

## The Formation of Perceived Meaning on Essential Matters in *The Little Prince*

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the correlation of social interactions and their role in forming one's perceived meanings of the essentials in life in *The Little Prince*. Using Herbert Blumer's (1969) Symbolic Interactionism Theory, I analyze the processes during their social interactions, the meanings generated, the interpretation of meanings, and how meanings become the basis of one's actions. My analysis reveals their social interactions before the encounter generate perceived meanings on essential matters, which drive their lives. The Aviator, perceiving the essentials from interactions with an industrialized society, lives a mundane and lonely life—whilst the Little Prince, perceiving the essentials come from the heart, lives a fulfilled life. However, their encounter alters the Aviator's perceived meaning, creating a shared perceived meaning on essential matters. Ultimately, the shared perceived meaning drives their actions—the Aviator shares it with the readers and the Little Prince develops the way he expresses it with his friends.

**Keywords:** essential, life, meaning, social interactions

### INTRODUCTION

Children's Literature is known to play an essential role in shaping children's personalities. It is a book category whose existence depends on its supposed relationships with its reading audience: children (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2002, p. 15). In its essence, too, it is literature that is most particularly good for children in terms of emotional and moral values (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2002, p. 16). Although it is a book intended to be read for children, Clark (2003, as cited in Gubar, 2011, p. 209), states that Children's Literature is always written for both children and adults since for it to be published, it needs to please some adults. Nonetheless, both adults and children enjoy Children's Literature since it enables them to come to grips with ideas about themselves and what they are (Chambers, 1985 as cited in Hunt, 2002, p. 3). These arguments conclude that children are not the only age group who enjoy Children's Literature.

Among many Children's Literature, one stood out the most for its unique message and admirers. *Le Petit Prince*, famously known as *The Little Prince*, is the most translated Children's Literature in the world—it has been translated into 480 languages and dialects (Mun-Delsalle, 2002, para.2). The reason for this success is due to its profound reminder of what matters in life. From its first publication to this day, *The Little Prince* has been admired by many, mostly grown-ups, as they consider it a guide and survival manual in today's absurd world for those who doubt or wonder about the meaning of life, death, and relationships between individuals (Mun-Delsalle, 2002, para. 3). Released in 1943, *The Little Prince* offered a groundbreaking perspective on what is essential in life at the time. With World War II and the fruit of the Second Industrial Revolution, it is logical for society to view survival and success in life—the existence of physical sustenance, ways to make it, and rewards for success in various fields—as essential. *The Little Prince*, stating “It is with one's heart that one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the eye,” (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 82), served a contrasting view. Thus, it helped many to cherish life more than a matter of living or dying. In today's fast-paced world, *The Little Prince* still provides comfort for children, ones living within grown-ups, too.

*The Little Prince* (1995) follows the story of the Aviator who is stranded in a desert and ends up meeting the Little Prince. Throughout their encounter, the Aviator learns more about the Little Prince—his planet, his Rose, his adventure, the people he met, and ultimately what the Little Prince perceives as essential—invisible things coming from the heart. However, the Aviator also tells the readers about his social interactions with the grown-ups and how it led him to a constant sense of misplacement and discontent. Hence, the encounter with the Little Prince generates a sound meaning of what is truly essential for the Aviator, one that would alter the course of his life. *The Little Prince* is a story about the search for meaning in life within one's heart. It not only ignites children's imagination, but it is also a clue for grown-ups in their search for meaning in life.

While reading through *The Little Prince*, two correlated points prompted me to conduct further analysis. First, the unique social interactions of both the Aviator and the Little Prince in two time frames—before and after their encounter. Before meeting the Little Prince, the Aviator's social interactions with the grown-ups discourage him from his interest in drawing. In turn, these interactions lead him to feel misplaced living among grown-ups and discontent becoming a grown-up himself. Meanwhile, before the Little Prince's arrival on Earth, he interacts with the Rose, whom he later leaves to look for what is truly essential. Yet, on Earth, he meets the Fox and perceives a profound meaning of what is truly essential. Further, when the Little Prince finally meets the Aviator, he shares the said meaning with the Aviator. Then, I found that both of these meanings—those generated from social interactions before and after their encounter—are acted upon by the Aviator and the Little Prince in response to the meanings. The formation of these meanings and their correlation with social interactions have intrigued me to analyze *The Little Prince*.

