

Analysis of Symbolism and Hidden Meaning in The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

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Abstract

The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is a children's book that talks about the little prince, who comes from another planet that is also known as Asteroid B 612. One day, the little prince decided to leave his planet to learn about the meanings of life. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote this book to show the young readers about the importance of love, friendships, the matter of consequence, and to express his experience on life. The research method that will be used in this research is the descriptive qualitative method and the approach with the theory of symbolism by Charles Baudelaire. In the result and discussion, the researcher will talk about the hidden meanings behind the story of The Little Prince. In this novel, the author represents several kinds of people in adulthood through the six characters that the little prince met in his adventure, they are the king, the conceited man, the businessman, the drinker, the lamplighter, and the geographer. The novel also explains the importance of friendship represented by the character of fox. In addition, the author also describes the relationship between him and his wife which is represented by the relationship between the little prince and his rose. Finally, the author expresses his trauma of grief through the melancholy relationship between the narrator and the little prince.

Keywords: Symbolism, Representation, Children Literature, Literature Analysis, Novel.

Abstrak

The Little Prince karya Antoine de Saint-Exupéry merupakan sebuah novel anak yang menceritakan tentang little prince yang berasal dari sebuah planet bernama Asteroid B 612. Suatu hari, little prince memutuskan untuk meninggalkan planetnya dan berkelana mencari makna kehidupan. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry menulis buku ini dengan tujuan menunjukkan kepada para pembaca muda tentang makna cinta, persahabatan, dan masalah konsekuensi serta mengekspresikan pengalaman hidupnya. Metode penelitian yang akan digunakan yaitu metode deskriptif kualitatif dan pendekatan simbolisme oleh Charles Baudelaire. Hasil pembahasan akan membahas tentang makna-makna tersembunyi yang terdapat dalam novel The Little Prince. Dalam novel ini penulis merepresentasikan beberapa macam manusia pada masa dewasa melalui keenam karakter yang ditemui oleh little prince dalam petualangannya yaitu the king, the conceited man, the businessman, the drinker, the lamplighter, dan the geographer. Novel ini juga menyampaikan tentang makna penting persahabatan yang direpresentasikan oleh karakter fox. Selain itu, penulis juga mendeskripsikan tentang hubungannya dengan istrinya yang direpresentasikan dengan hubungan antara little prince dan mawarnya. Terakhir, penulis mengekspresikan traumanya akan rasa duka melalui hubungan melankolis antara narator dan little prince.

Kata kunci: Simbolisme, Representasi, Sastra Anak, Analisis Sastra, Novel

INTRODUCTION

Symbolism is a movement that started in the half end of the 19th century in France. At the beginning, symbolism was used to define the true meaning behind a poem, then it started to be used in other forms of literary works. Charles Baudelaire was believed as the inventor of the symbolism theory in the 19th Century, then followed by Arthur Rimbaud,

Paul Verlaine, and Stephane Mallarmé in the next period. They believe that every poet will always have different styles and uniqueness to express themselves in symbolism.

On the other hand, the symbolism adhered by Charles Baudelaire did not use the conventional meaning as it used in the semiotic. It is also different from the romantics that defined symbolic value based

on the privilege of the object, while for Baudelaire everything always has symbolic value. To avoid the explicit meaning in his poem, Baudelaire used symbolism as the main tools to express his feelings and ideas. This form of symbolism became a new movement in art and literature, as to understand the meaning in a poem, it needed to be an equality between the meaning and the object that was used as symbolism.

In this research, the researcher will use the symbolism theory by Charles Baudelaire, to analyze the hidden meanings in a children's book, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is a French children's book that was published in 1943. Because of the uniqueness it has, *The Little Prince* received very well by the critics after the publication. It got translated into 250 languages and placed in the third best selling books, after *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The story started with a young boy called the Little Prince who wandered to seven planets to find the meaning of life. He left his planet, Asteroid B 612 because he was tired of getting rid of the baobabs there, and the reason that he did not want to admit, to stay away from his rose. He moves from one planet to another to find a friend and a place that will suit him. From planet one to six he moves, until he finally arrives on earth, the planet that the Geographer recommends him to visit.

