

Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince* as Scriptotherapeutic Inscription

Abstract

This research paper investigates how Antoine de Saint-Exupery in The Little Prince relates autobiographical elements with fictional ones and the significance of such narrative to deal with trauma. Saint-Exupery in this novella recounts his early days and his youthful days as a pilot but the story is not all about him. The narrative not only recounts what he experienced as a child and as an adult but also brings the fictional little prince into the center of this narrative. It is through the eyes of the little prince, that the narrator makes sense of the alien world and also his own. The writer had undergone childhood repressions and also traumatic experiences in the Second World War and his writing is examined as an attempt to come to the terms with these traumas. This paper draws primarily from the ideas of 'Scriptotherapy' from Suzette A. Henke and terminologies to discuss them from trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra as well as from life writings, particularly those that focus on the relation between autobiographical and fictional and the importance of performative aspect of writing. Paul de Man's insight from "Autobiography as Defacement" supports the argument regarding the construction of fictional self. Finally, the paper takes into consideration the therapeutic effect of fictionalizing self redrawing from Henke's suggestions.

Key Terms: Trauma, Scriptotherapy, Artistic and Therapeutic Functions

In Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince* the author conjures up a fantasy which can be argued to be a transfiguration of an autobiography. This paper at first examines the work in relation with the author's life and then proceeds towards the textual analysis to uncover his concerns and techniques. Although the narrative resembles with the structure of fables and parables, critics have often treated the subject matter

as autobiographical. Even the fictional character, the prince, who comes from another planet, can be argued to be the childhood projection of the adult author. The work is an integration of autobiographical and fictional elements in which the traumatic experiences of the author provides stimulus for writing.

In *The Little Prince*, the protagonist is all alone in the Sahara desert after his aircraft is broken. This book “is an allegory of Saint-Exupery’s own life-his search for childhood certainties and interior peace, his mysticism, his belief in human courage and brotherhood and his deep love for his wife” (James 1). The book is largely based on his personal experiences and also there is the personal imagination that allows the fictionalized rendition of autobiographical impulses. The first person narrative recounts the childhood memories supplemented by the fantastic tales.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery in his fabulous narrative *The Little Prince* expresses his childhood self from the very beginning of the book. He recounts his childhood days and the book he read then. “Once when I was six years old I saw a magnificent picture in the book, called True Stories from Nature, about the primeval forest” (Exupery 7). He then made an attempt to draw the outside picture of boa constrictor that had swallowed up an elephant. He showed it to the adults but they were not able to comprehend it. For them, it was simply a hat. His second drawing also went in vain. He was instead suggested to leave his future career as a painter and advised to “devote to geography, history, arithmetic, and grammar” (Exupery 9). The narrator “had been disheartened” (9). Even though the narrator is adult while he is writing this, he takes over the voice of his childhood self. “Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them” (9). The child was alienated because of adult’s ways of thinking and their power of denial. This is how the narrator left his childhood career and became a

pilot. He got the chance to travel all over the world and witnessed the ways of the adults. “I have lived a great deal among grown-ups. I have seen them intimately, close at hand. And that hasn’t much improved my opinion of them” (9). Still in his adulthood, the narrator takes over the voice of child. He addresses his counterparts as ‘grown-ups’ as if he was not one of them.

The narrator clearly has maintained the distance from the adults and still resides with his childhood self. The narrator maintains this distance throughout the book. He, at times, experiments with the people talking about “boa constrictors, or primeval forests, or stars” (10) and shows his painting but no one is concerned or correct about them. They consider him “a sensible man” when he makes conversation about “bridge, and golf, and politics, and neckties” (10). What is important for him is trivial for the adults and vice-versa. Saint-Exupery explores the problematic human relationship between the child and adult.

However, the representations of such issues are problematic themselves because the childhood traumatic experiences (dominance by adults in this particular case) are difficult to narrate. The feelings and emotions related to such distant and repressed memories are difficult to narrate. Suzette A. Henke in *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life-Writing* (2000) discusses the aspects of life-writing related to trauma victims or the ones who tries to cope with the long-repressed memories. She studies this in relation to the women’s life-writing who have undergone different types of trauma. Her study on the effect of writing is central to this research paper. She uses the term “Scriptotherapy” which is defined as, “the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment” (Henke, 12). This work revolves around the idea that Saint-Exupery tries to reconcile with the childhood memories not through direct

engagement with the audiences but through the solitary act of writing which is one of the characteristic of scriptotherapy. “Scriptotherapy, Henke’s term for life-writing, can be the means to recover memories long repressed and facilitate the resolution of fears without the presence of a listener. She argues that by writing one can come to understand and live with these memories” (Stanley 1). Thus, Saint-Exupery narrates in a humorous tone because he knew that only with literary imagination the issue can be dealt with.

Instead of particularizing the experience as exclusively his own, the author tries to make it more universal experience that most of the child go through in one form or another. “The experiences, relationships, and scenes of adversity related in autobiographical terms are read not only as details in an individual life, but as elements in a broader narrative of resistance to established norms and social prejudices. In contrast to this politicized drive toward an autobiography of integration, scriptotherapy is concerned with making explicit the divisions within an internally conflicted identity” (Clarke 221). This would appeal to the larger audience and even to those who have not gone through such dominance by adults. The imposition of authoritative adult views on the child has lasting impact even though, the child attempts to forget or bury those memories.