Second, the meaning of what is truly essential that the Little Prince perceived from the Fox also propels me to analyze it further. *The Little Prince's* statement: "It is only with the heart that one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the eye," (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 82), contrasts today's view on essential matters—since it generally correlates with wealth satisfaction, career prosperity, many friends, good health, freedom, validation, education, and other "visible" things (Novosel, 2021; Ho, 2021). However, upon reading *The Little Prince*, I found that what is meant by "essential" are things one pursues and implements in life that one regards as essential. These discussions on what is truly essential offered in *The Little Prince* as a children's literature, and its relevant influence in today's society, I see the analysis of *The Little Prince* as having the potential to enlighten a new point of view of grown-ups' meaning on today's essential matters. Thus, I will analyze how the Aviator's and the Little Prince's social interactions create their perceived meanings on essential matters, as well as how they respond to these perceived meanings—specifically in two timeframes, before and after their encounter.

Throughout the book, I noticed that *The Little Prince* showed a significant correlation between social interactions and individuals' meaning on essential matters—which then drive their conduct in life. This correlation is best explained by Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism Theory. This theory recognizes social interaction as a process that forms human conduct and not as a mere medium where factors of human conduct pass; thus it argues that society is created by repeated social interactions (Blumer, 1969, p. 8). Concurrently, it also defines meanings as the basis of human conduct and is generated through social interactions with other individuals (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Basing this theory, are three fundamental premises: 1) Human beings act toward things based on the meanings they attach to those things (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). 2) The meanings of these things are derived from one's social interactions with others (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). 3) These meanings are handled and modified, through an interpretative process within the person when dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). According to Blumer (1969, p. 5), the process of interpreting meaning has two steps: the individual indicates to himself the things that have meaning and the interpretation becomes the direction of his actions. Hence, this theory explains that everyone has their own meaning toward things, and these meanings are the basis of their actions toward the said thing. This analysis will use Symbolic Interactionism, to analyze the processes during their social interactions, the generated meanings, the interpretation of meanings, as well as their responding actions.

## ANALYSIS

### Pre-Encounter: The Aviator's Mundane Essentials

I will start with the Aviator's perceived meaning on essential matters. In the book, it is apparent that the Aviator's perceived meaning on essential matters is formed during his interactions with the grown-ups. To better understand how the Aviator is influenced by his interactions with the grown-ups, I will first discuss the social context of the grown-ups. *The Little Prince* was written during World War II and post the Second Industrial Revolution, the society showcased in the book was influenced by the social condition at the time. Several elements in the story support this: (1) The Aviator uses real-world references to describe Earth—countries such as Australia, China, Siberia, etc. (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 66), the accurate approximation of the world's population in the 1940s (United Nations, 1999) being two billion (p. 66-67), and the six continents on Earth. (2) He also uses many early 1900s references such as "railway signalman" (p. 85) and "lamplighters" (p. 57 & 66). (3) The years that the Aviator mentions about the findings of the Little Prince's asteroid are 1909 and 1920 (p. 20-21), which were around the Second Industrial Revolution. Thus, this analysis will take the said social context into account.

One detail of the social context that I am considering in this analysis is the emergence of the model "man-as-machine," known today as blue-collar workers (Killen, 2015, p. 51) and also the term "brain work" that referred to highly skilled and highly taxing labor—including doctors, businessmen, and other representatives of professional and managerial classes, but soon also new categories of employees called the white-collar workers (Killen, 2015, p. 53). Considering this social context, an individual would be appreciated and rewarded better when classified as a 'brain worker,' rather than an ordinary laborer. In addition, it was the years around World War I and World War II, in which it is logical to assume that people were focused on their well-being. Thus, when it comes to essential matters, it is natural for society at the time to center on others' appreciation, reward for oneself, and one's well-being.

