

TALE OF THE ROSE: REDEFINING ROSE THROUGH THE LENS OF FEMINIST THEORY IN THE LITTLE PRINCE

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Abstract-From her very first encounter with Antoine De Saint-Exupéry in 1930, Consuelo Suncín de Sandoval has both intrigued and charmed him but despite her extensive role in Antoine's life as his wife and muse, she was forgotten until 1999 when *The Tale of the Rose* was discovered. Consuelo died in 1979, written but never having published her side of the story. The new found account by Consuelo De Saint-Exupéry, the human embodiment of the infamous proud Rose of the Little Prince raises many questions but most importantly that of her lack of agency. This paper will focus on her abjection from her position as the wife of Antoine De Saint-Exupéry alongside her attempts at delinking herself as the extension of him by telling her own account of their marriage. Within the framework of Feminist theory the paper will draw the parallels between the artistic representation of Consuelo in *The Little Prince* and the physical, more realistic conditions she underwent in *The Tale of the Rose*. The text has been conveniently termed as that of a romantic retelling of a widely celebrated aviator and his renowned literary creation, placing it as a variation of the original text but a more subliminal reading reveals the lack of female subjectivity, that the paper will further argue on

Key words – Feminist, The Little Prince, The Tale of the Rose, subjectivity, agency, embodiment, the rose, delinking, extension and representation.

The following is the review of literature already done on the respective topic:-

For the French population, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was a lot of things: an uncanny mix of an aviator who could go months without flying an airplane but there was no given moment where he couldn't point out its precise cardinal direction, and a writer whose poetic cadence nobody could match. The Little Prince being the product of the latter part of him but would have been non-existent without the former for that is how Consuelo Suncín Sandoval came to know him as, the first time she came in contact with the dark haired man who asked her to fly with him the very first time they met and for whom in few months' time she would become the muse and driving force towards the literary part of him which ironically had no mention of her apart from the Rose that we know of in *The Little Prince*, that his readers knew of until late 2000 when her side of the story came to light.

Pursuing the questions related to the confusion of the genre of *The Little Prince* which breaks the existing literature boxes and creates its own space among the children as well adults on the lines of fantasy and magic realism making it further difficult for readers like James E. Higgins in his "The Little Prince": A Legacy (1960) who explores Antoine's ability to be charge of the mundane and the miraculous, both. Further in contrast with *The Tale of the Rose* by Consuelo de Saint Exupéry which is an official memoir whereas *The Little Prince* which was received by the audience as a fictional work of art showcases traces of autobiography. Higgins points out that Little Prince is the embodiment of a child we all once were: "He is the figure of the child we once were, but shall never be again." (James E. Higgins 515) especially to be seen in Antoine who is noted to have a "Childlike appetite for danger" when described in the blurb of *The Tale of the Rose*, further bringing his tumultuous marriage with Consuelo to life "He is a tragic lover, aware of the great consequences of love once found, and he faces them squarely" (James E. Higgins 515). Which comes close to how Consuelo describes their marriage as long series of episodes when Antoine would abandon her in scattered hotels to number things among which she shared her life with but did not possessed, strained by the responsibility which was the result of an impulsive decision he made in a moment of weakness, "I am responsible for my rose" (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The little Prince*) Antoine was also seen rebelling against the ordinary life and the problems of the ordinary world through his little habits that Consuelo mentioned, his ways of taking care of the "illnesses of the modern world" (Kathryn Crim 2009). Not only embodying the thoughts and decisions of Little Prince, Antoine was seen wearing no coats but only a scarf, "which he allowed to stream behind him in the wind, exactly like that of the Little Prince" (Eliot G. Fay 1946). His antics were very close to that of small children which reflected in the ways he carried himself through life. He and the little prince were mirror images of each other and one may question if he wrote what he desired to be if only he didn't have to face the matters of consequence himself. The little prince personified the child facet of Antoine who emerged more than often especially during his marriage to Consuelo, who gave him space exercise his agency on their marriage (Eliot G. Fay 461).

Antoine, known to the aviation world as a valiant pilot who never succumbed to anything, fell helpless at more instances than one due to his rickety marriage with Consuelo which is accounted and deep-seated in the story of southern mail (*Courrier-sud*) where he talks about his fears and incapacity at providing Consuelo with a permanent home thereby dragging her with him wherever his job and mind led him to. Jacques Bernis and Genevieve Herlin, the two main protagonists of the novel face similar difficulties eventually face death away from each other. The story received comments that proposed that it was not his usual writing style, not adhering to his usual pattern of poetics and philosophy: "Courrier-sud seems rather lacking in philosophical significance" (Eliot G. Fay 1947) Antoine wrote southern mail when he was going through a rough time with Consuelo, still surrounded by all the fame and attention by *Night Flight* which pulled them apart despite being close to each other. They went to parties and stayed at houses that were not their own.