On the earth, he finally meets the precious friend that he dreams of. However, he also finds out that his rose was lying to him this whole time, that she is not the only one of her kind. The feeling of betrayal and the regret of leaving his rose will be the main reason for his act later in this book. On the earth he also meets the narrator who is also a Pilot that will be the last friend the Little Prince had. Together with the Little Prince, the narrator will learn about the important meaning behind the matters of consequence.

Interesting fact about the book is that

the story has a special relations with its author. In the "extra materials for young readers" page, it declared that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry himself has experience as a Pilot. He loves flying so much that he always writes something that relates to it. In the pages that talked about the author, it's explained that the Little Prince had many hidden meanings that related to the author's representation of the meaning of life and to his own life experiences. With this explanation the researcher will use this matter as the main topic of this research.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, the method that will be used is a descriptive qualitative method with the approach of symbolism theory by Charles Baudelaire. The main object of this research are symbolism to analyze the hidden meanings in the novel *The Little Prince*. The data used in this research is descriptive data written in the novel *The Little Prince* in the form of sentences with implied meanings and their representations in the author's life. In this research, there will be primary and secondary data that will be used. The primary data is from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry English translation edition that will be published in 2019 with 112 pages. The secondary data in this research are some journals about the symbolism theory by Charles Baudelaire. The data collection technique used by researchers is by describing and elaborating on the implied meaning contained in the novel. The application of qualitative descriptive methods is intended to obtain data that is real and produce data that prioritizes its meaning.

FINDING(S) AND DISCUSSION

The Little Prince is an unique children's book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry that talks about adventure, love, friendships, and the matter of consequence. In this book, the little prince wandered from one planet to another to find the true meaning of friendship and life. There are some quotes with the hidden

meanings that will be analyzed in this research.

In the beginning of the story, the narrator or also known as the Pilot was telling the story of his six years old self drawing a boa constrictor digesting an elephant.

"My drawing was not a bat. It showed a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. I then drew the insides of the boa constrictor, so that the grown-ups could understand" (pg 6)

He showed it to the adults, instead of supporting him, the adults misinterpreted the drawing and advised him to focus on other important things such as geography, history, mathematics, and grammar.

"The grown-ups advised me to set drawings of open or closed boa constrictor aside, and to concentrate instead on geography, history, mathematics, and grammar. So it was, at the age of six, that I abandoned a magnificent career as a painter." (pg 6)

In the quotation above, it shows how adults are so logical and have a closed-mind imagination. The fact that they also don't really care about how children see and express things differently. This act could have a serious effect on children that will be part of their personality when they grow-up.

From this sentence, Saint-Exupéry wants to express the importance of imagination. He wants the adult reader to remember that as a child, they also used to have a magical way of seeing anything in this world. The adult should not be rude or try to kill children's imagination by letting them bury their dreams. As the narrator of this book abandoned their dream of being a painter.

After abandoning his dream as painter, the narrator grew up to become a pilot. He also learned how to interact logically with the adults as they pleased to know such a reasonable man.

The narrator grew up and lived alone with no one to talk to. Yet, everything changes

when he has a breakdown in the Saharan desert as something failed his plane's engine. This is the beginning of his meeting with the little prince, and all the story that the Little Prince would tell him.

One day, the little prince told him about the rose he has in his home planet. This rose, which became one of the reasons the little prince left his planet, was described as an unmodest flower. Both the little prince and his rose love each other, yet they are too young to understand how to appreciate and love each other. It became a burden to the little prince and made him leave his planet, yet he regretted this action after.

"I got it all wrong! I should have judged her on her deeds and not on her words. She gave me fragrance and light. I should never run away! I should have noticed the tenderness behind her feeble wiles. Flowers are so contradictory! But I was too young to know how to love her." (pg 29)

The quotation above shows the little prince's frustration and worry toward his rose. From the relationship between the little prince and the rose, Saint-Exupéry placed a hidden meaning that related to his life. It explained that the love between the little prince and his rose reflected Saint-Exupéry's stormy relationship with his wife. The prince has left the rose because she could be so proud, arrogant, and grumpy, yet beneath the stress of the relationship, he realizes that they miss each other too much for him to stay away. The same thing happened to Saint-Exupéry's relationship with his wife.