The Aviator grows up in the said social context. This is apparent when he is discouraged from his interest in drawing—art was not the central focus in society during World War II and post the Second Industrial Revolution—and is advised to excel in academics by the grown-ups, which was more beneficial to ensure one's well-being. The Aviator tells the readers about his social interactions with the grown-ups when he was six. He draws an elephant inside a boa constrictor—hence, the boa constrictor looks more like a hat—and shows it to the grown-ups (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 10). Which, the grown-ups respond by ignoring and advising him to give up drawing and focus on academics instead (p. 10). This interaction not only shows the Aviator living in the said social context, but also how his social interaction creates his perceived meaning on essential matters.

This social interaction creates two perceived meanings for the Aviator: 1) On essential matters. 2) On the grown-ups. First, there is a shift of meaning on what is essential for the Aviator—he sees drawing as essential but when the grown-ups ignore and advise him to stop, he doubts it and gradually regards it as inessential. The Aviator begins to see that what is essential is not his interest but what the grown-ups—who are influenced by their society. In the social context discussed above, academics are highly significant for becoming a "brain worker"—who is appreciated and rewarded better—as one needs to undergo and excel in academic education to become a "brain worker." Hence, the Aviator starts to perceive the meanings of essential matters as things that the appreciation and reward can be measured, namely academics. Onwards, this perceived meaning on essential matters will be referred to as measurable things.

This shift of meaning on essential matters is proven by the Aviator's responding actions. The Aviator then follows the grown-ups' advice, focusing on academics, since he does excel in Geography (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 11). Further, he becomes a pilot (p. 11), which is considered a highly skilled

and highly taxed occupation. Since the Aviator perceives measurable things as essential, he implements them in his life and acts upon them.

Here, the three premises of Symbolic interactionism apply. The first premise, the Aviator acts based on his meaning. The second, his perceived meaning is generated from his social interactions with the grown-ups. Third, his interpretation of meaning becomes the direction of his actions. The Aviator also follows the two steps of interpreting meanings: he indicates to himself things that are essential—measurable things essential, and then this meaning becomes the direction of his actions—excelling in Geography and becoming a pilot.

Yet, I found a detail in his process of perceiving essential matters—he perceives measurable things as essential unwillingly. Several statements support this detail. He indirectly expresses that he is misplaced among the grown-ups, he states: “I would bring myself down and talk about bridge, golf, politics, and neckties” (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 11). Further, the following statement indicates his discontentment with himself for being a grown-up: “Perhaps he [the Little Prince, my addition] thought I was like him. But, unfortunately, I cannot see sheep through boxes. Perhaps I am a little like grown-ups. I am getting old,” (p. 23). This statement is stated when he tells the reason why he writes and draws the book for the readers. These statements imply his discontentment and sense of misplacement in living among the grown-ups and becoming a grown-up himself, despite him still perceiving what the grown-ups perceive as essential.

This unwillingness is due to his perceived meanings on the grown-ups. When his drawing is not understood and the grown-ups advise him to devote himself to academics, the Aviator sees grown-ups as “never understanding anything by themselves,” and that “it is rather tedious for children to have to explain things to them time and again” (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 11). Thus, in every interaction with the grown-ups, he always sees and acts toward the grown-ups, based on the meaning that grown-ups are unimaginative and tiresome. For instance, the grown-ups he sees as “reasonably clear-sighted” with his boa constrictor drawing, but they always fail to understand what he draws, which he then responds by bringing “himself down to their level and talk about bridge, gold, politics, and neckties” (p.11). This sense of misplacement among grown-ups causes the Aviator to be discontent and unwilling to perceive measurable things as essential. At the same time, he does not have much choice since everyone perceives measurable things as essential and it is the way to live in his social context.

Here, the three premises of symbolic interactionism apply. First, the Aviator acts toward the grown-up based on his perceived meaning. Second, this perceived meaning arises from his social interactions with the grown-ups, both when he was six and when he tested the grown-ups. Third, the Aviator also follows the two steps of interpreting meaning: (1) He indicates to himself that grown-ups have certain meanings for him—they are unimaginative and tiresome. (2) Then the said meaning became the basis of his actions—he shows the grown-ups his boa drawing to test their imagination (p. 11). Thus, the Aviator testing the grown-up is an action based on the interpreted perceived meanings on the grown-ups.