There were pockets of his life into which he did not allow her, which lead to her not being in any of the records of Antoine's life even the ones where she was the prime reason behind his success, both literary and in aviation. Antoine was noted to write gargantuan letters to Consuelo describing her of his adventures and well being when he would be flying halfway around the world and out of one of his very first love letter to Consuelo, *Night Flight* was born; which not only became a prizewinner but was further adapted into a successful movie starring John Barrymore. It was astonishing how strong he became by spending so much time being other people's weaknesses. While tethering Consuelo to him at all times he promoted the significance of individual freedom through *Night Flight* (L. A. Triebel 1951). As Triebel through his essay asks the question of consequence: "*What gave Saint-Exupery the impulse to write?*" followed immediately by the answer, "*His profession*" there are a lot of facts that appear to have being muddled if we keep Consuelo's account of Saint-Ex which even though came much later question the thorough absence of Consuelo from any of the reviews that included Antoine especially *Night Flight* which held a pull personally for him as it was his first creation with regard to Consuelo. *Night Flight* was praised greatly by critics all over as it was weaved with the glorification of putting one's duty over one's own life and pleasure but Benjamin Cremieux who was a close friend and adviser to Consuelo, who was also responsible for the meeting of both of them knew their marriage inside out and was present when Consuelo first decided to accept Antoine's proposal. Cremieux pointed out the pure realism in *Night Flight*, which Antoine slipped, mentioning in his comments that, "*To sacrifice oneself for an ideal is one thing; to sacrifice another person is something entirely different*" (Eliot G. Fay 92). Referring to the philosophy followed by Riviere the protagonist of the book, keeping in mind the state of their marriage, his abandonment of her in the middle of their engagement celebration, as she is quoted from her book, "That was the first of the night flights that would disturb my sleep from then on" (Consuelo de Saint Exupéry, 2000). It is to be noted that there is no mention of Consuelo in any of the referred journals apart from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Timeline by Sandbox theatre which gives a brief account of their marriage.

Antoine belonged to no one, he counted on very little to run like a clockwork, except perhaps the powercuts. There was nothing permanent about him, except flying; which he prioritized above everything else including Consuelo. There were several occurrences where he was regarded as a writer first but aviation was his true love throughout. Aviation gave him the space to be both simultaneously: a boy who loved flying plus the thrill of it and a man who was disciplined and held an air of bookish intellect (Kathryn Crim 8). Every other book that he wrote apart from *The Little Prince* orbited aeroplanes- *Flight to Arras*, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, *Southern Mail*, *Night flight* etc. Even *The little Prince* to some extent (Kathryn Crim 8). All these books were once mere letters to Consuelo to tell her of his day but mostly the fact that he was alive and breathing. Aviation held a big chunk of his identification, a trajectory he came to know, by crisscrossing it's arteries almost daily, he came to know it's heart which in turn held his. But most significantly as mentioned in Kathryn Crim's, *On Antoine de Saint-Exupery*, the discourse of airplane and flying was closely linked to his masculinity and for him it was a marker of being a man. So when Antoine lost his position as the director in the Argentine Airmail due to it's disbandment, his identity as well as his passion for flying began to falter but his writings took off as he locked himself in his rooms for hours on end and only came out for occasional food breaks but that's the thing about this business in between the papers and the ink he missed being in air and so he returned (Kathryn Crim 9).

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's writings included two things: Aeroplanes which were his first tool to bring alive the vivid images of stars and space onto his writings and the second thing was the over-glorification and romanticisation of the adventures of aviators in his novels. The time period in which he wrote gave him the path to do so freely. Identifying with his fellow characters, he too portrayed his profession on the lines of exaggeration in terms of danger and suspense. Though having realized that the characters he created in *Southern Mail* and *Night Flight* barely resembled the aviators in real life he modified his writing style or as Joseph T. McKeon put it: "Debunking his own myths" before any critic could do it for him and thus came along *The Little Prince* which was more easier to grasp and apply to life in times of the lessons it promoted (Joseph T. McKeon 1974). At the same time due to some of his flight experiences like that of encountering a cyclone and flying through it safely, he would question the art of writing commenting that, "You cannot convey things to people by piling up adjectives, by stammering" (Kathryn Crim 9).