Furthermore, Saint-Exupéry also described the representation of adults by the six characters that the little prince met in the six planets. The first character is the king, a lonely individual that is obsessed with the idea of being a king, although he can not force any individual to obey him.

"If I ordered a general change into a seabird, and the general did not obey, it would not be the general's fault."

It will be my fault.” (pg 33)

This character represents an adult that always wants to rule, although they know in their heart that no one can rule anyone unless force is used.

The second character is the conceited man who always thinks he is the best and wants to be admired.

“To ‘admire’ means to recognize that I am the handsomest, the best-dressed, and the richest, and the most intelligent man on the planet.” “But you’re the only man on your planet!” “Do me a favour. Admire me even so!” (pg 40).

This character represents someone who really wants to get attention, even if the admiration is faked rather than sincere.

The third character is the drinker. This character clearly represents adults that are always drinking alcohol whenever something goes wrong in their life. This character represents someone that always drowns in their sadness and becomes addicted to alcohol.

“Why are you drinking?” the little prince asked. “To forget,” replied the drinker. “To forget what?” wondered the little prince, feeling sorry for him already. “To forget that I’m ashamed,” admitted the drinker, bowing his head. “Ashamed of what?” asked the little prince, wanting to help him. “Ashamed that I’m drinking!” concluded the drinker who buried himself in silence once and for all (pg 40-41).

Seeing how miserable the drinker is, the little prince wanted to help him. But when he knows the reason, the little prince realizes that it would be useless giving help to someone like this. There are a bunch of adults like this representation in the real world, and just like the little prince did, helping them would be useless. The only person who could help them is themselves.

The fourth character is the businessman who was so busy that he didn't even raise his

head as the little prince appeared. He claims that he owned all the stars in the sky.

*“What's the point of owning the stars?”
“The point is to be rich” (pg 44).*

This character represents the adults that's very drowned in their works as their only goal is to be rich. They don't really care about anything else such as their family or friends, and end up abandoning them.

The fifth character is the lighter of streetlamps. This character is similar to the businessman who is very busy, yet so different as all he wants is to get some rest. When the little prince met him, he was so pleased as the lighter of streetlamps is the only person that's not “full of himself.”

“It may well be that this man is absurd. And yet he’s less absurd than the king, the conceited man, the businessman, and the drinker. At least there’s some points to his work.” (pg 46)

When he landed on this planet, he greeted the lamplighter respectfully. When suddenly his curiosity comes, and he asks his question to the lamplighter.

*“But then why have you just lit it again?”
“It’s my job,” replied the lamplighter.
“I don’t understand,” said the little prince.
“There’s nothing to understand,” said the lamplighter.
“A job is a job. Good morning” (pg 46).*

This character represents the fact that as adults, people need to work to survive. Although the job might be something that they don't really want to do. They must do it as it is also part of their responsibility. It might be exhausting, yet they have no choices.

The sixth and last character is the geographer. This character is someone who knows all about geography, yet he never goes on adventure. To get all the data he needs, he only waits for the traveler to visit him and he will ask all the questions to get the

information.

"You go and see?"

"No. That's too complicated. Rather one insists that the explorer provide proof. If for instance we're talking about the discovery of a large mountain, one insists that he bring back some large stones" (pg 51).

This character shows that as adults, people usually only know things that are related to their work. They might know many things that are related to their job, yet they don't understand anything outside of it. As adults they are also forced to be professional, that they have no time to do or learn something they used to like as a child.

As it already mentioned above, Saint-Exupéry wants to show the important lesson of life, one of them is friendship. As an adult is more focused on things they claim are important, they grow-up losing their friends. The narrator or the pilot is one of the most important friends that the little prince has. Yet, he also meets another friend, known as the fox.

The fox represents someone who got excluded from society. Someone who felt lonely and wanted to make friends, yet they were also scared of getting hurt so they acted like they didn't need anyone in their life.

When the fox meets the little prince, he asks the little prince to tame him. As the word "tame" here means to be friends. The friendship they had is not something instant, the fox said that to tame him, the little prince will need to be patient. He needs to meet him everyday, where they will get closer day by day.

The fox also described friendship as something special. When they are not friends, that person is just an ordinary human being, but when they become friends, that person will mean a lot to them.