That said, the Aviator’s social interactions generate his perceived meanings on two things: 1) On essential matters, he eventually perceives measurable things as essential. 2) On the grown-ups, he sees them as never understanding and tiresome. These meanings are then shown through his actions, excelling in Geography and becoming a pilot although he unwillingly does so because he feels misplaced and discontent with his life. With these perceived meanings, the Aviator comes to live a mundane and lonely life, since he is unable to appreciate his interest in drawing and has a sense of misplacement among grown-ups.

### **Pre-Encounter: The Little Prince’s Heartfelt Essential**

Before meeting the Aviator, the Little Prince encounters three categories of social interactions: 1) Social interaction that confuses him. 2) Social interactions that counter his initial

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perceived meaning on essential matters. 3) Social interactions that complement his initial perceived meaning on essential matters. Among these three, the social interaction that confuses him becomes the basis of his other interactions. The Little Prince's core interaction is with the Rose, which he admires (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 36), and out of his admiration, he tends to her needs (p. 36-37). However, the Rose begins to torment him with her demanding vanity and overweens about her thorns (p. 36). One time, she is caught in the middle of a lie and proceeds to behave in ways that would make the Little Prince remorseful (p. 37-38). Afterward, the Little Prince gradually doubts her (p. 38). In response, he then decides to leave the planet (p. 39-41).

His social interactions with the Rose confuse him on what is essential. At first, he regards his friendship, what he does in his friendship—good deeds—and his love for the Rose as essential. This is expressed in his regrets for believing the Rose's words, when he states that he should have based his judgements upon deeds and not words (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 38). Yet, when he encounters the Rose's misconduct, he begins to see that what he deems essential is inessential for the Rose and he is disappointed, doubtful, and irritated. Hence, the Little Prince's social interactions with the Rose confuses him on his meaning of essential matters. For this reason, the Little Prince decides to depart from the Rose and explore the other planets, looking for what is essential.

In this interaction, the Little Prince's perceived meaning slightly shifts—first he is sure of what is essential, friendship and deeds for loved ones, but now he is confused and decides to look for what is truly essential. This shift is aligned with the three fundamental premises of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). First, the meaning the Little Prince attaches to the Rose underlies his actions toward her—he attends to her needs because he deems deeds for those he loves essential, and when he is disappointed he decides to leave her. Second, the said meanings arose from his interactions with the Rose. Third, these meanings are handled and modified through an interpretative process: The Little Prince indicates to himself that friendship with the Rose has certain meanings for him. At first, the Little Prince has a perceived meaning on essential matters—deeds for loved ones—but when the meaning is countered, he is confused and feels rejected, thus he is disappointed. Then, he perceives that what is essential is not friendship, love, and deeds for others, yet what is essential is confusing for him. This perceived meaning on the essentials then becomes the direction of his actions—leaving the planet, looking for what is truly essential. Yet, it is to note that the Little Prince is only unsure of what he deems essential and his perceived meaning is not entirely altered.

The Little Prince's departure indicates that he is searching for what is truly essential. Several events support the Little Prince's search for the essentials: 1) He often asks questions about why something is important for the other person. 2) He unconsciously contrasts the perceived meanings that counter his own by saying that grown-ups are “odd,” “strange,” and in one heated encounter “absolutely extraordinary” (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 47, 49, 51, 56). Hence, in his social interactions before landing on Earth, the Little Prince looks for what is essential by first digging into what others perceive as essential, then comparing and contrasting them with his own perceived meaning on essential matters. Furthermore, when the Little Prince continues his search on Earth, he arrives at the desert where there are no men. He then finds himself to be all alone and looks for friends (p. 76)—friendship is one category that he deems essential. For these reasons, the Little Prince's actions can be considered as a means to look for what is truly essential. Therefore, the next two categories of social interactions—the social interactions that counter and complement his perceived meaning on essential matters—are a part of his responding actions, looking for what is truly essential, toward his interpreted perceived meaning: what is essential is confusing.