In all the following references there is no complete mention of Consuelo de Saint Exupéry who according to her account, was with Antoine at every step of his life after their meet in 1930 which is something to be noted as she is ever remembered as an extension of the great Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, if at all. Her book, *The Tale of the Rose* which was written after Antoine's death was sealed away, only came into light after her death and was discovered by an academic who was doing a detailed research on Antoine. Most of Antoine's silent mentions of Consuelo in *Night Flight*, *Southern Mail* and *The Little Prince* reflect his guilt of not being able to take care of his rose. "The Little Prince has left his planet and his flower, to search for relief from his loneliness on other planets" (James E. Higgins 515). Flying from one mission to another, Antoine left no opportunity to create a distance whatever anchored him. Always the object of desire and considered as the receptacle of memories of wildness, after a point he could no longer withhold nor amputate so he simply lived as a flowering tree, growing roots only for his Rose, "whom he could not live with or live without."

INTRODUCTION

Consuelo De Saint-Exupéry (author of *The Tale of the Rose*), initially Consuelo Suncín Sandoval before her marriage with Antoine Saint-Exupéry (author of *The Little Prince*) was a fierce storyteller from the land of an active volcano known as Izalco which was also called 'Lighthouse of the Pacific.' Daughter of a coffee planter with two sisters, she moved to a number of places for studies: United States, Mexico City, France and then finally to Buenos Aires in 1927 where she met Antoine but not before having been windowed twice before she married him. Her power of being the literary muse was established long before Antoine came and materialized it in his work. "La casa imantada" (The magnetic House) by José Vasconcelos Calderón who was a well know academic and a prestigious philosopher, addressed Consuelo in his work time and again, devoting more than twenty-five pages of his autobiography: *A Mexican Ulysses: An Autobiography* to her. When she met Antoine she was a twenty-six year old, fresh widow of Enrique Gomez Carrillo who died within eleven months of their wedding leaving her with all that he owned.

Consuelo and Antoine's marriage lasted from 1931 to 1944 followed by his disappearance over Southern France. The only work she ever produced came out of this last marriage of hers which to a very large extent defined how the world portrayed her and came to know her i.e through Antoine which continues till this date. If we are to juxtapose Consuelo's marriages, her affairs and her marriage to Antoine, we are to find that she had so much more agency in her previous engagements with men than with Antoine. For example, during her affair with Vasconcelos whose family moved to Paris for exile, leaving Consuelo in San Salvador, made her move to Paris herself and once she found herself among the very best she turned to Vasconcelos in triumph and said, "Well, I think I can hold my own with them."¹ Consuelo is widely known across various theories and sources regarding *The Little Prince* as the inspiration for 'The Rose' in the famous children's classic yet the literary society took long before they recognized her as an integral facet of Antoine's story. This element brings in to question the very representation of Consuelo by not only Antoine himself but all the people following him, as well as Consuelo's infamous reputation of a literary muse by her previous husbands as well as Antoine and being written as an item of possession, will be discussed through various concepts put forth by feminist theorists in the light of both the novels by the respective authors.

WRITING IN THE BORROWED LANGUAGE

To begin with, we will discuss Virginia Woolf's theory of authorship in the light of Consuelo's work and the language she wrote it in. *The Tale of the Rose* released after Consuelo's death in 1945 was discovered in 1999 and went on to be translated and published in 2000. The very first point to be noted is that despite Consuelo being given the space to tell her own story, her own account, it is seen and treated largely from the point of view of Antoine's work and not hers alone i.e an extension of *The Little Prince* for example in the blurb of the book it is mentioned the respective work is "the story of a man of extravagant dreams, and of a woman who was his muse..." (Asther Allen) creating a spacious disjunct between the portrayal and the content of it which merely talks about her own experience of her life. This aspect can be understood more specifically in the context provided in *Contemporary Literary Cultural Theory* by Pramond K Nayar where he states that representations like these give rise to an inequality that is not natural but rather a social construct and is reinforced by societal members such as family, religion, education etc which can be seen in this case where the way Consuelo's work is received by the readers is based solely on the foundation of Antoine's work which is further romanticized to such an extent that there is no question of it being seen as oppressive or taking away the kind of story Consuelo wants to tell in the first place due to its reputation of being a supplement of *The Little Prince*. Woolf writes that when Female texts are seen through view point of men it ceases to exist in isolation and end up as "poor cousins of the male authored texts" (Nayar 87).