In addition to this, the author also demonstrates the troublesome relationship not only between child and adults but among adults themselves. This was based on his personal experience as a French Air Force Pilot during Second World War. He lived in a self-imposed exile to North America after the fall of France in Second World War. For him, war among the adults was irresponsible and silly act. This book “is a story of men, of the foolishness of some adults and the wisdom of childlike. It is a satire on people who take material and insignificant things too seriously and forget

that the basic ideas of life and happiness are more important” (Tamin 244). Human beings wage war on trivial issues.

The author contemplates about it but such issues are very difficult to expose, particularly when the war is such heinous and devastating. So, the author creates a fantastic tale and it is through the eyes of the little prince through which he expresses the dilemma and discontent that he was during the war. In the book the narrator “learns about love and truth, responsibility and relationships” (Cantrill 70) from the Little Prince. In the book Saint-Exupery is “primarily interested in expressing himself in a new medium” (Higgins 514). The little prince is a fictional character which the author conjures to express his own experience, ideas and convictions.

The author went through a traumatic experience when he crashed on a desert and nearly died of dehydration. In the book, there is an important reference to this part even though the traumatic experience is omitted. Rather this autobiographical part melts into a fabulous tale.

So I lived my life alone, without anyone that I could really talk to, until I had an accident with my plane in the Desert of Sahara, six years ago. Something was broken in my engine. And as I had with me neither a mechanic nor any passengers, I set myself to attempt the difficult repairs alone. It was a question of life or death for me: I had scarcely enough drinking water to last a week. (11)

There the little prince comes to him with a strange and sudden request to draw a sheep. However, Saint-Exupery thinks about his inability to draw. In his childhood when he had drawn the picture of boa constrictor which had swallowed an elephant, but his grown up friends had taken it for the picture of a hat. But, when Saint-Exupery draws the same picture, the little Prince recognizes it to be a boa which had

swallowed an elephant. And then the friendship between the two deserted beings started. In course of the next eight days, Saint-Exupery learnt significantly about his little friend. "It took me long time to learn where he came from. It was from words dropped by chance that, little by little, everything was revealed to me" (Exupery 19). The little prince had come from a tiny planet – Asteroid B 612. He learns about the planet's volcanoes, bushes and the most beautiful rose. The little prince needed the sheep which will eat the heavy bushes and his work would be reduced. But the most interesting thing is the beautiful rose which the little prince watered and nurtured with a great care. "The planet the little prince came from was scarcely any larger than a house" (22). Saint-Exupery gets to know more about other Asteroid which the little prince had visited. All these planets are tiny with strange inhabitants.

The little book depicts the trauma- not only in terms of social, cultural, and political implications but on the personal level. The characters in the novel are pushed to their limits during the great crises of the period marked by the communal massacres in Europe at the time of Second World War. Beside this, the narrator and the author himself go through the traumatic phase as his plane crashes and he nearly dies. The traumatic experience of losing his plane and narrowly escaping his own death affected his concept of self. Saint-Exupery's tragic novel is much more about the trauma as it is about child fantasy. "The potential for self-enlightenment always dwells in writing, whether one seeks it or not" (Stanley 1). The author's expression is an individual experience of collective trauma during the war. "What I would like to suggest in *Shattered Subjects* is that autobiography is, or at least has the potential to be, a powerful form of scriptotherapy" (Henke 22). Thus, it can be argued that Saint-Exupery's autobiographical form of writing and its subsequent fictionalization is an attempt to come to terms with trauma.

There is an interesting story about the discovery of the asteroid B-612 in the book. The Turkish astronomer presented his discovery “but nobody would believe what he said” because “he was in Turkish costume” and the narrator repeats “Grown-ups are like that” (Exupery 22). Later, the astronomer “gave his demonstration all over again, dressed with impressive style and elegance in European costume. And this time everybody accepted his report” (23). The foolishness of adults or the grown-ups is clearly stated but in a humorous manner. This becomes helpful to uncover the philosophical musings of the author, Saint-Exupery. The discussion of authoritative norms in a fabulous form is associative to the author’s life and works.

The little prince was astonished to find the desert devoid of humans and he was more astonished to see a garden of five thousand roses. This finding is heart breaking for the little prince who had thought the rose of the planet to be unique. There are several other philosophical musings that Saint-Exupery projects in this little book. Saint-Exupery wrote this novella while he was in exile. And the story parallels with the life of the author in an exile that is, a man all alone in a desert. It seems Saint-Exupery finds his childhood self while in alienation. Henke writes that such writing in turmoil has the positive effect. For her, “Autobiography could so effectively mimic the scene of psychoanalysis that life-writing might provide a therapeutic alternative for victims of severe anxiety and, more seriously, of post-traumatic stress disorder” (12-13). The construction of self allows the outlet of the repressed desires and memories. In *The Little Prince*, this self is not only fictional but also fantastic. This too has a purpose that is to convey multilayered thematic concerns. The experience and imagination of the author should be examined in relation to each other.

There is an intricate but a strong relationship between the life of the author and his work but the autobiographical impulses are transformed into fantasy.

