The Anguished and the Enchanted

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Translator's Preface

I discovered this short book in an unkempt storage facility some months after my father’s death in 2014. It lay near the bottom of a box, unopened for decades, labeled simply “Judith,” the name of my mother and my father’s first wife. The box contained more or less what one would expect: scrapbooks from my mother’s childhood, diplomas, withered photographs, and papers related to my grandparents’s emigration from Finland. But it also contained approximately one hundred and twenty unbound pages, handwritten in Finnish, to which someone had fastened an index card that read simply: “Eino’s story of Father’s.” Eino Matinpoika was my maternal grandfather, a man I never met, who immigrated to America with his wife Maria and his daughter Jehudit [Judith] in 1953.

Notes on the Text

After reading several pages of the text, it became clear Matinpoika had composed a Finnish translation of the world-renowned classic, *Le petit prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, in which a downed pilot meets a magical boy in the desert. The boy tells the pilot of his adventures and teaches him, in his way, about the preciousness of life. The date of the manuscript is unclear, although Matinpoika’s life in America was relatively brief. I am tempted to imagine that Matinpoika encountered this book as
a boy or young man, and even that it had been read to him by his father, Matti Näkkäläjärvi, who would have had to translate it into Finnish as he read.

It is true that Finns have done well to keep alive our tradition of oral narrative: memorizing and performing stories, fables, myths, and histories. In the nineteenth century, *The Kalevala*—comprising ancient songs and tales transmitted orally for centuries—was arranged, printed, and almost immediately adopted by Finns as our ‘official’ national epic. It seems unlikely, however, that a complete translation such as Matinpoika’s could have been composed from oral/aural memory alone. It is more likely that Matinpoika translated the work by other means: via a French or English copy and/or with the assistance of a fellow Finnish-American. Regardless, if Matinpoika was introduced to the story in Finnish—he would have been taught some French as part of his schooling in Finland, but he did not learn English until he arrived in America—his hearings, in conjunction with his own experiences and emotions at the time of those hearings, likely influenced his understanding of the work.

More interesting, of course, than the process by which Matinpoika translated the text is the impact of his translation, which, in my view, is nothing short of the most significant achievement in translating Saint-Exupéry to date. To understand something of his accomplishment, I must relate a few facts about Saint-Exupéry and his work.

It is well-known that Saint-Exupéry, a pilot, survived a plane crash in 1935 in the Libyan desert, where he experienced days of powerful hallucinations triggered mainly by dehydration (see, e.g., Tagliabue 2008). This event played a crucial role in his subsequent life and work, including the crafting of the characters and themes of *Le petit prince* (Larroche-Kodama 2015, 19). Saint-Exupéry wrote, in some detail, about his 1935 experience in his memoir *Terre des hommes* [Wind, Sand, and Stars] (1939; 1939b), just as his wife, Consuela, wrote of its influence on her husband in her own book, *The Tale of the Rose* (2003).

To be sure, Saint-Exupéry did not craft his most famous book to be yet another account of his near-death experience in
the desert. Rather, it is what we could call, in English, a ‘fairy tale’; indeed, an exemplary one, with powerful sentimentality, lovable characters, and both inspiring and cautionary messages, intended not for very young children but for young adults and adults alike. The widely held belief that Saint-Exupéry intended to keep the ‘reality’ of the little prince alive within the text is supported not only by the text, itself, but by the relatively recent discovery of a completed illustration of the narrator (a pilot) asleep or unconscious next to his downed plane. That this illustration was excluded from the final version of the text strongly suggests that Exupéry wished to avoid any possible inference by the reader that the tale was merely a sleeping man’s dreams or a dying man’s delusions (see Adler 2014).

What is special about Matinpoika’s translation is that it opens up ‘spaces,’ as it were — including the space to wonder if one is, in fact, reading an account of a dehydrated man’s delusions — for more complex, richer, and more ambivalent readings of Le petit prince than any other text I have known, including the original work. One might say of Le petit prince that its regressive undercurrents and multiple meanings are hidden, even, or perhaps especially, from the author. Most translations of the work only further repress its multiplicity, striving instead for that elusive yet perilous quality that haunts translators: ‘accuracy.’ And yet, the tale’s characters, dramatic action, and themes are laden with meaning, even if one does not read the work “against the grain,” as Terry Eagleton puts it (in 1986).

While other translations of Le petit prince (at least, those written in languages I am able to read) typically offer a flat and one-dimensional reading, and while literary and psychoanalytic analyses of the book offer alternative, critical interpretations in expository form (see, e.g., Drewermann 1993; Franz 1970), what is special about Matinpoika’s translation is that it integrates multiple interpretive possibilities into the text itself, making room for a fecund and layered reading. In comparison, for instance, to the standard-bearing English translation by Katherine Woods (1943b), Matinpoika takes advantage of virtually every opportunity in the story to offer the reader a whiff of doubt, a dash of
uncertainty, a hint of ambivalence. By contrast, Woods’s text, which, in many places, also fails to meet the standard of accuracy, forecloses all readings of the text but the most childish and ‘fable-esque.’

The Absurdity of Adults

In any language, Saint-Exupéry’s Le petit prince presents a moving, if not saccharine, critique of the modern, adult world and its ‘disenchantment’ (see, e.g., Weber 1991). It laments the inability or unwillingness of adults [les grands personnes] to recognize what is sacred and beautiful about life. At the same time, however, Le petit prince contains another story: a story of the struggles and the failures of a child and a man, if not a rather childish man [in Finnish: lapsellinen mies], to discover ways to be alive and content in the adult world.

