

# Philosophical Thoughts from the Perspective of Ecological Literature: A Case Study of *The Little Prince*

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## ABSTRACT

Ecological literature is an ancient and emerging art form produced by the intersection of literature and ecology, including broad and narrow ecological literature. *The Little Prince* is a noted short fairy tale written by French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry from the perspective of children in 1942. It tells the readers the different adventures that the little prince went through during the journey from his planet to the earth, in which people can learn some philosophical thoughts on life, environment, love, and humanism. Therefore, this paper adopts the comprehensive application of the literature research and case analysis to study the work's philosophical thoughts from the perspective of ecological literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Ecological literature, *The Little Prince*, philosophical thoughts

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, ecological literature is a kind of literature that reflects the connection between society and human beings, aiming at exploring how people contact nature. However, the trend of studying ecological literature and *The Little Prince* (As shown in Figures 1& 2) has not been so steady in the past ten years. More research efforts should be made to obtain a new and deeper understanding. Based on reality, in the work *The Little Prince*, the philosophical thoughts are almost anywhere that the readers can find out on the basis of ecological literature. Thus, with integrated methods of the comprehensive application of literature research and case analysis, this paper aims to combine *The Little Prince* and ecological literature, and find out what real and practical philosophical thoughts it concludes.

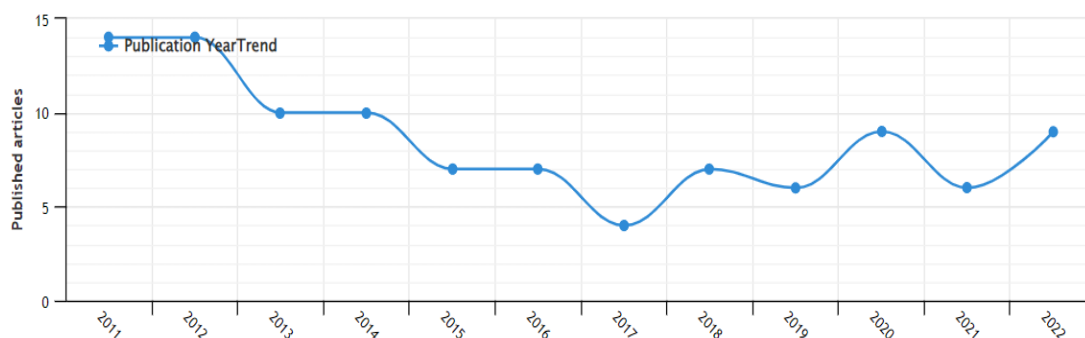
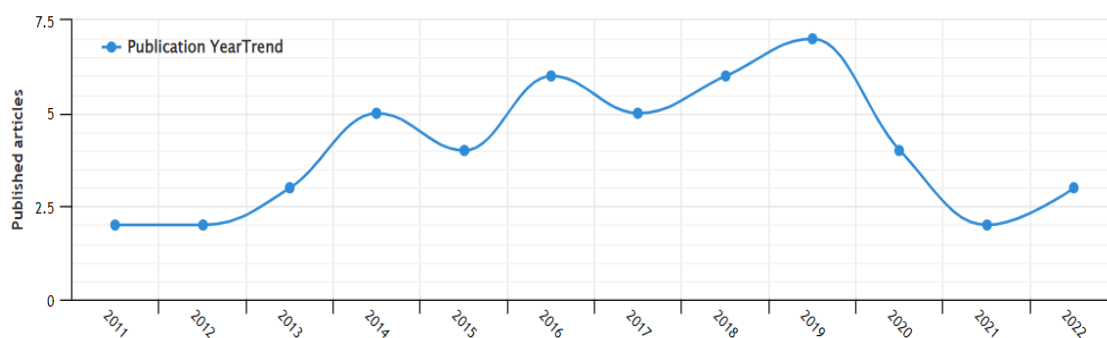


Figure 1: Trend of Ecological Literature Research (2011-2021)