“Scriptotherapeutic narrative moves in the direction of recovery and restitution, the novel confronts its reader with a final, lingering difficulty. Concerned as it is with the frank articulation of fragmentation and psychic disturbance, scriptotherapy must finally remain resistant to fictions of complete and uncomplicated resolution” (Clarke 225). It is an act of writing that goes beyond the conventional concept of life writing. There are not sufficient studies that take into consideration Saint-Exupery’s such writing process.

Saint- Exupery had undergone the traumatic experiences both revealed as a troubled relationship between child and grown-ups as well as crisis among the adults. He writes about the writing of the book itself- about the alternative beginning. “I should have like to say: ‘Once upon a time there was a little prince who lived in the planet that was scarcely any bigger than himself, and who had the need of the sheep. To those who understand life, that would have given a much greater air of truth to my story’” (Exupery 24). He further writes why he did not start this book that way, “For I do not want anyone to read my book carelessly. I have suffered too much grief in setting down these memories” (Exupery 24-25). He wrote in exile taking reference from his personal experiences and aspirations while he was ill and distressed. He writes about the writing process itself, about this book and about his suffering and memories. His reflections about his method and intention of writing make the reader aware of the author existing, writing and thinking, apart from the narrator of the story.

Thus, this paper takes the ideas and terminologies from trauma theorists, mainly Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra to explain the trauma narrative and its significance to the author/narrator. In “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the

Possibility of History”, Cathy Caruth tries to explain the “occurrence” and makes an “attempt to understand trauma” (3). According to Cathy Caruth “trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon” (Caruth 2). Caruth explains that trauma is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time. In “Writing History, Writing Trauma”, Dominick LaCapra explains “working through and acting out” (22) as the ways of reacting to the traumatic experiences and memories. He also writes about the role of writing for the one who witnesses the unnarratable event. The suddenness of the event characterizes the trauma. The mind is unable to immediately process what happens during the traumatic event, the psyche must learn to incorporate the events at a later time.

The murder of large number of Jews marks the sense of powerlessness in author's part and his writing of this beautiful book is his way of forgetting what he witnessed. The author is the survivor of the traumatic incident himself but he is more deeply affected by what he witnessed during the war. He completely ignores the backdrop of the Second World War in his book as if nothing had happened rather he explore the troubled human relationships through the child-like adult narrator and the little prince .

At first the plane crash was “an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic event” (Caruth 2) so it was difficult to narrate. And now, there is a gap between the event and its conscious recounting so the memories are inaccessible. Thus, Saint-Exupery invented the fictional character the little prince so as to fill those gaps of traumatic memories with soothing imagination. The past is inaccessible for

both the author and the narrator in the novella. This is suggested by Cathy Caruth, memory “is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic repressions” (6). Saint-Exupery must have been aware of his inability to recount the past as it is and to express his deepest thoughts and feelings. So, he replaced that part with the character out of this world so that it sounds fictional as are the traumatic experiences.

Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory. Moreover, traumatic events may sever these normally integrated functions from one another. The traumatized person may experience intense emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail but without emotion. After the traumatic event, the author goes through different phases. At first, as a protective mechanism the consciousness of the trauma victim is shut down and made accessible only after some time. Then, there is also a gap between traumatic event and the experience of it. Saint-Exupery writes during this passive period after he witnessed the atrocities of Second World War.

The experience of trauma would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of the reality which can never be fully known, but in an inherent repression of such experience itself. Although the author is physically the same man, he is not same psychologically. That was a lifetime ago for him, and this life and self are new and different. However, he is really coping with the trauma, to recover rather than being instead stuck in a perpetual state of alienation and “melancholia” (Lary 122). The author’s mind is rooted in the past but not fully committed those personal and collective sufferings. Freud’s distinction between “mourning- memory work that enables reconciliation with loss- and melancholia, where the loss is continually revisited, is vital, intrusive and persistent” (Lary 122). In this regard, we can say that

the fictionalized rendition of the autobiographical narrative is a process of mourning which helps in the settlement of the irreparable loss. For Henke “through the public inscription of personal testimony”, it is possible “to implement the kind of healing” (22). If there is no settlement of the trauma, the consequences could be dire.

In *The Little Prince*, the fictional character is placed in a memorable/mental setting of Exupery, when he was all alone in the desert. We can see Saint-Exupery’s audacity in presenting a potentially tragic ending to an apparently children's story. The author finds that no one can recall the past clearly and all of them had their own ways to deal with trauma. He wanted to deal with his trauma through writing-inventing a beautiful, adorable and like-able little boy who has splendid views. It is through the little prince that the narrator learns about his own life. Philip Lejeune discusses about this type of “imaginative conception of autobiography” (3). He writes,

the dynamics or drama of autobiographical cognition occurs in terms of the written performance itself. According to this conception, a given autobiographical text normally manifests the writer's spontaneous, "ironic," or experimental efforts to bring his past into the intentional purview of his present narrative project. The autobiographer cannot help but sense his omission of facts from a life the totality or complexity of which constantly eludes him. (3)

This means that the author underwent transformation himself while writing this book in an exile. There is no epiphany as traumatic experiences are never clear but there is coherence in the story which is the response to the incoherent traumatic memories.