The pilot, along with the boy whose tale he narrates, discover in each other reliable sources of confirmation of the need to imbue the adult world with absurdity, futility, and grief (see Bowker 2014), an activity not without its share of aggression. Together, the pilot and the boy regard, and sometimes treat, all adults as hopelessly lonely, foolish, and contemptible, preoccupied with themselves and with nonsensical activities, such as counting the stars in order to “own” them, or, more familiarly, travelling back and forth, half-asleep, on commuter trains. In this respect, as Christine de Larroche-Kodama has wisely noted, the immoderate sentimentality of the text, as in other cases

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1 Matinpoika refuses to engage in Saint-Exupéry’s childish language when he has the boy refer to adults as les grandes personnes [literally, ‘big people,’ but, commonly, ‘grown-ups’]. Instead, he translates each instance as ‘adults’ [aikuiset]. This is a matter of some importance when considering the attitude or point of view Matinpoika recommends in his translation, just as it affects our understanding of certain critical themes, such as the drawing of a snake eating an elephant, discussed below.

2 Of course, whether we accept these two individuals as distinct entities, as per the reality of the story, or understand the boy to be a projection of the pilot’s younger self, is a central ambiguity of the work, an ambiguity accentuated by what seem to be deliberate translative decisions taken by Matinpoika.
of excessive sentimentality, “covers up” a repressed impulse toward “brutality” (2015, 11–12).

Before he ‘descends’ to Earth, the unnamed boy visits six adults on six different planets. In these encounters we find manifestly disappointing adults and shattered fantasies of adulthood. That is, these encounters may be understood as failed attempts by the boy, and perhaps the pilot, to imagine adults who have discovered a way of living in the world that feels real, important, and meaningful. Of course, the boy finds only ridiculous figures, engaged in monotonous and empty activities. These individuals are often incapable of reason, of establishing equilibria with their natural environments, and of intervening with agency in their own lives, so as to create meaningful experiences.

If we were to posit that the boy’s attempts to find examples of meaningful lives are, at least unconsciously, intended to fail, then his ‘flights of fancy’ to the six planets would be, rather than sincere explorations, excuses to persist in a ‘global’ rejection of adulthood. On this reading, even before the boy descends to Earth, he is already convinced that the universe is ill-suited to him, that it is absurd and perhaps insane, and that it is inhabited only by ludicrous and trifling beings who do not understand the most essential things.

In spite of, or beneath, the boy’s apparent pride and vanity — emphasized by Matinpoika by his addition of the adjectives *itserakas* and *turhaan*, respectively — the boy deeply dreads being ‘unimportant’ for, as he admits, he has spent his life on a tiny *[très petite]*, insignificant planet, pulling up baobab roots, tending to what turns out to be a common flower, and watching the sun set, again and again. On any psychoanalytic reading, the boy’s fear that his own life may amount to little certainly figures into how he comes to regard those around him. That is, for a boy

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3 The French verb used most frequently by Saint-Exupéry here is *tomber*: to fall or drop. Best translated as ‘descent,’ the boy’s travels do have a downward trajectory, for not only will he fall, i.e., crash his spaceship on Earth, but will later, in death, fall to the ground, and, we might even say, ‘descend’ to the underworld.
who fears unimportance, it would be intolerable to find others who are important, whereas his injured ego is assuaged to find either that insignificance is shared by all, or, better yet, that he possesses a secret to which others are not privy, making others even more trivial, more absurd than he.

Put another way, the lessons the boy draws from his travels are nothing new. They are, rather, affirmations of what he already knows, which is that growing up and grown-ups are ‘bad.’ As in the case of the baobab trees, which the boy dreads most of all, growing up means overrunning the child’s world. Should a baobab tree ever reach maturity, it would, according to the boy, literally cut through his tiny planet, destroying it forever. Thus, the boy must be forever on guard, uprooting all fledgling baobabs as soon as he perceives them.

The baobabs both precede and do not precede the boy. While they are, in a sense, already there, they do not exist in ‘grown-up’ form, looming large, like adult figures: a detail missed by virtually all critical commentators on the tale. Sadly, this missed detail had led to a nearly universal mistaking of the symbolism of the baobab tree. All commentaries of which I am aware equate the baobab tree with an impinging parent or caregiver. But baobabs are threatening not because they suppress childhood expression or creativity in the present, but because they have the potential to extinguish what might remain of the child’s world in the future. That is, they are invisible, ubiquitous, and terrifying potentialities. They supposedly ‘infest’ the boy’s planet, but only as hidden seedlings, waiting to surprise the boy one day by popping up to the surface and starting to grow.

The baobab trees represent, I would argue, rather than ominous adults, the boy’s own impulses to develop and grow. The boy has come to regard growing up not as an opportunity to make his creative potentialities and capacities manifest in the adult world, but instead as a soul-splitting process that is mutually exclusive with childhood experience. We can imagine any number of reasons why a child might come to this unfortunate conclusion, some of which do include the presence of a repressive, abusive, neglectful, or narcissistic adult figure. Thus, the boy wishes
to remain a child forever (*puer aeternus*) and therefore must remain vigilant against a threat — the threat of developing into an adult — he can only defeat through his own premature death.

**Ambivalences of Development**

The project of growing up may come to entail, for all of us, what W.R. Bion calls a “hatred of development” alongside considerable envy of those who are or seem to be already developed, who seem able to contain the overwhelming emotions and terrors perceived by the child (1959, 1962). This envy may be directed both outwardly and inwardly: outwardly, as aggressive attempts to convince others that they, too, are condemned to hopelessness, and inwardly, as grief and shame. Moments in which hatred and envy appear between the lines of otherwise sweet and sentimental passages are common if not frequent, both in the original French text and in Matinpoika’s and my translations.

The wisdom of the railroad switchman, for instance, in a passage often overlooked by commentators, is that “nobody is happy where he is.” Such a claim, while it might resonate with a restless child or even an angry adolescent, is, on a mature level, a universal attribution of alienation and self-alienation. Of course, the boy agrees with and accepts this statement as absolute truth, conceiving every adult as inexorably lonely and compulsively running away from “where he is,” no matter where that place may be. It is no wonder, of course, that this description also seems to fit the activities of the boy and, possibly, the pilot as well, whose travels then may be imagined as flights into mania.