**Figure 2:** The Research Trend of *The Little Prince* (2011-2021)

## II. INTERPRETATION OF *The Little Prince*

*The Little Prince*, a famous fairy tale, tells people about the little prince's various remarkable adventurous experiences on different planets. In the novel, it has excellent philosophical thoughts from the perspective of ecological literature. On the whole, this novel is based on the little prince's interstellar adventure experiences, and then expounds on his growth process. If the readers turn to the work itself as the little prince, they can actually find the shade of the world, the warmth of human beings, and the original responsibility and mission. Finally, people can genuinely feel the philosophical principle of life and the practical value of existence. When knowing about this, the readers can simply learn that human beings and nature are factually integrated, which reflects the development concept of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature. Furthermore, it is actually the reflection of reality and the theoretical origin of ecological literature. Buried in reading the novel, valuable and meaningful philosophical thoughts can be found and practiced. For instance, "In real life, people should avoid using destructive discourses, and try to make ambivalent discourses into beneficial discourses, in order to realize the harmonious relationship between people, to live in harmony" (Yujuan Cao, 2021).

Simultaneously, "I", the pilot, cannot be ignored in the work. From the perspective of "I", the readers can learn the whole process when the little prince travels from planet to planet: his emotion, his feelings, his ideas, and his desolateness. Although "I" and the little prince come from different planets, with different ages and backgrounds, they can overcome many differences, bear in mind the interest of each other, and live in harmony. "On the other hand, people from the same region and background around 'I' cannot identify with each other." (Yujuan Cao, 2021).

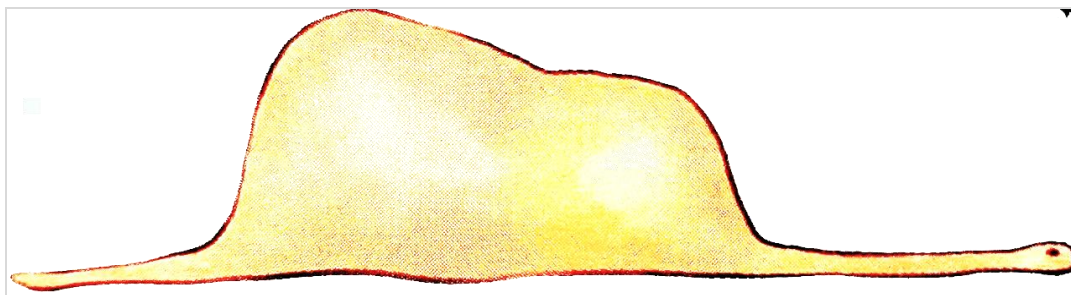
Up to a point, "I" and the little prince are friends because they can literally walk into each other during contact, which, to some degree, really embodies the philosophical thought of harmonious humanistic beauty under ecological literature.

## III. EMBODIMENT OF PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS IN *The Little Prince*

Ecology is awash with theory, but everywhere the literature is bereft (Samuel M. Scheiner, 2013). Literature is a kind of art, a diamond in human thought, and each one is precious! Literature is also a reality that the human eyes and soul examine and feel the world and present it through language (Xiangli Zhai, 2021). Ecological literature is a synthesis of ecology and literature. The most crucial point is to create something new, exploring the profound connotation from the philosophical point of view in *The Little Prince*.

When understood and encouraged by others, especially by adults, children can have the courage to do something they like and stick to it. With the support of ecological literature, what the author narrates attaches to people's daily life from the perspective of the pilot, from which the readers can explore something philosophical. Spiritual comfort and encouragement can often make a person more courageous to face challenges and difficulties, and then achieve something.