The act of writing depends on the act of remembering. But “the subject of trauma theory is characterized by that which it does not know/remember” so it is important to acknowledge the “gaps and absences” (Radstone 25). For Saint-Exupery, the

creativity and imagination made it possible to fill those painful memories. Sushanah Radstone clarifies this position of trauma victims. She writes that the “representation and remembrance” is impossible but one must “write through its own impossibility” (Radstone 26). The author is conscious of the impossible task that is in his hands which can only be fulfilled by the fictional character.

The writing of the book could be the means of “working through” (LaCapra 21) for Saint-Exupery. “Working through is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma, one is able to distinguish between past and present... and now with openings to the future” (LaCapra 22). The author must have searched for the way out of his traumatic past and the present in turmoil. LaCapra brings the idea of Hayden White “to take writing as intransitive or to see it as self-referential” (LaCapra 19). The act of writing which is conscious of its limitations helps to work through the prolonged trauma. Saint-Exupery’s reflection on what happened not only allows for deeper understanding, but also “offers potential for mental healing” which has the power of ‘alleviating persistent symptoms of numbing, dysphoria, and uncontrollable flashbacks” (Henke 12). The process of writing might have changed the author’s beliefs about his experience and thus brought a new understanding in addition to the healing effect.

The author witnessed the atrocities of Holocaust and the subsequent war among the several countries. France was also the victim of such atrocities. He was a pilot and went to several places, met with the victims of war and he could relate with the trauma of Jews which was incomprehensible. “Saint-Exupery narrowly missed being shot down by the Nazis, it will be remembered, on a reconnaissance flight to Arras in May, 1940. After the Armistice, which occurred in June, he escaped to Portugal, and thence, six months later, to the United States” (Fay 459). So, in exile he

wanted to write about what he went through and most importantly where the world was leading with such events such as Holocaust.

He was among the few authors of that time who wanted to deal with this in completely new way as it was a very different experience. The response to such trauma, according to Henke is ‘the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation’ (Henke 12). The representation of such large scale atrocities had never been there. To understand why the author made the book into this form, the ideas from Dominick LaCapra would be helpful. “The historian Dominick LaCapra establishes a useful triple distinction of different ways in which an event as traumatic as the Holocaust can be represented. The three approaches he defines are testimony, fiction, and history” (Munte 2). Saint- Exupery stays away from the approaches of testimony and history because they both make “claims of truth” (Munte 3). For Dominick LaCapra, “Fiction if it makes historical truth claims at all, does so in a more indirect but still possibly informative, thought-provoking, at times disconcerting manner with respect to the understanding or reading of events, experience and memory” (LaCapra 131). In *The Little Prince*, the author omits the description of traumatic events; in fact, he brings the fictional character when he reaches to the point from where the trauma begins.

The indirect symbolism looms over the text. “Fiction also explores the traumatic experience and the emotional dimensions of that experience: it talks about its emptiness or its fragmentation” (Munte 3). The sadness resonates deep in the humor of the narrator. The emptiness of the experience is replaced by playful narrative with introduction of the fictional little prince.

The character little prince is a curious child who experiences are totally different from the author’s own as he says but the intimate friendship between them

reveals that they are not separate selves. James E. Higgins in “The Landscape of Metaphor” makes different observations on the symbols. He writes about the explicit symbols in *The Little Prince*, that is, the all- pervading symbol of natural world. He even claims that Saint-Exupéry’s symbols are not allegorical constructs and also they do not have any alliance with other modernist writings. “The symbolism in Saint-Exupery’s work is not a series of abstract ciphers to be analyzed and decoded by the intellect, nor a means of strengthening the singular vision of the logician. Like life itself his symbols are often ambiguous, sometimes enigmatic, their meaning never totally reveal or explained” (Higgins 327). Thus, this mode of writing must be brought under discussion in relation to the author’s life.

The imageries and symbolism have been drawn out of the personal life but presented in such a way that it evades the rationality behind the writing. Higgins further writes, “All of the natural objects that find their way into *The Little Prince* have already been sensually experienced by the author: they have touched his life, they have substance and poignancy. Their meaning is not something beyond themselves. True, as presented, they take the reader strangely beyond material reality” (327). This book is the work that blurs the boundary between children and adult stories and it goes beyond the genre definitions and occupies an exceptional place in field of literature. One of the prime literary devices used here is symbolism. The transgressing symbolism is regarded as the way to deal with limitations of conventional autobiographical forms. The novella, contemplates on the diverse issues poetically- chiefly the author's views on women, death, spirituality, and the child’s perspective.

In addition to these studies and reviews, some theoretical insights are critically studied. E. Sparshott in “Truth in Fiction” claims that “there is no other possible way

to imagine a world than to manipulate one's memories. Every fiction, thus, carries the implication that what is imagined as changed could actually be a change, in the world that is supposed otherwise the same" (4). Thus, the personal imagination of the author is as important as the personal experiences represented in the book.