The railroad switchman declares that all adults are unhappy in the world, senselessly riding trains back and forth, desperately seeking change in scenery which, when they arrive, are never so much as noticed. This depressed and anxious state is contrasted with the condition of the children in the railcars, who look with wonder out the windows, instinctively knowing “what they are looking for.” If such claims were true, Wallace Stevens would not have been wrong to suggest that the greatest mercy one could bestow on adult “solitaires” would be to let them reside forever in a place of “perpetual undulation,” such as a train
switchen, where there would be “no cessation / Of motion, or of the noise of motion” (1990, 60). But of course, as any reader will know, adults do not ride commuter trains just to change the scenery: Mainly, they ride trains go to work, work that may be meaningful if not simply prudent. Then, they ride trains again to go home, sometimes to happy families. Nonetheless, of this life, the boy and the switchman conclude: “It’s not worth it” [Ce n’est pas la peine].

At this point, without being too pedestrian, it is well to conduct a ‘reality-check’ on the story. Even admitting that we are reading a fairy tale, the pilot is now relating to us a memory told to him by a mysterious boy who appeared in the Sahara desert, having descended after touring several small planets in outer space. This boy has, inexplicably, walked hundreds if not thousands of miles out of the desert, to a metropolitan area, and has met there a railroad switchman, with whom he watches speeding trains pass. In doing so, he accepts the sweeping, unsubstantiated judgments about the psychic lives of the passengers inside — individuals neither the boy nor the switchman can see much less know — only to declare that adult life is not worth living. How is the reader to accept this tale-within-a-tale as something other than a reverie? How is the reader not to wonder if the details of the story, such as the scene of the speeding railcars, are akin to moving screens onto which the pilot has projected his own impressions of adult life?

To be fair, the pilot and the switchman are not entirely wrong in their attributions. Many adults do live their lives as if asleep, unhappy where they are, and chasing after what they know not. What is striking is that, in spite of or because of the substantial psychological distance between this reverie and objective reality, the pilot and the boy arrive at the conclusion that adult life is so tedious as to make it completely valueless: “not worth” living. While the switchman’s assertion could be found in elaborated form in a variety of critiques of modernity (see, e.g., Bermann 1983; Marcuse 1964), the judgment it occasions suggests a profound melancholy and a sense of hopelessness about coping with the demands of the adult world, demands that sometimes
include riding on commuter trains. Today, we might call such reactions, including passive suicidal ideation, to quotidian adult duties and responsibilities, hallmarks of ‘severe depression.’

After the boy leaves the switchman, he and the pilot discover a perfectly functioning water well, which appears at just the right time in the middle of the desert. Two crucial lines are uttered at this moment. First, the boy, whom the pilot has carried through the desert as if he were a fragile treasure, asks for a drink. When the pilot hears his request, he exclaims: “And I knew exactly what he was looking for!” [Et je compris ce qu’il avait cherché!]. Since we know that the boy does not need water, this odd announcement and its exclamatory punctuation strongly suggest that what the pilot ‘knows’ the boy to be looking for is someone to hold him, to cherish him as a fragile treasure, to nourish him, and to take care of him as if he were an infant.

Second, after he and the boy drink the water, the pilot tells us that he feels better and finally breathes easily. And yet, he asks himself: “Why must I feel this anguish?” For psychoanalytic readings of the text, this question — “Pourquoi fallait-il que j’eusse de la peine?” — is the question, for the pilot and the boy seem to have always suffered a certain anguish, an anguish they cannot escape, leaving them “unhappy where they are,” no matter where they are, in spite of both of their extensive travels. This anguish is made both more acute and less comprehensible by the fact that neither the pilot or the boy seem to have the first clue about its source. Instead, the pilot and the boy have devoted their lives to ‘taking flight’ from the world, and have perhaps even risked their lives to find evidence that it is the world, and not they, that is faulty.

The pilot’s mysterious anguish lies not only in a vague apprehension regarding the boy’s departure but in the unconscious, repressed experience of his own lost boyhood, and in the unconscious, repressed knowledge that this loss will remain with him, wherever he goes, throughout his life.4 If the boy is a sur-

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4 If it seems odd to speak of “(unconscious, repressed) knowledge,” it may be useful to imagine the distinction drawn by Christopher Bollas (1987)
rogate or stand-in for the pilot’s lost childhood, then his wish to be ‘important’ is identical to the pilot’s wish to have mattered. Sadly, the pilot’s attachment to the boy holds out only false hope for recovering what he has lost and never found, since the boy merely echoes the same defense that the pilot has already mastered: the rejection of adult life as hopelessly meaningless. The persistent anguish of the pilot is, in fact, affirmed by his own verdict that life is not “worth the trouble” [la peine] of living.

It is essential to avoid over-simplifying the pilot’s and the boy’s feelings about development. They both hate and love it: They are, in a word, ambivalent. The opening lines of the book, in which the pilot tells of his own childhood experience of looking in amazement at an image of a boa constrictor devouring an animal, and then drawing his own picture of a boa digesting an elephant, hold an essential clue to the tale. Most psychoanalytically inclined critics immediately presume that the image of the snake eating an animal, in the context of a book such as Le petit prince, is a symbol of a “devouring mother and, in deeper sense, of the unconscious, which suffocates life and prevents the human being from developing” (Marie-Louise von Franz quoted in Larroche-Kodoma 2015, 2). Franz explains that the image of the elephant consumed by the snake signifies the thwarted individuation of Saint-Exupéry, which is “swallowed and unable to come out again.”