Decentering Due to the Pre-assigned Role. In Consuelo's work, be it painting, sculpting or writing there was always this ambiguity between the imaginary and the reality which in this context will be explored against the backdrop of the title of *The Tale of the Rose* which links fiction with non-fiction. The title of the book was given by Alan Vircondelet who was also the author of a biography on Antoine. The title which was not chosen by Consuelo herself creates a specific type of expectation in the mind of the readers which automatically takes away her agency over the nature of the text she wants to put forth in front of them. As stated: "While the man might be able to choose his subject-position, the woman's is pre-determined" (Nayar 101). Through the title Consuelo is assigned the position of a muse who is telling her own side of a pre-existing story which further takes away the essence of anything else she has to say which is not focused on Antoine or their marriage. "Literary cultures, therefore, play an important role in the socialization of girls and the naturalization of the power structures because women consent to accept these roles" (Nayar 94). The title of the text presents Consuelo as a devoted, sacrificial wife and a literary muse which hinders the readers from treating her in isolation of *The Little Prince* or Antoine. Initially it may not appear as damaging or grave of an issue but when one personally picks up a copy of the text the very first thing one expects is a decorated version of a love story that inspired the very creation of a bestseller and the advertisement the book, too does not contribute to Consuelo's attempts at establishing her own subjectivity. Not to forget the very language it is written in which suggests to the notion of Palimpsests by Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert in their book: *The Madwoman in the Attic*. A palimpsest text "mask secret subtext of desires, politics and meanings. While their 'surface' meanings might be those that were acceptable during their time, the palimpsest reveals something else altogether" (Nayar 96). Consuelo's text can be taken as a loose example of a palimpsest text due to the degree of romanticization done through the different events of the book which is evident when read twice or thrice, only then do the aspects regarding Consuelo's lack of subjectivity in both her text and marriage come into light. Only after keeping these aspects aside does the reader get to the heart of the novel. This can be seen over the course of two extracts, the first one being by Consuelo and another one by Antoine through her version :-

An Argentine friend once told me she owned five thousand trees. In Buenos Aires, the trees are outnumbered. All the trees you see there come from far away; they are brought to the city like prisoners, and promised that they will receive all kinds of love and care if they will only grow. In that country, men go out to find trees and ask them to come and grown back home, to give shelter and shade. I knew of some estates where the trees flourished under the constant care of the gardeners. But the pampa is hard. It doesn't want to give anything away; it wants to be solitary, it wants to be the pampa. There's something quite magical about the effort the landowners expend to make anything green grow there. A harvest is a miracle. but the more obstacle man faces, the more worthy he becomes of bringing about miracles (C. De Saint-Exupéry 33).

Subliminally this extract discloses Consuelo's thoughts on Antoine and her doubt about their marriage as well as her reflection on her own self which she is expected to give up in order to adjust herself by his means and ways. She does this through the metaphor of trees and Pampa which can also be juxtaposed with *The Little Prince's* account of the Baobabs:-

¹ She arrived in Paris in 1926 and soon ended her affair with Vasconcelos and married the acclaimed figure Enrique Gomez Carrillo.

Now there were some terrible seeds on the planet that was the home of the little prince; and there were the seeds of the baobab. The soil of that planet was infested with them. A baobab is something you will never, never be able to get rid of if you attend to it too late. It spreads over the entire planet. It bores clear through it with its roots. And if the planet is too small, and the baobabs are too many, they split it in pieces. "It is a question of Discipline," the little prince said to me later on. "When you've finished your own toilet in the morning, then it is time to attend to the toilet of your planet, just so, with the greatest care. You must see to it that you pull up regularly all the baobabs, at the very first moment when they can be distinguished from the rosebushes which they resemble so closely in their earliest youth. It is very tedious work," the little prince added, "but very easy" (A. De Saint-Exupéry 31).

Further in the chapters in *The Tale of the Rose*, Consuelo reflects on the letter by Antoine and therefore a parallel can be drawn between their own accounts of each other in terms of their language. On Consuelo's part we can observe how her language is layered and constructed through a tinge of anthropomorphism in order to put forth her actual thoughts towards Antoine whereas his words to her are unedited, 'declarative' and open:-

He told me that his life was a flight and he wanted to sweep me off with him, that his life was a flight and he wanted to sweep me off with him, that he found me light and delicate but believed that my youth could withstand the surprises he promised me: sleepless nights, last minute changes of plan, never any luggage, nothing at all except my life, suspended from his. He said again that he was sure of coming back to earth to find me, to snatch me up with dizzying speed, that I would be his garden, that he would give me light and I would give him solid ground on the earth, among men, the solid ground of a home, a cup of hot coffee made just for him, flowers always waiting for him on the table. I was afraid of reading these words; they made me want to look back, all the way back to my country, where the houses and people were safe (C. De Saint-Exupéry 35).

All the following three extracts reveal some sort of resemblance with each other, firstly Consuelo personifies herself as a plant or more specifically the Pampa in terms of having to leave her safe environment to live a life of spontaneity with Antoine, next we can see in *The Little Prince* the baobabs who again share similar aspects with the Pampa and can be confused with rosebushes during their early growth stage and lastly in Antoine's letter, his assertiveness towards Consuelo to be his garden and the focus on her youth.