The second category is social interactions that counter his initial perceived meaning on essential matters before he was confused. These social interactions are with the King, the Conceited Man, the Drunkard, and the Businessman, which happen on their respective small planets in which

they live alone. These four grown-ups have their own perceived meanings on essential matters. The King perceives authority as essential since he always needs an object to rule, which the Little Prince comments, “Grown-ups are very strange” (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 42-47). Meanwhile, the Conceited Man always needs someone to admire him—he would ask someone for applause and raise his hat in a modest salute (p. 48-49)—thus the Conceited Man perceives others’ perception of self as essential. The Little Prince then comments that “Grown-ups are really very odd” (p. 49). Then, the Little Prince describes the Drunkard as “very, very, odd” because he is drinking to forget that he is ashamed of drinking (p. 51)—hence, the Little Prince contrasts that obliviousness of one’s problem is essential.

Meanwhile, the Little Prince disagrees with the Businessman the most, since the Businessman only wants to own something—to be rich so he can buy more stars—but he does not care for them. It is described that the Little Prince’s idea of what is important is very different from those of the grown-ups, he tells the Businessman that he always cares for the Rose and his volcanoes (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 56)—what is important is not the possession but how one treats them. The Little Prince then continues by commenting, “Grown-ups are certainly absolutely extraordinary” (p. 56). The contrast towards perceived meanings on essential matters that oppose him is most apparent in this interaction—he not only contrasts that possession is essential, but he also expresses what he deems as essential by telling the Businessman about what he does for the Rose and the volcanoes. Hence, this interaction also shows his initial perceived meaning on essential matters—deeds for others—before the interaction with the Rose confuses him of what is essential. Through these first four encounters with the grown-ups, the Little Prince meets people who perceive essential things that oppose his own—their essentials benefit them, e.g., authority, others’ perception of self, obliviousness of internal problems, and possession. Meanwhile, the Little Prince deems friendship and compassion—as seen in his deep appreciation for his bond with the Rose—also deeds for others, as seen in his descriptions of what is important when conversing with the Businessman, as essential. Thus, the Little Prince does not find what is truly essential since his first four encounters with the grown-ups counter his initial perceived meanings of essential matters.

In his next social interaction, the Little Prince encounters perceived meanings that complement his own, and one eventually becomes his newfound perceived meaning on essential matters. The first social interaction in this category is with the Lamplighter who lives on a tiny planet and only follows his orders to light up and put down the lamp. When the Little Prince meets the Lamplighter, the Little Prince becomes compassionate with him because what he does is useful for others. The book describes that the Little Prince comes to love the Lamplighter because what he does is useful for others (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 57), he is faithful to his orders (p. 58,) and he is not only concerned with himself (p. 60). The Little Prince grows fond of the Lamplighter because he shares one of the Little Prince’s initial perceived meanings on essential matters, that is deeds for others. This interaction complements the Little Prince’s perceived meaning on essential matters as it confirms his initial perceived meaning—deeds for others. Then, the Little Prince meets the Geographer, with whom he gains a new understanding of his Rose. They are discussing what objects are recorded on a map when the Little Prince finds out that flowers are not recorded because they are ephemeral (p. 64). It is also said that through this interaction, the Little Prince has come to realize his regret of departing from the Rose (p. 64). This interaction complements the Little Prince’s perceived meanings on essential matters as it makes him realize that he has abandoned his ‘ephemeral’ friend, thus he cannot care for her anymore. Hence, the Little Prince perceives again that his friendship with the Rose is still essential—he is beginning to find what is truly essential.