In the simplest terms, I believe Franz has gotten it backwards. It would not be difficult, although it would be irksome, to review the vast literature suggesting symbolic affinities between the developing male child, the snake, and the phallus. What is more, as most Kleinian theorists would agree (see, e.g., Klein 1988), the prevalence and psychic significance in the maturational process of fantasies of ‘devouring the mother’ can hardly be overstated.

But if the image symbolized a child being consumed by a parent, it is hard to understand why, according to the text, the boy

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between what is known and what is (and what can be) thought, a distinction that makes room for unconscious knowledge or ‘the unthought known.’
would not be frightened by it, but, instead, would find it ‘magnificent’ \textit{[magnifique]} — a term that, even in French, cannot be read without hearing the connotations of greatness, power, and magnitude. Instead, the young pilot proudly shows his drawing to adults, presuming that it will frighten them.\footnote{Here, Matinpoika strikes at the very first sentence of Saint-Exupéry’s text by substituting a word that means, in general, ‘powerful’ and, more precisely, ‘forceful’ or ‘strong’ for \textit{magnifique}. The two Finnish terms Matinpoika employs — \textit{vahva} and \textit{lumoava} — to translate terms such as ‘powerful’ or ‘impressive’ \textit{[puissant / impressionnant]} I discuss in greater detail in the annotated translation, itself.} What is ‘magnificent’ about the image, and what the young pilot imagines to be likely to frighten adults, is the idea that a relatively small snake could consume a comparatively enormous elephant. Later, the boy will make fun of the snake he meets in the desert as being tiny, skinny, and powerless. But it is the fantasy above about the snake devouring the elephant that not only opens the book but drives its action.

That a snake can consume its prey “without chewing” also adds detail to the desire at the heart of this fantasy: That is, in this fantasy, the young pilot need not imagine biting, masticating, or decimating an adult, piece by piece, in a horrific or violent fashion. Instead, the snake/child can simply \textit{incorporate} the elephant/adult — along with all that it signifies and possesses — and keep it inside. In Saint-Exupéry’s illustration, the elephant appears not even to be dead, for it is depicted standing upright and with eyes open.

The point of undertaking this analysis is not merely to upturn a longstanding (mis)interpretation of a symbol that opens the text, but to suggest that, right from the start, we are introduced to the pilot’s — and, perhaps, the boy’s — ambivalent conflict about growing up. He wishes to incorporate adult knowledge and experience, but, in order to accomplish this, he needs to undertake a process of maturation for which he is ill-prepared and, subsequently, which he regards as degrading to his child-self. By fantasizing about consuming an adult (or adulthood) simply and \textit{tout entier}, he imagines himself capable of skipping over the
difficult work of developing and, instead, of being capable of remaining a child while, at the same time, possessing the wisdom and power of an adult. Put simply: He wishes to be developed without developing.

Here, one is tempted to think of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Experience,” in which experience is valorized as the royal road to truth and is frequently analogized with consumption. “If a man should consider the nicety of the passage of a piece of bread down his throat,” opines Emerson, “he would starve” (2009, 313). Emerson here stands against thought and reason in favor of an orientation to the world in which pure and immediate experience is simply and wholly ‘ingested.’ Experience is best incorporated, on his account, by incorporating what is at hand via simple, unreflective consumption, not by the (far more difficult) processes of learning, thinking, questioning, and relating. “If we will take the good we find, asking no questions,” Emerson declares, “we shall have heaping measures. The great gifts are not got by analysis. Everything good is on the highway” (315).

Emerson writes, in a passage that could very well be uttered by a character in *Le petit prince,*

Do not craze yourself with thinking, but go about your business anywhere. Life is not intellectual or critical, but sturdy. Its chief good is for well-mixed people who can enjoy what they find, without question. Nature hates peeping, and our mothers speak her very sense when they say, ‘Children, eat your victuals, and say no more of it.’ (2009, 314)

If thinking, questioning, choosing, communicating, and ‘peeping’ (i.e., expressing curiosity and interest) all disrupt the process of incorporating the experience we need to develop, then it must be because the self that conducts all of these activities is either inept or corrupt (see Bowker 2016).

Oddly, on this line of thought, the many activities in which we must engage, in order to grow and mature, must be thwarted in order to accept the sort of passive experience that putatively allows us to mature. Instead of deciding or choosing or acting,
we simply take in what we are given just as it is given. Of course, to “eat your victuals” while being forbidden to speak may be to be physically nourished, but it is to be emotionally and intellectually starved. To accept this understanding of human development is to accept a relationship with the world that resembles a relationship with a narcissistic object, in which the very presence of the self is (paradoxically and cruelly) imagined to interfere with the growth and development of the self.

Narcissistic Love

The pilot and the boy are not consciously aware of why the universe seems to be populated only with unhappy, solitary, absurd adults. The problem is understood by the boy and other important figures, such as the switchman and the fox, in terms of their (i.e., the adults’) ‘forgetting’ of the wonder and instinctual knowledge of the child. With this loss of memory, which might be understood as a loss of contact with the child self, adults withdraw their interest from the world and from what is truly magical, meaningful, and beautiful in it (see Bowker 2019b). Of course, one reason why the pilot and the boy are unconsciously driven to make the world absurd is because it is they who have ‘forgotten’ their deep-seated envy and resentment of adults.