Use of Gendered Terms. Pursuing this further, another aspect that remains a crucial part of both the texts in terms of language is the various terms used for and by Antoine and Consuelo to describe each other. Ann Weatherall in her essay, "*Gender, language and discourse*" mentions the problems of a sexist language and that "language not only ignored or defined women narrowly but might also demean them" (Weatherall 23). From the introductory pages of the *The Tale of Rose* where Esther Allen mentions the different names Antoine had for Consuelo: "She was his little girl, his sorceress, his Pimprenelle², his bird of the islands, but finally and most of all she was the Rose, unique in all the world, whom the little Prince could not live with and could not live without" (Asther Allen). This can be analyzed in the discourse of 'women depreciated' by Weatherall: "The data for this research were metaphors that students used to refer to women and to sexual experiences. We found that many source domains are used in metaphors about women, including immaturity (e.g. babe), animals (e.g. bird, bitch), clothing (e.g. blue stocking, bit of skirt), food (e.g. tart, sweetie pie), vehicles (e.g. town bike) and furniture (e.g. mattress). Animals are used as a source of metaphors for men as well as women, but the animals used to refer to women tend to be either domesticated (e.g. cats, kittens, chickadees) or hunted for sport (e.g. foxes) (see also Baker, 1981). Many of the metaphors we collected seems offensive not only because they tended to sexualize women but they also constructed women in passive object positions in sentences that use metaphorical constructions (e.g. 'Looks like he's going to take the wood to the beaver') (Weatherall 26). While Consuelo's names for Antoine ranged from, "My flying Knight", "My Don Juan pilot" which suggest a certain position of authority or merit.

Women's writing is rejected on the grounds that it deals only with the less important issues like the home" (Nayar 90). Even though Consuelo's voice is given a much greater importance in this frame of reference despite her talking only about their marriage and their household, it is to be noted that that space stems not from what Consuelo De Saint Exupery has to say but what Consuelo who is the Rose in *The Little Prince* has to say about Antoine and their marriage which again subjugates the true motive of her writing. "Dale Spender argued that woman's language was deferential, passive and apologetic, while men's language was aggressive, imperative and declarative" (Nayar 98). Consuelo's writing is indeed seen to be apologetic at more instances than one but it is largely influenced by the various positions that others put her in over the course of her marriage, not to mention Antoine himself. One of the instances include a family dinner with André Gide³ who was in close relation with Antoine's cousin and expressed his negative opinion of Consuelo through his journal, he wrote: "Saint-Exupery returned from Argentina with a new book and a new fiancée. Read the book, saw the girl. Congratulated him heartily, but principally on the book." His family as well as those around him disapproved Consuelo and his lack of efforts to stand up for her contributed to Consuelo's marginalization both in their marriage as well as her status as his wife which will be discussed later in the paper.

OWNERSHIP OF THE ROSE

One of the key themes that dominate much of both the text is the element of possession. Rae Langton in his essay, "Projection and Objectification" connects the idea of oppression and objectification arguing that "women are treated as tools, they are treated as things, items lacking in agency" (Langton 287). He puts forth how projection of a certain thing changes the very perspective of someone towards it and the oppression it propagates. The idea of the Rose being something to be possessed gets materialized in *The Little Prince* who exercises his ownership of her in more instances than one which has a tint of contradiction since little prince gives the rose the space to exercise her agency on him and then subjects her of not being an ordinary rose:-

² Pimprenelle is a herbal plant which is known for its qualities of being 'drought-tolerant and grows all year round'

³ André Gide was a French author and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947

“ I ought not to have listened to her,” he confided to me one day. “One never ought to listen to the flowers. One should simply look at them and breathe their fragrance. Mine perfumed all my planet. But I did not know how to take pleasure in all her grace. This tale of claws, which disturbed me so much, should only have filled my heart with tenderness and pity.” And he continued his confidences: “The fact is that I did not know how to understand anything! I ought to have judged by deeds and not by words. She cast her fragrance and radiance over me. I ought to have never run away from her... I ought to have guessed all the affection that lay behind her poor little stratagems. Flowers are so inconsistent! But I was too young to know how to love her...” (A. De Saint-Exupéry 48).

This can be seen in the light of how Antoine probes Consuelo to marry him but doesn't give her the rightful status as his wife in the society due to his impulsiveness regarding their marriage which can be seen in the following instance during their court marriage:-

I gave my name and address, then it was his turn. He was shaking. He looked at me, crying like a child. I couldn't do it. No, it was too sad. “No, no” I blurted, “I don't want to marry a man who is weeping. No”.... I shut myself in the house in Tagle.

Tonio often found reasons not to be there for meals. It was like an unspoken agreement between us; even if he was staying at Buenos Aires, he no longer ate any of his meals at home. He would come home at night to change his shirt and shave, while I stayed in my little boudoir, pretending to read a newspaper or a book. He would say, “I'll see you soon, Cherie,” and gave me a guilty kiss, then flee into the night, trembling” (C. De Saint-Exupéry 49).