Furthermore, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography : A guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* provides the larger context around which autobiographical texts must be studied. The ideas of Elizabeth Bruss in , "Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre" are important for this paper as "her book argues for understanding autobiography neither mimetically, as a chronology of the representative life, nor expressively, as the writer's baring of experience, but as a performative act" (138). Frank Moorer in "Paul Eakin: Touching the World" writes of Eakin's ideas- he "does not accept the notion that the self or subject in autobiography is constituted solely by the act of creating a text. He insists that the autobiographer inevitably draws on ideas of the self inscribed in the culture, history and language of the writer as well as on his or her store of personal experience" (3). This means that for Eakin, the self cannot be isolated from the socio-historical context.

The meaning of the text is not exclusively the process of creating the work of art but also the summation of the various socio-historical, cultural and linguistic stimuli. The author had to obey the several suppressive ideologies- both during the childhood and the Second World War. The thematic concerns of the book can be understood only within the broader context which is deliberately omitted in the narrative. For Henke, "Both autobiography and autofiction offer a unique conflation of history and discourse, of verifiable fact and aesthetic fabulation" (14). The author does not recount any horrendous events he went through rather replaces with the

fictional tale. He absolutely avoids recounting of the near death experience during the plane crash at Sahara desert. Also, even though he wrote during the time of war he completely ignores the context of world war as if nothing has happened. If we consider the ideas from trauma theorist such as Cathy Caruth, a subject of trauma usually goes to the incubation stage after he goes through catastrophic event.

In Exupery's case, it can be said that he deliberately chooses not to write about the traumatic event but to replace with the playful narrative that not only helped him but also the larger audience. Memory has great role to draw the meaning in a specific text. Remembering of the past means reinterpretation of past in the present that "never can be fully recovered" (Smith and Watson 16). What we faced and experienced in our childhood has great role to shape our adulthood and these fragments of the experiences and memories can help us to construct autobiography. And for Henke, "autobiography is, or at least has the potential to be a powerful form of scriptotherapy" (15). This can be attributed to Saint-Exupery's attempt to write in the times of turmoil after facing the both sustained and immediate trauma. The sustained trauma is childhood repression by adults- not allowing him to pursue what he was inclined at. And the immediate trauma is his plane crash and the witnessing of the Second World War.

Experiences, rules and regulations, norms and values, culture, childhood abuses, struggles, sorrows and so on comes in the fragmented form of memory that help a writer produce a work of art. "*The Little Prince*, however, is the deepest -and the obscurest-work of the lot. This book is brooded over by concern for human life in general and for our own troubled times in particular, a passionate concern to discover the place of man in the universe and to define the fundamental values of life"

(Wagenknecht 235). Here, the childhood memory of the author becomes effective to draw the meaning of his concerns when he becomes adult.

Thus, we can argue that Saint-Exupery's autobiographical mode is an attempt to come into terms with otherwise latent memories of trauma. Henke's understanding of the genre's autobiography and life-writing informs more about this therapeutic aspect of the writing, at times inventing a fictional tale. Such writings for her, are not only personal tales or attempts but also the source to understand the collective consciousness. She writes about the significance of such writings and also its features. Her ideas align with Paul de Man's ideas which are brought into consideration in this paper. She explicates in this regards,

Autobiography has always offered the tantalizing possibility of reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically inflected by language, history, and social imbrications. As a genre, life writing encourages the author/narrator to reassess the past and to reinterpret the intertextual codes inscribed on personal consciousness by society and culture. (15)

Sometime a life narrator recalls his past traumatic event so as to get a direction for future or to be released from regularly haunting sad events. Here, Exupery also recalls his past and desires to return into his childhood. He seems to be in paranoia in his adulthood. The book has lots of natural imageries such as roses, sheep and bushes. The author takes up these natural imageries but the meaning behind them is historical for us. For instance, the little prince wants the sheep in his planet to get rid of the baobabs which is a terrible plant. There is an interesting way the writer puts this,

There were on the planet where the little prince lived – as on all planets-good plants and bad plants. In consequence, there were good

seeds from good plants, and bad seeds from bad plants. But the seeds are invisible. They sleep deep in the heart of the earth's darkness, until someone among them is seized with the desire to awaken. Then this little seed will stretch itself and begin – timidly at first- to push a charming little sprig inoffensively upward toward the sun. (28)

The little prince is worried for his planet because “the soil of that planet were infested with them and one is unable “to get rid of it” if it is attended “too late” as baobabs “spread over the entire planet”(Exupery 28). The large number of baobabs has the capacity to destroy the whole planet. This elaborate description of the dichotomy between the good and the bad seeds can be related to the inner life of human and also in the outer world.

The hatred perpetuated by Nazis against the Jews during the Second World War diffused beyond the national boundary and nearly engulfed the whole planet in agony. The author through the voice of the innocent little prince expresses his exasperation towards the war. But in the meantime, with subtlety he inspires people not to harbor the ill-feeling towards each other. The grown-ups do not deal with their feelings early rather they hide them and after sometime this hatred intensify and dissipates causing the loss of innocent lives as in Second World War.

The little prince talks about the necessity of tending the baobabs in time. “Sometimes there is no harm in putting off a piece of work until another day. But when it is a matter of baobabs, that always means a catastrophe”. (30) The narrator understands the little prince's point of view so, he made the drawing of the baobabs with hard work so as to caution others of its danger when they recognize that plant. “The lesson which I pass on by this means is worth all the trouble it has cost me” (30). Saint –Exupery wishes to keep the innocent people out of the danger of false

ideologies. In fact, he spreads the message of love and friendship to overcome the hopelessness of the life and the war.