On Earth, the Little Prince lands in the desert and wanders around looking for men (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 68-76). On his journey, he eventually wanders to a garden of Roses, which saddens him because the Rose told him that she is the only one of her kind in all of the universe (p. 74). In his sadness, he meets the Fox who then introduces what ‘tame’ means: “To establish ties” (p. 76). The Fox later explains that if the Little Prince tamed him, they would become unique to each other (p. 77 & 82) and everything would remind the Fox of the Little Prince. Upon understanding this idea, the Little Prince finds out that all the roses in the garden are not like his Rose because no one has tamed them (p. 80-82). Conversely, he finds his Rose unique because he has spent time with her and

cared for her (p. 82). Further, the Fox shares a secret with the Little Prince: “It is only with the heart one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the eyes” (p. 82). This particular social interaction with the Fox complements the Little Prince’s initial perceived meanings on essential matters. Now, the Little Prince not only perceives friendship, compassion, and deeds for others as essential, but he also perceives anything coming from the heart—invisible things such as one’s compassion, motivation, love, sincerity, moments spent together, etc.—as essential.

Here, the three premises of symbolic interactionism apply. First, the Little Prince becomes more appreciative of his friends because he gains an understanding that what is essential comes from the heart—this becomes his perceived meaning on essential matters. Second, this perceived meaning arises from his interaction with the Fox. Third, this perceived meaning goes through an interpretative process. The Little Prince indicates that invisible things coming from the heart are essential and this perceived meaning becomes the basis of his actions. He appreciates his friendship, with the Rose and the Fox, with a recognition that the essential is not their presence at the moment but invisible things coming from the heart, in this case, the time they lovingly give and compassion for each other. Therefore, the Little Prince’s social interactions have led him to find what is truly essential: Invisible things coming from the heart. Upon finding this perceived meaning, the Little Prince has come to be more fulfilled with what he has—friendship with the Rose and the Fox.

### **Post-Encounter: The Aviator’s and The Little Prince’s Heartfelt Essentials**

After the Aviator’s and the Little Prince’s encounter, their perceived meaning becomes a shared perceived meaning on essential matters. It is shared and not a newfound perceived meaning since throughout their interaction, the Little Prince shares his perceived meaning with the Aviator. While the Aviator’s perceived meaning on essential matters shifts, the Little Prince’s does not. However, the social interaction with the Aviator also enriches the Little Prince’s perceived meanings in terms of responding actions. Thus, their social interaction does not generate a shared perceived meaning on essential matters.

There are two conversations between the Aviator and the Little Prince in which their initial distinct perceived meanings on essential matters are handled and modified: 1) The conversation when they are looking for a well. 2) The conversation before the Little Prince’s return to his planet. First, the Aviator and the Little Prince begin looking for a well is when they are looking for a well when the Aviator’s drinking water runs out (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 88). In their conversation, the Little Prince replies with innocent utterances such as, “It is good to have had a friend, even if one is going to die [of thirst, my addition]. I am very happy to have had a fox as a friend...” (p. 88). On this, the Aviator concluded that the Little Prince does not realize the danger because he only needs a little sunshine to survive (p. 88). Even so, the Little Prince agrees to look for a well with the Aviator (p. 88). These details show how the Little Prince’s perceived meaning on essential matters is enhanced. When deciding to look for the well, the Little Prince says, “water may also good for the [the Little Prince’s, my addition] heart,” (p. 89) since doing this for the Aviator makes him content. This shows that he accompanies the Aviator as a response to his perceived meaning on essential matters—this time not only with words and demanded actions like with the Rose, but he willingly does something for others although it does not benefit him in response to his own perceived meaning.

The Little Prince’s responses align with the premises of symbolic interactionism. First, he acts toward the Aviator based on the perceived meaning he attaches to him—sincere friendship and compassion—which is also his perceived meaning on essential matters with the Aviator. The Aviator draws him a sheep to bring home (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 14-16), the Little Prince tells the Aviator about his journey, planet, and friends throughout the book, and their conversation while walking to the well (p. 88) have initiated the Little Prince’s perceived meaning on essential matters in the context of his friendship with the Aviator. Further, his previous social interaction with the Fox already instilled his perceived meaning on essential matters. Therefore, the second premise applies; His perceived meaning on essential matters is derived from his social interactions with both the Aviator and the Fox.

Then, in accordance with the third premise, the Little Prince modifies and interprets his perceived meaning on essential matters following Symbolic Interactionism Theory: 1) He indicates to himself the things that have meaning—his sincerity, compassion, and sincerity in his friendship with the Aviator. 2) This meaning becomes the direction of his actions—because he dearly appreciates the compassion and his sincere friendship, he willingly looks for a well with the Aviator despite not needing water to survive. Thus, this particular social interaction enhanced the Little Prince’s perceived meaning on essential matters, in which his expression of essential matters is genuine.