Consuelo being treated as an object or a medium to achieve one's own desire is largely applied by her former husbands as well as Antoine and she is projected time and again as something beyond a woman but unfortunately in a more submissive context. This is done through intense use of romanticization, “Women's oppression stems from a large-scale psychological or linguistic forces, shaped by unconscious and irrational desires, or shaped by the structure of language itself” (Langton 286). The very first example can be picked from the introduction of *The Tale of the Rose* where Allen talks about Consuelo's former husband Enrique Gómez Carrillo and her love affair with José Vasconcelos before she meets Carrillo. The story goes that Vasconcelos did not give up on Consuelo even after her marriage with Carrillo and so Carrillo challenged him to a sword fight automatically positioning Consuelo as the ‘trophy’ to be won over. The beginning paragraph of *The Tale of the Rose* mentions Ricardo Vines telling Consuelo that she is not a woman. In the later chapters we see Benjamin Crémieux, her close friend describe her as an object of magic, she writes: “He spoke to me as if I were a butterfly that he was asking to hold its wings open so he could have a better view of their colors” (C. De Saint-Exupéry 7). Consuelo, too aware of her treatment makes several attempts at detaching herself from the role that men around her kept assigning her to. “You like to play with life, you're not afraid of anything, not even of me. But I want you to know that I'm not an object or a doll: I don't change faces on command, I like to sit down everyday in the same place, on my own chair, and I know that you, you like to leave, to go to a new place everyday” (C. De Saint-Exupéry 39).

CONDITIONED DENIAL OF SUBJECTIVITY BY CONSUELO

“In the time between the First and Second World Wars, everyone spoke of Consuelo as a volcano projecting its sparks on the roofs of Paris. A volcano that engulfed the heart of Antoine de Saint Exupéry ... Part of El Salvador, where she was born in 1901, Consuelo Suncin Sandoval went through a rich and troubled century. A sculptor, painter and writer, nicknamed the Scheherazade des Tropiques ⁴for her storytelling skills and her enchanting voice, she will be the muse of famous men, artists or politicians, who will be known as the “Roaring Twenties”: Breton, Balthus, Derain, Maeterlink, Poincaré, D'Annunzio...” (*Consuelo De Saint Exupéry: Peintre – Sculpteur, 1901-1979*). A lot of different factors contributed in Consuelo's mystification (and othering) by everyone who came in contact of her, including Antoine. Even Consuelo herself can be seen taking part in her own stereotyped image and attempting to live up to it as Beauvoir puts it: “This mystification and stereotyping, she argued, was instrumental in creating patriarchy” (Nyar, 88). It is thus convenient to believe the ill-treatment of Consuelo by everyone who reads *The Tale of the Rose* but very few will agree that she herself was a huge participant of her own denial of subjectivity. A brief but significant example elucidates this statement: “Consuelo loved to act out the story of how as she and Gomez Carrillo emerged from the church where they had just been married, his second wife, Raquel Meller, a famous cabaret singer, suddenly loomed before them brandishing a revolver that was aimed straight at the bride. The gun jammed, and Consuelo fainted into her new husband's arms.” Even though this retelling is a minor bit on Consuelo's part it still raises questions on her artistic license in deciding to include it in her text despite the uncertainty of the event. Moving back to the primary focus on the process of othering, Beauvoir puts forth the relationship “where the Man is the subject and the Woman the Other.” (Nayar 88) on the contrary we can see how Antoine is treated as the logos who provides weight and meaning to Consuelo not only regarding the text, in the representation of the memoir but their marriage as well. Beauvoir's argument can be understood in the discourse of Consuelo having to conform to the marriage with Antoine for the greater good of his literary career despite being given the space to live a more comfortable life in the fortune left by her last husband Carrillo:

Antoine really was unlike any other man. I told myself I was insane: I had a house in France and a fortune, thanks to the generosity of my late husband who had made me his heir. Why torment myself further? Everything could be so simple.... I had friends in Paris, and if I gave up the idea of marrying Tonio I could keep my fortune, for Gomez Carrillo had been rich, he had published books in Spain, in Paris; everything would be easy for me if only I kept his name (C. De Saint-Exupéry 59).

She was reminded time and again by those around her that her marriage to Antoine would be good for him, indicating that she was expected to keep aside her life for a man who was promising her fancy endeavors but had no intention in carrying them out. “After that dream, he said, I could not leave him on his own. He has great talent as a writer, if you love him, he will write his book and it will be magnificent.” (C. De Saint-Exupéry 24) said by her close friend Benjamin Crémieux who also tells her to be a

⁴ Scheherazade was the female character and storyteller in ‘One Thousand and One Nights’

“grown-up for him and take care of his heart”. Even though Rose is titled as the one being ‘unique in all the world’ Consuelo is often lost among the various places Antoine abandons her in, the societal life he chooses over her and his numerous affairs with other women eventually results in Consuelo being seen “not as independent or unique but as a variation and flawed version of the Male” (Nayar 88).

