

LESSONS FROM A ROSE AND A FOX

The fragility of flowers is partially attributed to their susceptibility to the flux of environmental conditions. Such a threat also impends upon human life especially in the stage of childhood because their thorns or defense mechanisms are just beginning to develop. Nevertheless, even Kio, the toddler-age brother of Suki, recognizes this when Suki's friend Lisa comes over for a visit. After a brief greeting, Kio gives Lisa the sleeping cat but takes it back when Lisa laughs at his difficulty in pronunciation. While refusing to expose this creature to danger, he does not remove himself from the situation but points out to Lisa that he doesn't make fun of her. Furthermore, his intolerance for injustice incites him to scold Suki for talking about him in the third person while he is present. Nonetheless, he retracts his thorns and brings out a game which all can play in order to restore a friendly atmosphere. However, later when Kio falls down the stairs, Suki reflects that this might be a way for him to receive some positive attention. Realizing that Kio was injured in the earlier incident, she vows to attend to him more in the future. Meanwhile, the protagonist of The Little Prince is learning that the attention he paid his flower is a manifestation of his love for her. Furthermore, the unfortunate similarity in both novels is awareness when love is withdrawn.

The little prince has just left his flower, that "complex creature" so named not only for her profusion of petals but also for her range of being proud, silly, delicate, and wise, in order to travel. A lamplighter, the sole inhabitant of the fifth planet he visits, is the only person he's met so far with whom he'd like to be friends. This is because his occupation attests to the fact that he thinks of more than himself; this is a necessary condition for being a friend. The further he travels and the more he talks with various plants, animals, and people, the more he becomes aware of his flower's specialness. The reflection involved in discussion leads him to compare his world with the new ones. As a result, his flower comes out smelling like the only rose. Indeed, it is because its uniqueness is no longer defined by it being the sole member of its species (for the little prince has discovered a garden full of roses on Earth) but by being the sole recipient of his care. Similarly, by the fox asking if he can rely upon the little prince, it is being tamed by him. Although in the relationship between the flower and the prince it seems the latter is the dominant one and thus the tamer, the prince discovers that he needs to take care of the flower. He misses her. To be tamed is to be responsive to another, to value another at least as much as oneself. Responsibility is entailed in friendship. The shrewd fox confides in the little prince that, "one only understands the things one tames." (St. Exupery, p. 65) Such comprehension arises from listening, sympathizing, and aiding the growth of one's friend. I would like to expand the fox's tenet to include taming's effect upon self-realization which the little prince illustrates. His appreciation of the rose is also an appreciation of what it is to be a civilized human - to be caring.

This was epitomized by Suki's going beyond the immediate act of Kio's fall to contemplate the person inside. She is already privy to the fox's secret: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." (St. Exupery, p. 68) With such a vision of the right, it is especially disturbing to read the dedication of The Little Prince which honors St. Exupery's best friend who is cold and hungry. How can this incongruity be? In a world in which all people were tamed and civilized, this would be an impossibility.

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Bibliography

1. Matthew Lipman. Lisa. Montclair, New Jersey: First Mountain Foundation, 1983.
2. Antoine de St. Exupery. The Little Prince. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1958.