It is difficult for the author to make commentary on his traumatic past, the ongoing war and Holocaust because he had never witnessed suffering and atrocities at such scale. No form of writing would provide the justice to what he wanted to convey. Thus, he took repose in fantastic tale. This fairy tale like narrative would not particularize the traumatic incidents but works towards perpetuating universal values. The human sufferings are universal and during the hard times it is essential to assimilate with others.

The traditional autobiographical mode would not give justice to feelings and ideas the author wants to communicate. Thus, it became essential for him to express his convictions even if he loses the historical connection. The book is devoid of the dates, names of places and the persons which is the characteristic of the autobiographical narrative. Instead, the author uses minimal setting and character. This has rhetorical function, that is, it allows the readers to go beyond what is simply written and contemplates on the author's larger goals.

However, the most important thing to consider here is the effect of such writing on author than the reader. The author takes up the autobiographical first person narrative and fuses it with the fantastic tales when reaches to the traumatic narrative point. He simply ignores the context of the world war but to counter it spreads the message of eternal love and friendship. Henke uses the term "narrative recovery" which she writes, "now fairly current in the field of narratology, pivots on double entendre meant to evoke both the recovery of past experience through narrative articulation and the psychological reintegration of a traumatically shattered

subject” (22). To achieve this recovery, the author introduces the fictional childhood self with simple yet profound concerns. The adult views for author are adulterated.

The identity that the author conjures through the character is intricately linked with his memories. In a tool kit for autobiographical writing, Watson and Smith talk about the importance of “changing notions of “I”-ness or personhood” that “affect the self-narrative” (168). Saint-emphasizes on his childhood encounters and shows how the mature understanding of the selfhood is wrong. He strongly criticizes the imposition of the adults on children’s lives and further proves this with hints on ongoing atrocities caused by the grown-ups. In fact, he is largely supportive of the childhood innocence and curiosity.

We find no negative image of the child character in the book. The identity formation is the core issue here. So, it is important to note that, “Identities are marked in terms of many categories: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, generation, family genealogy and religious and political ideologies” (Watson and Smith 33). In this narrative, all these definitions are related to adulthood which inevitably causes catastrophism.

Watson and Smith write about the identities that are formed from complex interactions. The identities are meant to be stable. “But social organizations and symbolic interactions are always in flux; therefore, identities are provisional. What may be meaningful identity, on one day or in one context, may not be culturally and personally meaningful at another moment or in another context” (Watson and Smith 33). The identity of the author also differs from culture to culture and within a single culture as well. It would have been just a particularization if he had written about himself. But due to the incorporation of fictional techniques Saint-Exupery is able to express more universal concerns in disguise of a fantastic character.

The identity of the author is marginal within the text but he speaks through the voice of the character. This fictionalization could have been his way of dealing with the identity crisis. Identities “are constructed. They are in language. They are discursive” (Watson and Smith 33). Sometimes the traumatic persons act in destructive ways because they suffer from societal conflicts and the inner psychological crisis. The author gives a humorous yet ironically true statement through the character’s eyes. This explains how the author spoke during the time when the overt political views were silenced. Saint-Exupery realized the costs of losing identity, he began writing.

He uses autobiographical writing as an instrument to create identity and revolt against the oppression creating a fictional identity through writing. The little prince is admirable in his innocence and wittiness which the author could not have been if he had written about himself. Nevertheless, both the author and the character act as mirrors to each other, reflecting each other’s frailties and strength among the crisis.

In the course of writing past memories, the author is visiting own past which might have been horrible but he replaces with the fictional memories that is nourishing to the spirit. In order to break the racist and patriarchal notions of the society, he probably found autobiographical tools as an appropriate means of keeping stories but also the need of fictionalization to make the story alive and timeless. When the ideas and perceptions are inserted, neatly weaved with the events, text will be definitely more persuasive.

Since, Saint-Exupery was confined to the ideologies of the adults or his mentors; he had to dominate his interests, pursuits and passion. Colin Wastell in *Understanding Trauma and Emotion*, expounds upon the effect of childhood

repressions and writes that those individuals try to cope with childhood memories rest of their lives. He notes that,

The fundamental point is that the construction of a coherent and functioning self depends on a collection of ‘good enough’ memories of a self, primarily in relationship to others but also active in many ways to establish a sense of agency. These self defining memories together constitute an autobiographical memory that forms a narrative of the person’s life. When experiences— especially in childhood—are dominated by powerful and threatening emotions, the young person adapts as best they can. (162)

This leads to the idea that dealing with the childhood memories can be performative when it comes to the writers. Here, Saint-Exupery instead of revisiting the gloomy memories of his childhood and also the catastrophic events he went through. Instead, he chooses to fictionalize those dim and murky memories and turn those into a soothing and beautiful tale. For Elizabeth Bruss, “‘act-value’ is only one of three defining features of her theory- the others are truth-value and identity-value” (Smith and Watson 138). Bruss provides emphasis to the performativity because it is which ultimately determines the other two values.