In addition to this, the factor that contributed the most to Consuelo’s othering is her fight to gain a recognized status as his wife in the eyes of the world, this will be seen in the area of female identity and the subject. The New York Times, writes: “In pages, weighty with love, passion, betrayal and tragedy, the Salvadoran-born beauty has reclaimed her place in the Saint-Exupéry myth.” Mentioned on the jacket of *The Tale of the Rose* it raises an issue with the use of the word ‘reclaimed’ therefore elucidating the impression that she was discarded from her status as his wife from time and again but her attempts and successful tries at becoming the ‘devoted wife figure’ who put her husband’s demands at first, one such instance include:

Creating intimacy in three small rooms on the ground floor, with simple furniture and a telephone that never stopped ringing, required a great deal of energy and imagination and all the courage of a young, devoted, and loving wife.... So there we were at last, in order and at peace. My name would be different from then on, but I wasn’t used to it yet and continued to sign “the Widow Gomez Carrillo.” Tonio scolded me and asked me to forget Gomez Carrillo because he was dead. I was never again to have anything to do with him or his books, or to travel to Spain to see his editors. Even today, fifteen years later, I’ve never written a single letter to collect the smallest portion of the handsome inheritance he so graciously left me. I’m a little ashamed to admit it, but I was young—that’s my only excuse. My young husband wanted to write; he didn’t want another writer in our home, and I understood (C. De Saint-Exupéry 73).

This extract suggests that she tried to do everything possible to fit into the mold of a perfect wife – leaving her usual safe and lavish lifestyle, her desire to write, being tethered to Antoine and following him wherever he went and whenever he asked, helping him with his literary career, making every house they moved him into a home and just about everything socially expected out of a wife yet she is disapproved of and denied by not only his family but everyone in his literary circle as well: – “The trip in the Simoum, which for me had been only somewhat enjoyable, nevertheless provoked the jealousy of all his women friends in Paris, each of whom believed she was destined to play the role of the ideal companion for Tonio, a role for which they all found me extremely unsuited.” (C. De Saint-Exupéry 156). This aspect of her married life reflected onto her identity and altered it deeply as she couldn’t be identified without having Antoine’s name in the same sentence which is depicted through this text: “The great myth of Antoine-De Saint Exupéry, the heroic fighter pilot, now had to be altered to make room for the impassioned new voice of his wife, who in the fifty years since his death had been virtually airbrushed out of the picture” (Allen, xii). If we are to keep Antoine’s performativity as a husband into the same frame we are to find a lot many loopholes starting from him having to exercise his masculinity, as Weatherall puts it: “The narrow definition of women in language refers to the observation that women are more often discussed in terms of their appearance and their family relationships, whereas men are more often discussed in terms of what they do” (Weatherall 18). where we can go back to Antoine’s family’s disapproval of Consuelo on the basis of her origin. Antoine’s profession as a celebrated aviator and a literary figure allows him to literally ‘get away’ with all his ill-treatment and abandonment of Consuelo during the course of his marriage. “The publishers of *Memoirs of the Rose* claim the book makes Saint-Ex more human, but it is hard to read it without concluding he was an inveterate womanizer and a cad.” The former part of the statement serves itself as problematic since Consuelo’s decision to marry Antoine after Carrillo’s death was shamed greatly yet Antoine’s continuous affairs during his marriage to Consuelo is merely termed as him being more human, “My Argentine friends no longer invited me to their homes. In their eyes I was shameless, a merry widow” (C. De Saint-Exupéry 50). Shifting back to Antoine’s performance of his masculinity which is visible throughout the book and is explicitly stated by him too, one such instance includes: “I’m leaving, Consuelo, I’m leaving tomorrow for Moscow. I need to see men and nations as they evolve. I feel like a eunuch tied down at home by your ribbons” (C. De Saint-Exupéry 132). Antoine’s continuous attempts at moving away from Consuelo in order to exercise his role is evident in the way he uses his career as a medium to do so and how even the role of a husband itself limits him and therefore requires for him to go out of his way to exercise his performativity which brings into light that of Consuelo’s who had to exercise her role within the confines of patriarchy.