As for the Aviator, he is confused with the Little Prince’s utterances about water being good for the heart, but he remains silent (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p.89). Yet, after a short silence, the Little Prince says, “The stars are beautiful because of a flower one cannot see.... What makes the desert so beautiful,... is that it hides a well, somewhere...” (p. 89). This surprises the Aviator with a sudden awareness (p. 89). He narrates how when he was a little he lived in an old house and legend says that it hid a treasure—although nobody has ever found it, it cast an enchantment over the house (p. 89). He then proceeds by saying, “Yes,.. be it a house, the stars or the desert, the source of their beauty cannot be seen!” to which the Little Prince replies with, “I’m glad that you agree with me” (p. 89). When the Little Prince falls asleep, the Aviator takes him in his arms as if the Little Prince is “a very fragile treasure” (p. 90) and says to himself that he only sees a shell, what is important is the Little Prince’s loyalty that drives him forward (p. 90). Afterward, the Aviator’s meaning of the Little Prince changes. He sees the Little Prince to be “more fragile” and wants to protect him (p. 90)—he is more compassionate with the Little Prince.

In this interaction, the Aviator begins to perceive the Little Prince’s perceived meaning on essential matters. Now, he has a shared perceived meaning with the Little Prince. He provides four expressions that indicate his realization: 1) The stars—it is beautiful for the Little Prince because he has faith that his Rose is among the stars—what is essential is the Little Prince’s faith, his established ties with the Rose, the time and genuine endeavors he lavished on her, and most importantly his compassion for the Rose. 2) The desert—it is beautiful because of the hope that he will find a well in it—what is essential is his hope that keeps him looking for a spring of fresh water. 3) The house—it is beautiful because the hidden treasure casts an enchantment over the house—what is essential is the thrilling knowledge that the house hides a treasure. 4) The Little Prince is beautiful because of his loyalty to the Rose—what is essential is the Little Prince’s personality and passion for the Rose that drives him forward.

The Aviator’s process of perceiving essential matters is also in line with Blumer’s (1969) Symbolic Interactionism Theory. The first premise, the Aviator reacts to the Little Prince’s seemingly random statements with understanding and starts to take the Little Prince’s perceived meaning on essential matters to heart. The second premise, the said perceived meaning on essential matters is derived from his conversation with the Little Prince. The third premise, the Aviator starts to see the Little Prince differently. He points out that he is seeing a shell, and that what is important is within the Little Prince. Upon interpreting this, the Aviator starts to appreciate the Little Prince more, as apparent through his protecting the Little Prince like a fragile treasure.

After walking, they finally find the well, in which they agree for the Aviator to fix his engine and return the next evening and for the Little Prince to wait by the well. This leads to the second conversation that confirms their shared perceived meaning: the conversation before the Little Prince’s return. The Aviator comes back to tell the Little Prince that his engine is fixed, but he finds the Little Prince talking to the Snake about how good the Snake’s poison is (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 98). Hearing this, the Aviator panics and questions the Little Prince, to which the Little Prince explains that his star will be just above the spot that he landed a year ago (p. 99) and it is too far for him to carry his body (p. 102), hence he needs the Snake’s poison. The Little Prince expresses that he is sad and frightened of leaving Earth and the Aviator (p. 99). Then, the Aviator, too, realizes that he cannot bear “never hearing that laughter again” as it is like “a spring of fresh water in the desert” for him (p. 99). Then, the Little Prince comforts the Aviator by explaining how stars can mean different things to



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different people (p. 100) and that for the Aviator, it can be the Little Prince's laughter and they will all be his friends (p. 100), then when he looks up at the stars, it will be like a lot of little bells (p. 101).