Consider, on this matter, the one individual visited by the boy who is found to be least absurd. This individual is one who follows orders dutifully, and who is devoted to something other than himself. Of course, I am speaking about the boy’s explicit sympathy for — one might also call it an emotional identification with — the lamplighter, who was, apparently, once “ordered” to light and extinguish a streetlamp each morning and evening.6

These orders were issued long ago, but now, as the lamplighter’s planet has begun to rotate more and more rapidly, the lamplighter must light and extinguish his lamp every minute in

6 One may be reminded here, since absurdity is at issue throughout the book, of the crime committed by the condemned man in Franz Kafka’s great story, “In the Penal Colony” (1971). He is condemned to die (but, of course, does not die) for having failed to follow his orders to wake up every hour, on the hour, and salute his captain’s door.
order to keep to his regimen. In spite of this, he never abandons his duty, a duty set upon him by someone or something who is never revealed and, apparently, a duty the lamplighter has never questioned or challenged, in spite of its inane nature and agonizing effects, which include, of course, the impossibility that the lamplighter will ever know a moment’s rest. I would suggest, here, that what the boy identifies with in the lamplighter is not only the man and his (manic) activity — although these are important — but the context in which the man lives and works. The lamplighter’s world has changed around him. His world is, literally, moving faster than he can handle. And yet, he does not change his routine. The clash between his world and his duty has created an untenable situation within which he lives, never abandoning his orders and, seemingly, never openly rebelling against them or their mysterious source.

There is a Sisyphean element in this work, of course, and, more to the point, his life is reminiscent of the famous advice offered by Albert Camus concerning how to live in an absurd world. To live amidst absurdity, according to Camus, requires “an aspiration to order” (1956, 23), as well as a refusal to show that this very order is the cause of our anguish. We hide our anguish by living “without appeal” to any external authority (1955, 53), which is to say, in part, that we do not shift the burden of our responsibilities, no matter how absurd, onto someone or something else, but rather comply or even over-comply with them. The individual must live “solely with what he knows” (1955, 53), ever “faithful to the absurd commandments,” so that he “preserves” even that which “crushes” him (1955, 34).

Just as we are surprised when Camus insists that we must imagine Sisyphus to be happy (see Bowker 2014), we are surprised that, although the lamplighter is exhausted and miserable, the boy describes his predicament as “funny” and declares his occupation to be both “beautiful” [très jolié] and meaningful [a … un sens]: Indeed, he finds it “meaningful because it’s beautiful” [véritablement utile puisque c’est joli]. Why is this type of selfless devotion so crucial to the boy’s sense of both beauty and meaning? There seems to be a very fine line, in the mind of the boy
(and the mind of the pilot, and the mind of Saint-Exupéry) between the rote repetitions of ‘adults’ on commuter trains and the lamplighter’s obdurate following of orders. The clue to this subtle difference, and, in some ways, the clue to the central theme of Saint-Exupéry’s text, may be found in the boy’s relationship with his flower, his rose.

The rose that appears one day in the boy’s world never shows or tells the boy that he is loved, cared about, or valued. The rose never relates to him as if he matters in his own right. The rose makes exorbitant demands of him, emotionally manipulates him with guilt, threatens to fall ill or die from neglect, and hides its emotions out of vanity when it could, instead, share them with the boy. Nevertheless, the boy serves his rose dutifully, and it is this unrequited, faithful service that defines their relationship.

The relationship I have just described might well be considered a ‘textbook’ description of a narcissistic and abusive relationship (see, e.g., Miller 1997). If there is love in the relationship, it is a narcissistic love that, pace Consuela de Saint-Exupéry, is modeled not on a tumultuous, adult romantic relationship but, rather, on a relationship between a child and a narcissistic parent, perhaps a female figure or mother, since the boy gives the flower a feminine gender (a practice Matinpoika refuses, interestingly).

If we imagine the rose as a mother-figure (who, of course, needn’t be female), we may understand the boy’s absolute devotion to his rose, as well as his equation of love with the anguish and the enchantment of belonging that resembles enslavement: The boy’s devotion is essential to the rose’s survival, and the rose’s survival is the boy’s survival. Without a relationship to the ‘mother’ (as neglectful and abusive as ‘she’ may be), the boy would be left with utter desolation. The prospect of this unimaginable catastrophe is ever-present in the rose’s “extravagant, totalitarian demands that he [the boy] love her boundlessly”

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7 Indeed, “there is nothing more frightening for a child than a mother’s threat to die” (Larroche-Kodama 2015, 25).
the anguished and the enchanted (Drewermann 1993, 90), which the boy understands to be the only way to keep the rose, and therefore himself, alive.

If the boy were to attend to himself and not to the rose, or if he were to abandon the rose, or, worst of all, if he were to free himself from the rose by becoming conscious of the abusive nature of their relationship and by developing into an autonomous adult, he — i.e., his child-self — would die. That the boy does eventually depart from his planet to visit others, ostensibly in the hope of “gaining knowledge and finding a suitable occupation” [pour y chercher une occupation et pour s’instruire], is certainly a sign of progress. He leaves his rose physically, but his never-ending emotional devotion to her — represented in virtually everything he does on Earth, from his initial ‘descent’ and ‘crash’ to his demand that the pilot draw a muzzle for his sheep, to, ultimately, his plan to reunite with his rose in death — reflects the fact that his emancipation from this narcissistic object is far from complete.8

Hopelessness and Envy

Thus, Le petit prince tells not one tale but many. It presents — or, rather, has the potential to present — many sides of the complex project of becoming an adult. This project entails a willingness to abandon certain beliefs and fantasies associated with childhood and to discover a way of living as an adult among other adults — a way that, nonetheless, still offers the individual a sense of continuity with his or her own creative experience (established, ideally, in childhood) and with his or her inner or fantasy world. It is this continuity between the child’s sense of creativity, vitality, meaning, and the “feeling of real” (Winnicott

8 Without delving too deeply into psychoanalytic object-relations theory, it may be rightly said that, although the boy does physically separate himself from his rose, and, in so doing, destroys his rose in a certain sense, in the boy’s mind the rose does not survive his destruction of it, and therefore, it continues to fail him as a facilitating object through which he might come to discover both his capacity to exist as a subject and to find externality, which is to say, to learn about other objects as non-subjective objects. On this matter, see Bowker and Buzby 2017 and Winnicott 1971.
that, ideally, permits the child to imbue adult life, activities, and relationships with “importance.” The French word, repeated throughout Saint-Exupéry’s text, is the same: *importance*.