DISPLACEMENT

The last area that I will be covering is that of Consuelo’s displacement centering on the most constant element of her marriage which is closely linked to her abandonment, too as one cannot be discussed without the other. “For all that it tells about the two of them, there are many things Consuelo’s story silences. One scene, especially, echoes through their marriage in the recurrent, aching abandonment of every home they ever tried to establish, the strange sequence of nightmarish moments when Consuelo would walk into a house suddenly and inexplicably emptied of all its contents. For they were perpetually unable to find a place where they could stay and be together. All of their paradise were lost; the house in Buenos Aires; El Mirador outside of Nice; a whole series of apartments in Paris, Casablanca, and New York. No sooner had they settled in to some new location than the nameless imperative to move on, to move away, made itself felt once more” (Allen xix). It is to be kept in mind that this feeling of *dépayement*⁵ was not merely physical but abstract, too actualized with every change of house that she was required to do because of Antoine and this feeling stayed loyally with Consuelo only and not Antoine who retorted that changing houses was just a method to save money but spent generously on different hotels that he made Consuelo stay at. A more large scale displacement mentioned in *The Tale of the Rose* is that of evacuation of Paris due to the German attack, Consuelo writes:

In one minute I had lost my house, my husband, and this adopted country that I loved and respected. My mouth tasted of ashes, and nothing, not even liquor, could quiet the feeling of hatred and defeat inside of me. For the first time I was running away. It was a strange feeling. You run away from the enemy, you go anywhere you can, and you feel even more threatened. It was my turn

⁵ A French term which means ‘the feeling that comes from not being in one’s home country’

to be engulfed in the panic experienced by the forty millions French people who had received the order to evacuate their homes, their beloved villages, to mill around in circles like animals, using up the last of their energy without suspecting that their strength and their resistance was leaving them (C. De Saint-Exupéry 233).

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, I shall be supposing but not arguing that each side is partly right. There are still so many things left to dissect but it is to be remembered that these are people's lives that we are discussing and one can never be sure of their accuracy as Pramod K. Nayar puts it through New Historicism: "Texts are necessary to understand the social context, even though we must be alert to the fact that we only have access to the past through these biased, incomplete and political texts" (Nayar 202). Consuelo who is clearly seen as the victim of the different modes of oppression carried throughout her marriage to Antoine, may indeed have been a more manipulative figure than she puts forth through *The Tale of the Rose* since she is only contesting the space that she was denied and Antoine, though surprisingly different from his writings cannot be seen in mere black and white especially because the text is drawing parallels between a fiction and a non-fiction. These texts create more questions than they answer but they are still crucial texts nevertheless. "People speak of a couple as being happy or unhappy, as if it was ever that simple" (Henri Jenson xix). Consuelo's lack of agency and subjectivity echoes throughout the novel but so does Antoine's thoughtfulness towards Consuelo to dedicate a significant character of a worldly read book, after her. Maybe Consuelo De Saint-Exupéry indeed cannot be understood without the mention of Antoine De Saint-Exupéry but at the same time *The Little Prince* as well cannot be understood without the mention of his beloved Rose. To conclude this I would like to quote a story about Consuelo from *The Tale of the Rose*:

During the party, someone told him a lovely story about me. It was the story of the rose fields on the road from Paris to La Feuilleraie. "Madame Gomez takes that road home every evening after work," a guest told him. "So of course she's gotten to know all the rose growers. One frosty evening, Madame Gomez saw that her friends the growers were panicked and in tears. The frost was killing the roses. That same night, she sent them dozens of large linen sheets embroidered with crowns. They say the sheets were inherited by her husband, who is an aristocrat, a count, I believe, or in any case the descendant of a great family. You can imagine, white sheets like that, lying on the ground. It was the middle of the night, but she revived the rose growers' hopes. They went back to work. She herself worked alongside them, and with their help, she built an enormous tent, white as snow, to save the roses. The next day, all of us went to help. Each of us, monsieur, took along a piece of wrapping paper, newspaper, it was a real madhouse beneath those 'tents'. We crawled along on all fours, lighting little fires, and, monsieur, it was truly a miracle: the rose crop was saved. Heaven helped them, it can't be denied. The weather grew a little warmer, and the roses managed to survive. Of course the sheets were left in rags, but the love that the rose growers bear Madame de La Feuilleraie, I mean Madame Gomez—that, believe me, is far more beautiful than a thousand sheets, even if they were embroidered with crowns. The growers spent several days at La Feuilleraie to help out in the orchard and the vegetable garden. They cut back the undergrowth. You understand, monsieur, work that is not paid, work that is done out of friendship, out of love for the earth—that is far more precious than any other kind. And everything at La Feuilleraie has bloomed. If you're interested, I can give you the exact figures. Almost a ton of pears have been harvested from the orchard and sold in the marketplace... She loves roses, Madame Gomez, she loves to save them. She herself is a rose (C. De Saint-Exupéry 226).

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