Approaching the return, the Little Prince strongly advises the Aviator to not come with him because he does not want the Aviator to witness him being bitten by the Snake then looks as if he dies and becomes sad, but the Aviator decides not to go (p. 102). While the Aviator is still sad, the Little Prince explains that he must go home because he is responsible for his flower (p. 104). Not long after, the Snake bites the Little Prince, and he falls to the ground (p. 104). Their means to comfort each other before the Little Prince's departure further confirms that they share a perceived meaning on essential matters.

In this interaction, both the Aviator and the Little Prince act based on their shared perceived meaning on essential matters. First, they act based on their perceived meaning on essential matters. Both comfort each other because they perceive their sincere friendship, compassion, time spent together, and genuine conversations as essential. Second, their social interaction adds to their perceived meaning on essential matters.

Ultimately, the third premise also applies when this shared perceived meaning is handled in and modified through an interpretative process. For the Aviator, he points out his encounter with the Little Prince as essential for two reasons. First, the Little Prince gives him a new resonant perceived meaning on essential matters. The Aviator begins to understand what he lacks in life through the Little Prince's perceived meaning on essential matters. The Little Prince, perceiving invisible things coming from the heart as essential, has become a person living a fulfilled life and oppositely, the Aviator is living a mundane and lonely life. Thus, the Aviator's shared perceived meaning on essential matters becomes very significant for him as it is something that he has been looking for since he lost it at the age of six.

Second, because the Aviator has shared a perceived meaning with the Little Prince, he can grasp his sincere friendship, compassion, and time spent with one another as essential. Then, this perceived meaning on essential matters becomes the direction for his action. As mentioned above, *The Little Prince* uses a first-person peripheral point of view, narrated by the Aviator. That said, *The Little Prince* is intended to be read as a message from the Aviator to the readers. Further, the Aviator even mentions the reason he wrote the book: He does not want to forget his social interaction with the Little Prince, which consists of his sound perceived meaning on essential matters (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 23).

The Aviator's next statement, "For those of you who, like me, love the Little Prince, nothing in the universe can be the same... And no grown-ups will ever understand why it is so important!" (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 106-107) suggests the grown-ups will never understand because they only perceive measurable things as essential—implying that the book is intended for those who love the Little Prince and are not like the grown-ups. Therefore, the Aviator's newfound perceived meaning on essential matters drives him to write and share it with the readers—specifically those who perceive the Little Prince's meaning of essential matters. This becomes his responding actions toward his perceived meaning on essential matters.

For the Little Prince, he interprets his enhanced perceived meaning, and it becomes the direction of his actions, aligned with the third premise of symbolic interactionism. First, the Little Prince indicates that the Aviator and the Rose have certain meanings for him. Aside from sincere friendship and compassion, the Little Prince also perceives his friendship with the Aviator as essential for it to genuinely express his perceived meaning on essential matters. Thus, based on this interpretation, the Little Prince willingly walks with the Aviator to the well and comforts the Aviator before their goodbye. Moreover, the Little Prince also shares his perceived meaning on essential matters with the Aviator. Beyond that, this interpretation is also the basis of his return home. He says,

“You know... my flower... I am responsible for her” (Saint-Exupéry, 1995, p. 104). For this reason, the Little Prince’s decision to go home is also an expression of him perceiving his love for the Rose as essential. Hence through his social interaction with the Aviator, the Little Prince perceives willingness to do things for others as expressions of his perceived meaning on essential matters.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of my analysis lead to the conclusion that the Aviator’s and the Little Prince’s processes of perceiving what is essential have shown the mundane influences of an industrialized society, as well as the significance of looking for what is truly essential in life. The Aviator serves as an epitome of today’s adult living in an industrialized society. He is encouraged to regard appreciation and reward as essential for his life, whilst in turn, he is being measured by his performance as a highly skilled and highly taxed worker. My analysis shows that his perceived meaning on essential matters has led him to a mundane and lonely life—which is common among today’s adults. Meanwhile, the Little Prince, being an innocent child, is foreign to any unpleasant tendencies—such as pride, envy, malice, and suspicion—that hinder him from looking for what is truly essential. In turn, the Little Prince explores and is fulfilled with who he meets and what he does when he meets them. By knowing what is essential is within one’s heart and invisible, the Little Prince is living a fulfilled life.

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