Needless to say, the process of maturation into adulthood can be complicated or altogether derailed by failures in the child’s early environment: most often, failures in the care and love provided — or not provided, or conditionally provided, or unpredictably provided — by the child’s primary caregiver(s). If, for instance, a child is abandoned, physically or emotionally, then the child will likely experience a profound sense of hopelessness about finding what a secure attachment-figure represents, which is nothing less than *a whole world* that holds out the possibility that the child can *matter*, i.e., that the child is real and ‘important.’ Such a child will carry this hopelessness into adult life, and may well reject even auspicious prospects of caring relationships, meaningful work, and genuine contact with his or her self, since, in the adult world, relationships, work, and self-contact do not operate according to the child’s rigid and absolute terms.

On this issue, I consider rather significant that neither Saint-Exupéry’s text, nor any translation of it of which I am aware, nor even the best-known criticisms of it, have adequately remarked on the brutality, lopsidedness, and self-destructive qualities of the philosophy of the fox, to be discussed immediately below. As I have suggested above, the quest to find a place for the self in the adult world may be understood as the quest to *matter*, or, to find a way of living that feels ‘important.’ Apart from the late-coming rose, the boy never speaks of parents or parental figures. We might presume that he has erased or forgotten them because, whether they actually existed or not, he has had no early experience of parental love, holding, facilitation, or guidance that might permit him to experience childhood as a foundation for — rather than the antithesis of — maturation.

And since the rose, as a surrogate parent, only does more damage on this front, the boy is ready to accept the false and tragic bargain suggested by the fox, whom he meets shortly after he descends to Earth. The bargain suggested by the fox is this:
Either (a) the boy must become an ‘adult’ (in his own quite pejorative sense) and give up the hope of experiencing child-like delight and wonder, or (b) he must allow himself to be ‘tamed’ or ‘mastered,’ such that he belongs to another. If he accepts the latter, what the boy receives is the enchantment of belonging, such that he delights in, wonders at, loves, lives, and dies for a special other, while his own life holds little or no intrinsic value.

The bond or tie forged by being *apprivoisé* (Saint-Exupéry’s term for being ‘tamed,’ ‘domesticated,’ or ‘mastered’) has known its share of apologists. At first glance, or for those who do not read French, it may seem merely to refer to the domestication of a wild animal, and, indeed, that is the most common French usage. Metaphorically, then, one might permit the term merely to denote the establishment of that bond that overcomes the distinct needs, experiences, and, one might say, ‘natures’ of wild animals and human beings.

Yet no one, to my knowledge, has sufficiently critiqued the autonomy-effacing qualities of this term and the idea that lies, thinly veiled, behind it. The word derives from the Latin *prīvus*, and is, etymologically, the antithesis of being singular or private. To be *apprivoisé* is to be deprived of one’s own-ness, to lose self-ownership, to cease to belong to oneself. Perhaps something of the danger in celebrating the project of taming and being tamed would be more clear to English readers if it were compared with the term, ‘civilizing,’ as that term was used — just as *apprivoiser* was used — to justify centuries of colonial projects in ‘wild’ lands that, the colonialists said, ‘belonged to no one,’ were inhabited only by ‘wild people’ who needed to be civilized because, without being *apprivoisés*, they would, tragically, never ‘belong’ to the modern world or the Christian God.

What is more, no reader or commentator, to my knowledge, has adequately critiqued either the asymmetry involved in the ‘taming’ project nor the confusion about who tames whom, and, as a result, who escapes the anguish of isolation and who finds what I have called ‘the enchantment of belonging.’ The bond that ties the servant to the master, or the colonized to the colonizer, or the animal to its domesticator, is clearly infused with power.
and domination. But what seems to have fooled audiences and critics alike is that the boy is encouraged to allow himself to be tamed, to subjugate himself to another. Although the boy does ‘tame’ the fox and so becomes his ‘master,’ the ‘philosophy of the fox’ is organized around the corollary process: that of subjugating oneself by finding a master to serve.

Of course, as any student of Hegel will appreciate, a master needs a servant in order to be a master; so we say, rightly, that the master needs the servant as much, if not more, than the servant needs the master. What is missing from the two terrible choices outlined above is a third option: to belong to oneself in such a way that one’s own spirit or, we might say, one’s own ‘inner child’ enriches one’s own adult self, one’s activities, and one’s relationships, infusing them with meaning and importance, without the need for servitude.

Earlier, I argued that audiences and critics of Le petit prince had been, in a word, fooled. But the same mistake has been made well outside of the context of this particular book. Here, I am referring, of course, to the influential and overlapping moral, political, and scholarly discourses in which we are exhorted to bind ourselves to ‘the other’ (or the ‘Other’) in just the way that the fox describes, either because such enthralment is thought to be a source of a divine enchantment, or because it is imagined to be the only way not to erase others’ realities, or simply because we know ourselves to be so thoroughly dependent upon others that, to put it bluntly, we may as well embrace it and give up on fantasies of mature, autonomous subjectivity (see Bowker 2015, 2016, 2017).

One can find ample evidence of the ‘philosophy of the fox’ in the most prominent political and ethical thought of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in the works of thinkers such as Georges Bataille (1988), Walter Benjamin (1999), Judith Butler (2000), Albert Camus (1956), Cathy Caruth (1996), Jacques Derrida (1989, 2001), Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 1998), Slavoj Žižek (1989), and many more. With respect to the work of Levinas, Fred Alford aptly names the ethos of all-encompassing subjection to others’ “hostage being” (2002, 29). The desire to
be held hostage by another, and the way in which this desire relies on an identification with the aggressor (Freud 1993), is ultimately born out of envy at those who have achieved the kind of maturity that permits them to act as masters.