In chapter 1, "I showed my masterpiece (as shown in Figure 3) to the grown-ups, and asked them whether the drawing frightened them. Nevertheless, they answered, 'Frighten? Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?' My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant" (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2019: 6). As is known to all, someone who does something that is not understood by others, may be alone and depressed. In other words, if a man cannot be supported spiritually, he may be involved in a bad condition. In chapter 2, "That, however, is not my fault. The grown-ups discouraged me in my painter's career when I was six years old, and I never learned to draw anything, except boas from the outside and boas from the inside" (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2019: 12). It is necessary for the young and the old to be supported spiritually, which indicates the deep philosophical thought of ecological literature: spirituality is not abandoned randomly.



**Figure 3:** Drawing Number One of the Pilot's Masterpiece

When puzzled by something complicated, children are constantly being curious and thinking about how to solve them. In chapter 3, “The little prince, who asked me so many questions, never seemed to hear the ones I asked him. It was from words dropped by chance that, little by little, everything was revealed to me” (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2019:22). In fact, there are many questions in his heart, and it can be seen that he is also a slow learner in the process of making friends. From the perspective of the pilot's description, the readers can see that the little prince is really interested in new things, which reflects the vividness and loveliness of children in life laterally. During the travel, the little prince meets the pilot, a king, an arrogant man, a tippler, a businessman, a lamplight, a geographer, snakes, the three-petaled desert flower, the rose garden, and switchmen. In the beginning, the little prince has many things that he could not see, but gradually he recognizes and learns something. Also, he can put himself into different practical situations, appreciating the social relationship between people, the relationship between people and society, and the harmonious relationship between people and nature.

In chapter 10, “‘Hum!’ ‘Hum!’ replied the king. ‘Then I – I order you sometimes to yawn and sometimes to —’ He sputtered a little and seemed vexed. For what the king fundamentally insisted upon was that his authority should be respected. He tolerated no disobedience. He was an absolute monarch.” (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2019: 86). It reflects the relationship between people and society, that is, a subject should obey the king's orders, and obey the social system under the rule of the king at that time.

The essence of ecological literature is to move people with emotion, not to convince people with reason. As for it, there are different situations showing people's emotions in *The Little Prince*, which is a reflection of philosophical thought on life. The primary goal is to have a relationship between people and nature. So how can the readers find the relationship between people and nature? In chapter 7, “‘If someone loves a flower, of which just one single blossom grows in all the millions and millions of stars, it is enough to make him happy just to look at the stars’ ” (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2019:62). This is the little prince's feeling about nature, leading him into the ideal spiritual world. From another perspective, stars “awake” the little prince and encourage him to do something. In chapter 17, “‘I wonder, ’, ‘whether the stars are set alight in heaven so that one day each one of us may find his own again... Look at my planet. It is right there above us. But how far away it is!’ ” (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2019: 146). If a person chases something, he or she will spare no effort to do it. In chapter 24, “ ‘What makes the desert beautiful,’ said the little prince, ‘is that somewhere it hides a well...’ ” (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2019: 190) People and nature are not separated due to the rule of the world, which is a hidden ecological rule in the complex world.

Another illustration can be found in chapter 26, “ It is just as it is with the flower. If you love a flower that lives on a star, it is sweet to look at the sky at night. All the stars are abloom with flowers...”(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 2019: 214) clearly expresses that if a man is close to nature, he can get something spiritual. The harmony between man and nature is another philosophical thought from the perspective of ecological literature. At a deeper level, man and nature are originally complementary and indispensable. Therefore, only by achieving the unity of man and nature, can people strengthen their further understanding of sustainable development in the development and dissemination of literature.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Ecology and literature are integrated, and ecological literature and philosophical thoughts are also synthetic. The analysis of specific cases in *The Little Prince* proves that ecological literature and philosophical thoughts are closely linked. According to the little prince's experiences on different planets, the readers can put themselves into practical situations, and profoundly understand the warmth and coldness of human feelings—the relationship between people, between people and society, and between people and nature. Eventually, with the synthesis of ecological literature, from the perspective of children, such comprehensive philosophical thought can be concluded. Based on the social connection between people, the harmonious coexistence between

people and nature can finally be achieved. Therefore, the combination of ecological literature and philosophy can be further developed to investigate literary works.

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