"As far as I'm concerned, you're just another little boy, no different from a hundred thousand other little boys. I don't need you. And you don't need me either. As far

as you're concerned, I'm just a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, we'll need one another. You will be unique in the world for me. I will be unique in the world for you..." (pg 64).

Sadly, in every meeting there would be a goodbye. After being friends for a while, come the time for the little prince to go. This farewell might hurt the fox, as the little prince became very important to him. But the time they spend together is worth more than anything. Before the little prince said goodbye, the fox told him a secret.

"Here's my secret. It's very simple: you can only see clearly with your heart. What's essential is invisible to the eye" (pg 70).

The secret that the fox said means that to understand something, we need to see it with our heart not our eyes (the eyes here means something logical). Because something important is not visible when we see it in logical ways. Sometimes, the thing that we need the most is already around us.

Moreover, Saint-Exupéry wrote this book to tell the young readers, not only about the good things in life but also the opposite. As in the explanation above, he gives 6 representations of adults, and the importance of friendship. He also wanted to show that the things that look weak can be the most dangerous. In this case, Saint-Exupéry illustrates it by the snake. At first, the little prince thought about how funny the snake was. He did not believe that the snake could be very dangerous and could kill anyone in 30 minutes.

As the snakes might sound wise and wanted to help the little prince. But it also speaks in riddles that always have more than one meaning. The snake said that it can help the little prince to go back to his planet, but this statement also has another meaning. As the snake will bite him, to send him back to his planet. In other words, it will kill the little prince. With his innocent mind, the little

prince agreed to let the snake bite him.

"I'm telling you this... also because of the snake. He mustn't bite you...Snakes are cruel, they can bite you for the fun of it" (pg 84).

The way the snake manipulated the little prince to let it bite him, shows that in this world there will be some people that might bring us into trouble, yet sounds like they wanted to help us. This kind of person is someone that we need to be careful with.

In the end of the story, Saint-Exupéry also wanted to illustrate how to face grief. For thirty minutes after the little prince got bit by the snake, he spent his time talking to the pilot for the last time. He asks the pilot to leave him alone, as he doesn't want the pilot to see him dying. But the pilot doesn't want to leave him because he is not ready to lose the little prince.

"When you look at the sky at night, because I will be living on one of them, because I will be laughing on one of them, it will be for you as if all the stars are laughing. So you will have stars that know how to laugh!" (pg 83).

The sentence above explains that the little prince wants the pilot to look at the sky and remember that he is happy. He wants the pilot to remember that they used to spend time together, and that he is already happy and free in the sky, back to his planet safely.

This part of the story is actually related to the author's experience. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry lost his father when he was three years old. He also lost his younger brother, who got ill with rheumatic fever. When they were in Switzerland, his brother got very ill, and back at home he died, with Antoine at his bed. This tragedy had a deep effect on Antoine, which he later put in the relationship between the narrator and the little prince that had been explained above.

CONCLUSION(S)

In the novel *The Little Prince* by

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the researcher finds symbolism of hidden meanings that relate to the author's experience and the meaning of life.

Saint-Exupéry expresses how adults sometimes make the children upset, and becomes the reason for children giving up his dreams. It illustrates in the beginning of the story, when the narrator abandons his dream of being a painter after adults criticize his drawing and asks him to concentrate on important things such as mathematics, history, geography, and grammar.

The author also wants to show the representation for different kinds of people in adulthood. There are the king who is obsessed with the idea of being a king, the conceited man who wants to be admired, the businessman who owns all the stars in the sky, the drinker who can't stop himself from drinking, the lamplighter who got exhausted with his job, and the geographer who is very professional with his job.

Besides the good side of life, the author also wants to show the reader that there would be some bad people that we need to be careful with. These people could have a bad effect on us, or bring us to a dangerous situation. The author represents these issues with the snake. As the snake always talks in riddles, all of his statements will always have more than one meaning. The snake has manipulated the little prince by telling him that he could help him go back to his planet by biting him. In other words, the little prince will be killed by the poison of the snake, and his soul could go back to his planet.

This novel also represents some of the author's experiences. Such as the relationship between the little prince and his rose that represents the relationship between the author and his wife. The death of the little prince represents the death of Saint-Exupéry's younger brother that left a deep trauma for

him.

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