At the risk of offending the politically correct, to borrow a term from today’s discourses of identity, the masters are ‘the privileged.’ They are ‘privileged’ — in the sense which I intend here — not primarily because they possess social, cultural, and economic advantages that make life safer and easier for them, but because they have been ‘privileged’ enough to have had healthy and loving growing-up experiences, which have permitted them to develop mature, autonomous identities (see Bowker and Levine 2018; Bowker 2019). Envy directed at such persons — which co-exists uncomfortably with the postmodern ethical call to revere and serve them — may take the form of entreaties, inveiglements, or even demands to regard the world as absurd, such that others share in the self’s inability to find meaning and importance.

Put another way: Without belonging to oneself, there can be no meaning or mattering. And without meaning and mattering, it is intolerable that others should mean or matter. Thus, the aim — or at least one aim — in the ‘philosophy of the fox’ is to make the world a place of meaninglessness and insignificance for everyone. Of course, this project is underwritten by the even deeper, and more personal, threat of anguish and desolation that thwarted healthy maturation in the first place (see Levine and Bowker 2019). On this point, it would have to be considered ‘uncanny’ that, of all places, the boy and the pilot meet in the desert, and not just any desert, but the most barren and inhospitable desert on Earth: the Sahara.

Another reason we are ‘enthralled’ by the idea of being ‘enthralled to others’ is that behind this possibility looms the ambivalent hope and dread of returning to the enchanting yet agonizing world we once knew, the familiar (and familial) first world, a world where something approximating love was discoverable but contingent upon being for another and so upon not being oneself. We might even say that the narcissistic, sadis-
tic, master-servant paradigm championed by the fox — and by countless influential cultural and social leaders today — requires that we return to early moments of psychic death or near-death, again and again, mainly because, in spite of their destructiveness, these moments are also the only moments in which we seemed to matter (to another). The impulse to return to moments of early psychic death or near-death is a subject about which a great deal has been written (see, e.g., Freud 1920, 1957), and is unfortunately beyond the scope of this Preface. But it may suffice to say that it is both thrilling and terrifying, a source of both anguish and enchantment.

Translative Interventions and Forbearances

Matinpoika’s translation is special for several reasons, but primarily because, as I have noted above, it opens up ‘spaces’ in which the reader is free to question the reality of the story’s characters and events, the reliability of the pilot’s account, and the meaning, maturity, and reasonableness of the themes and messages proffered. If one were pinned down, one would have to say that Matinpoika’s text suggests, at the very least, that the reader approach the tale with suspicion. Through his word choices, subtle shifts in emphasis and phrasing, omissions and re-arrangements of passages, changes in perspective, and even outright additions to Saint-Exupéry’s text, Matinpoika presents the story as both an inner and an outer reality, as both a fairy tale and a critique, as both a ‘likely story’ and a journey into the psyche of a man who is ‘lost’ in more than one respect.

I have titled the work The Anguished and the Enchanted not only because I believe this title directs the reader to the central themes of the text, but because Matinpoika refuses to call the boy ‘the little prince,’ or even a ‘prince’ [prinssi] at all. Instead, throughout the work — until the final pages where Matinpoika translates petit bonhomme as ‘little man’ — Matinpoika refers to ‘the little prince’ simply as ‘the boy.’ As a reader and a translator, I was not tempted to correct this aspect of his translation and, indeed, I ought to confess, I am sympathetic to Matin-
poika’s decision on this matter. In fact, when I realized what he had done — something that had not occurred to me even after reading *Le petit prince* countless times in both French and English — I was abashed at my own thoughtlessness.

By right, there is no reason to consider the boy a prince. He never refers to himself as a prince and he claims no royal parentage. Even deep within the reality presented by Saint-Exupéry’s text, not everyone who lives alone on a planet is the ruler of that planet, for we encounter a vain man who is neither a prince nor king, and a businessman who similarly makes no claim to royalty. On the contrary, it is suggested throughout the book that one is what one does, just as the king is a king because he issues commands, and the drunkard is a drunkard because he drinks too much. Given the boy’s primary occupation in his small world, he and the book would perhaps be more aptly named: ‘The little groundskeeper’. This, the name, ‘little prince’ is a really term of affection and, very likely, of identification and idealization.

With respect to the structure of the book, the twenty-seven short chapters of *Le petit prince* are here presented in six lengthier ‘parts’ and an Epilogue, although Matinpoika did not divide or name them as such, but merely began writing at the top of a new page when he seemed to wish to end one section and to begin another. The titles of the parts are entirely my own, and I have given myself some degree of poetic license on this front; hopefully, not so much as to distract from the text or from Matinpoika’s interpretation of it.

Perhaps because the story told by Matinpoika is now related in the third person, or perhaps because his first encounters with the book may not have been visual but oral/aural, the famous illustrations of *Le petit prince* are not reproduced in Matinpoika’s pages and are, in fact, underemphasized when discussed in the written text. The only illustration to be found amidst Matinpoika’s pages appears to be nothing more than a doodle on page 90 of his work: a small, marginal sketch of a goose. This drawing is not related or attached to any text and there is no reason to believe that Matinpoika wished for it to be integrated in the work.
Nevertheless, I have restored the image to the best of my ability so as to reproduce it here (Fig. 1).

The epigraph by Wallace Stevens is entirely my own addition, yet it seems to me to add as much as any epigraph can add, while doing nothing to detract from the themes highlighted in the text. It is doubtful, but not at all impossible, that Matinpoika knew of this poem or of Wallace Stevens, but the lines were so present in my own mind as I read Matinpoika’s text that I felt strongly that they belonged, somehow, in the present work.