Saint-Exupery fictionalizes his autobiographical incidents so as to create a different identity, that is, other than of the traumatized adult. Instead his fictionalization of aftermath of such traumatic incidents is a performative act, a way of dealing with the imminent problem of representation and expression. Furthermore, Michael Berube’s “Autobiography as Performative Utterance” provides “quite broad theoretical questions about the social and historical conditions of composition, production, dissemination, and reception of all forms of life writing, particularly

including those forms under discussion at present” (3). The blending of genres, styles, and tones are discussed by several critics. The autobiographical sketch of the book becomes clear. But there remains little study on the deeply introspective and distressing voice of the fictional narrators and characters that corresponds to those of Saint-Exupery. Nevertheless, these studies are helpful in bringing the author into discussion.

The autobiographical theories, especially those that bracket together autobiography and fiction are illuminating when supplemented by the trauma theories’ notion of working through or meaning-making in the process of such writing. “A performative view of life narrative theorizes autobiographical occasions as dynamic sites for the performance of identities constitutive of subjectivity. In this view, identities are not fixed or essentialized attributes of autobiographical subjects, rather they are produced and reiterated through cultural norms, and thus remain provisional and unstable” (Smith and Watson 143). The writing of *The Little Prince* for the author becomes the medium through which he carries out a function of creating a playful character out of himself. The character little prince can be argued to be his alternate identity which is apparently fictional but more captivating than the real one but “provisional and unstable” (43). This type of the form and the content of book blur the boundary between autobiography and fiction. However, this paper does not incorporate the theories of autofiction because the paper simply tries to uncover the implication of such fictionalized rendition of autobiographical experiences and impulses.

The making of the fictional self is a performative act whose value outweighs others. Saint-Exupery’s book is unusual in its portrayal. The deconstructive view of the autobiography reveals more about the nature of this type of writing. The

fictionality of the autobiography is rendered in Paul de Man's essay of 1979, "Autobiography as De-Facement," which "challenged autobiography as an inevitably self deluded practice unable to represent the life or bios it took as its subject" (139). This idea of disguise can be correlated with the author and the character little prince. The autobiographical impulses are sometimes explicit and other times hidden in the fantastical construction of the tale. So, Paul de man's ideas that dissolve the distinction between fiction and autobiography become crucial to the analysis of this work. His proposition that "Autobiography, then, is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" (de man 4) supports this research paper to make a cogent argument. The definition and the process of such conceptualization of the autobiography has been thoroughly elaborated here,

In its most radical deconstructive twist, autobiography is reconceptualized as a rhetorical figure- prosopopeia- that ultimately produces the illusion of reference. De Man challenges the very foundations of autobiography in that it is said to create its subject by means of rhetorical language rather than represent the subject. Autobiography operates in complicity with metaphysical notions of self-consciousness, intentionality and language as a means of representation. (Schwalm 7)

Since, Saint-Exupery is not only a trauma victim but a survivor. He survives the childhood repressions but "at a considerable cost" (Wastell 162) and also had been traumatized during the plane crash and furthermore as a witness of the Second World War. For Wastell, the "paradigm of the experience of trauma survivors" is that "they do whatever it takes to survive, and it is often the residues of these survival processes

that require therapy and other assistance” (162). But for Saint-Exupery there was not even a dim possibility of the modern therapies. Thus, he takes repose on creative fictionalization departing from traditional autobiographical medium to help himself out of his own memories.

Collado-Rodríguez, Francisco, in “Experimental Fiction and Trauma Studies: The Case of Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*.” *Between the Urge to Know and the Need to Deny*, notes that the book “features a fusion of autobiography and fiction that helps the author to keep the distance from the text and its implications, that is to say, to work through his own traumatic condition” (Rodriguez 293). This can be related with Saint-Exupery’s own experience and his writing of *The Little Prince*.

The author is capable of channeling the traumatic memories into the fantasy. Since, the reality has been shattered once again (after the war), the author relies on the imagination to cope with the problem. The departure from conventional life writing and combining reality with fiction help both the author and the narrator to overcome the traumatic memories. His imaginative narrative is broken and does not go with “Newtonian sensorial perspective” (Rodriguez 293). The little prince travels from alien planet in *The Little Prince* and Billy Pilgrim travels to the Tralfamadore in *Slaughterhouse Five*. There is a correspondence between these characters. Both the authors take repose in fantasy to work through their trauma.

The narrator in *The Little Prince*, tries to console the little friend who has made his mind to leave his companionship and go to his own planet. “And when your sorrow is comforted (time soothes all sorrows) you will be content that you have known me. You will always be my friend. You will want to laugh with me” (116). The Little Prince “laughed” then “became serious” (116) but insisted the narrator not to follow him while he went away. He has the reason for this. The Little Prince says,

“I shall look as if I were suffering. I shall look a little as if I were dying. It is like that. Do not come to see that. It is not worth the trouble” (116). The author possibly have expressed what it meant to go through all those years of repressing one’s passion as a child and following the so called adults and grown-ups only to witness the cruelties towards each other. He went through the metamorphosis at different stages of life. The little prince’s words are indicating what it means to get altered mentally. Paul de Man’s ideas on autobiography become helpful to understand this type of work.

