saint Exupery lose a brother in his youth? I knew nothing about Saint Exupery's life and the biography of Virgil Tanase gave me the answer. The author was confronted with several bereavements in his childhood, first the death of his father when he was four years old (a stroke) then his paternal uncle during 14-18 war at age seventeen then a year later his younger brother. He was very attached to his brother, his playmate, his accomplice and we can think that his death was a terrible ordeal for him which may have awakened the previous deaths of his father and uncle.

In January 1917, the two brothers come back to Friborg after the end of year holidays. François loses his coat. He catches cold and a crisis of acute rheumatic fever and cardiac problems will lead him to death a few months later.

The story of the Little prince tells about a friendship between the aviator and a young boy coming from an asteroid like an angel coming from the sky. The aviator just crashed with his plane in the desert and may die. That is what happened to the writer who was an aviator. Death anxiety may have remind the author the death of his younger brother of two years at age eighteen, a great friend for him after the death of his father when he was four.

The novel is a sublimation, a creative mourning work [2, 5, 6, 9] Saint Exupery wants to end his novel by the death of the Little Prince despite the opinion of his editors (no death in a tale for children).

Saint Exupery in *Flight to Arras* [12] (*Pilote de guerre*) tells that the nurse of François awakes him and his brother says: "I wanted to talk to you before dying... I am going to die... don't be afraid... I don't suffer... I have no pain... I would like to make my will." He bequeaths him a steam engine, a bicycle, a rifle, and expires twenty minutes later. We can understand Antoine's pain and the feeling of guilt to be alive, to be the only man in the family to survive. His brother wanted to be an aviator. Antoine will choose this profession where one risks.

Author Contributions

Michelle Morin is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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