In situations where it is helpful to share with the reader the Finnish term employed by Matinpoika, I have placed it in brackets immediately following my English translation. And in cases where it is informative to share both Matinpoika’s Finnish and Saint-Exupéry’s French, I have bracketed both terms — the Finnish, then the French — separated with a forward slash: [/].

In sum, the text I have rendered in English has been translated with deference not primarily to the French of Saint-Exupéry — with which I am quite familiar and which I have, of course, consulted at great length in preparing this book — but to the Finnish of Matinpoika. I have taken my foremost duty as a
translator to preserve the ‘spaces’ opened by Matinpoika’s translation, spaces that, as I have now suggested more than once, permit us both to read and to reflect, both to engage and to critique, the symbols, themes, and meanings of *Le petit prince*.

**Biographical Note: The Life of Eino Matinpoika**

“Eino” has been a common given name in Finland for some time, but holds no particular meaning of which I am aware, apart from the fact that it is derived from the root “ein” which, in many languages, means simply “one.” I have, at times, wondered why Eino was not named “Aino,” pronounced only slightly differently, and a prominent name in the *Kalevala*, meaning not “one” but “the only one.” I have wondered, given the scant details of his life I know, if his name — Eino Matinpoika [literally ‘one child of Matti’, i.e., a patronymic] — contained some clue about his place in the family, or in the world, as if, somehow, he were fated to struggle to forge a robust identity, or a personal sense of mattering.

I never knew Eino Matinpoika personally, but I do possess a golden locket that belonged to his wife, Maria, with an old and very small profile photograph of Matinpoika inside, where he looks a bit like the gaunt, elder Friedrich Nietzsche. In this way and others, it seems, Matinpoika was contrasted with his father, Matti, who was descended from the Sámi (the primary indigenous Finno-Ugric ethnic group hailing from the North), and who was a veritable colossus, standing over two meters tall and weighing a muscular 130 kilos, with a capacious mind to match. It is fabled that Matti’s enormous hands weighed ten kilos each, to account for his ‘adroitness’ at everything from building, to fighting, to playing Rachmaninoff, Liszt, and, most importantly, Sibelius on the harpsichord.

Matti was bright, brave, and tireless. He was, to adopt a Yiddish idiom, a *mensch*. He fought the Communists (“The Reds”) in the Finnish Civil War of 1918, where he suffered an injury in his upper thigh that left him with a noticeable but not ignoble stagger. In the interwar period, Matti studied and traveled wide-
ly throughout Europe. In Paris, he met the woman who would become his wife, Riia Taanila, a Finn (although not Sámi) from a well-to-do family, visiting France on holiday.

Matti became proficient in a variety of subjects, from philosophy to literature to physics, and mastered at least five languages: Finnish, English, French, German, and Dutch. When he returned to Finland to become a schoolteacher, and later a Head of School, he bought a sizeable, wooded plot of land in the West, complete with a large pond. There he built the family home, purportedly with his own enormous hands.

In 1929, Eino Matinpoika was born a premature and sickly child. In certain ways, he did not develop properly. His frequent ailments kept him away from others, yet he was said not to have minded his relative solitude. He ended up a slight and physically awkward man, but not an uncoordinated one, just as he was honest to the point of naivety, but not at all stupid. He won the favor of others mainly by way of his absolute sincerity.

Having failed to advance out of the early stages of his schooling and lacking the industriousness with which most Finns like to characterize themselves, the young Matinpoika lived an undisturbed, if not uneventful, existence in Finland, where he was said to have spent most of his time in leisure at the pond, which was frequented by small grey geese and enormous whooper swans. If one were to indulge in a bit of armchair psychoanalytic speculation, one might not be surprised to learn that Matinpoika was particularly fond of the plain, diminutive geese, and somewhat less fond of the glorious, loud swans. In fact, he is said to have tended to the geese avidly, ensuring that their food sources were safe, and trying, always in vain, to entice them to forsake their imperative to migrate and to stay at home with him through the long winters. His family thought him a bit eccentric for his habit of leaving trails of rye bread to lure the geese into large, teepee-like structures he built with birch tree branches. The geese, of course, enjoyed the rye bread, but never followed his trails quite far enough for Matinpoika to make them his own.

When Matinpoika and his family arrived in America, he — to the surprise of his wife and daughter, one presumes — declared
their surname not to be ‘Matinpoika’ but ‘Hanhillammi,’ which means, literally, ‘goose pond.’ Sadly, as with so many immigrants, the exact spelling and pronunciation of his name was treated with relative indifference by immigration officials and the family’s surname was registered as ‘Hanhillammi’ — a more common Finnish surname — before being quickly anglicized to ‘Hamilton.’ In any event, if Matinpoika saw in his voyage to America a chance to separate himself from his father and his life in Finland, he must have also wished to hold on to at least one important aspect of that: his relationship with the geese that he loved. Indeed, one might say that, by changing the family name in this way, he expressed a wish to belong to the geese, or, perhaps, for the geese to belong to him.

Upon moving to Ashtabula, Ohio, Matinpoika — who learned English but still attended Finnish-language worship services at the Bethany Lutheran Church on Michigan Avenue — found that he was unqualified or ill-suited for most available jobs. Eventually, he found work on railroad crews in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. One of the few surviving stories about Matinpoika runs that his shift boss once asked him to work on a Sunday. Matinpoika, who may or may not have been devout but who was, if nothing else, a man of routine, refused. The boss threatened, “If you don’t come in on Sunday, don’t bother showing up on Monday either!” to which Matinpoika replied, “I understand,” only to present himself ready for work the following Tuesday. His boss was so amused by Matinpoika’s sincerity that he kept him on his crews, in spite of his physical limitations, for nine more years, until Matinpoika suffered a deadly aneurism, possibly from the demands of his labor, for which he was not well-suited, but about which he was never known to complain.

Matthew Hamilton Bowker, May 12, 2019
The Anguished and the Enchanted