Autobiography is caught in the double-bind between the necessity of escaping the authority of the subject of autobiography (the written/writing-self which is merely a tropological substitution) and the equal inevitability of reinscribing this necessity into the ‘specular structure’ of knowledge which produces autobiography. In this way, we might think of autobiography as an act of self-restoration, in which the author recovers the fragments of his/her life into a coherent narrative. (McQuillan 76)

The author and the fictional character share the common experience and fate even though they are disguised as two personalities. “For De Man autobiography as a genre is the exemplary case of prosopopeia, or the representation of an imaginary or absent person as speaking and acting” (Smith and Watson 139). It can thus be argued that both the author/narrator are as fictional as the character according to de Man’s ideas. This is because there is nothing such as singular self rather it has to be created or performed. Martin MacQuillan writes about de Man’s ideas, “ de Man does not simply mean that authors rewrite events in order to appear better human beings in their autobiographies (this would be to re-instate the author as the conscious producer of meaning in a text). Rather, the writing of autobiography will be interrupted and

disrupted by the arbitrary effects of language” (75). The performativity involved in this is as much unconscious as it seems conscious.

Saint-Exupery executes this performativity through his art of writing- the techniques of dealing with this is fictionalizing. This becomes more applicable when the writer of autobiography has undergone traumatic experiences. Even de Man had been the victim of the Second World War. His “strong challenge to the genre’s legitimacy may be qualified by de Man’s own troubled lapses about his past collusion with occupying Nazi forces, his reading of *prosopopeia* framed a question of autobiographical representation as an act of impersonation that remains the key issue” (Smith and Watson 139). Here the key phrase is “an act of impersonation” which this paper aligns with the idea of performativity as discussed by Elizabeth Bruss and the “impersonation” of the author can be attributed to the little prince (139). But why does this disguise comes into play in the autobiographical writing? “Autobiography defaces itself: any autobiographical text is inherently unstable and will undo the autobiographical model it seeks to establish” (McQuillan 76). The implication of this has been studied in relation to the trauma theorists.

The author is working through the past in a manner that enables survival. Saint-Exupery’s relation with the little prince is an attempt to make bonds with the dead. Paul de Man’s notion of autobiography “as the making of a voice” (McQuillan 78) can be understood in relation to the performativity. In case of trauma victims this may invest trauma and make its reliving a painful, if the incident are not fictionalized. But there is also a necessity for commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound. This situation may create a more or less unconscious desire to remain within trauma but it is a response to the apparent harm caused by the trauma repressed for prolonged duration. Writing autobiography thus, cannot be a

straight-forward task because the very language ceases to function as the medium of representation. As a genre,

Autobiography tells the story of a life – creating a face – but our day-to-day lives are also caught up in language, figurative language, which we use to shape and give meaning to those lives just as the figurative dimension of language unravels that meaning (defaces us). All autobiography must fail to be autobiographical (fail to produce a face incapable of disfigurement).
(McQuillan 79)

The gloomy tales of the little prince and his disappearance without any traces reflects the author's internal state of mind. Even though, the response to the trauma is possible, the happy ending is almost impossible. The emotional distress perpetuates through the last pages of the novel. It is his recognition of the miserable circumstances of the little prince. The little prince went away; it corresponds with the loss of innocence. The author expresses his inability to move out of the past that demonstrates his continued state of coping with the trauma.

A strain of despair, disillusionment, horror, trauma and suffering of the peoples, has been reconstructed symbolically in the book. The narrative comments upon all the incidents that divide people and nations in the name of nationalism, religion, language to construct the false ideologies detrimental to the humanity. This novella has echoed the author's deep concern against war and violence. Novel has defined the human attitude, psychology and struggle to choose between darkness and light in the face of crisis.

There is an affinity between the life of the author and his work but the autobiographical impulses are transfigured by fantasy. It is an act of writing which

goes beyond the established notions of life writing. Henke writes about her studies, “This study began by asking questions about the relationship between autobiographical writing and the psychoanalytic process of “working through” traumatic experience. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that translating confessional speech into written language may profoundly expand the healing potential embedded in testimonial discourse”. Even though traditional autobiographical mode is a starting point in this book, it soon breaks away from its rules when the traumatic memories are around. The role of writing as a means of working through is discussed in many works but the role of such narratives as a response to the traumatic experience is rarely discussed.

This paper contends that fictionalizing the experience provides the means for both artistic and therapeutic functions based on the studies and ideas of Henke and the trauma theorists. The artistic function is a creation of genre-defying book and the therapeutic function is to work through one’s own traumatic memories. Henke writes that, “the numbers of authors have instinctively-turned to modes of autobiographical expression to implement the kind of healing made possible through the public inscription of personal testimony” (22). This has made *The Little Prince*, the work that eludes any classification. Thus, the book has indefinable qualities, and one can learn the way of resisting preconceived notions of writing to create a work that heals oneself and brings smile to many others.

The transfiguration or simply the fictionalization of the autobiographical impulses by fantasy helps to work through the trauma of the author and relocate oneself amidst the chaotic memories and traumatic experiences. Saint-Exupery was able to deal with the trauma by altering autobiographical circumstances to inscribe an alternative memory within his psyche. Only by expressing the exasperation towards

the adult domination through the fictional character, the little prince, the author is able to relieve the sustained memories. Thus, the attempt to understand the therapeutic function of writing has been central focus of this study.

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