



# A Sociological Analysis of Ideological Constructs in “The Little Prince”

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**Abstract.** In contemporary societal discourse, “The Little Prince,” an allegorical fable by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, highlights its reflection of and critique of societal norms. This paper elucidates these societal norms through the theoretical lens of Slavoj Žižek’s ideological constructs and shows how characters within “The Little Prince” embody alternative practices of action as proposed by Žižek. With the purpose of uncovering the ideological messages in the narrative, this study shows how this issue remains relevant to the current society. This paper adopts a sociology of literature and qualitative approach through the theoretical lens of Žižek’s ideological critique. The study found that “The Little Prince” reflects ideological constructs through the critique of adult rationality. Moreover, the results of this study explain how the distinguished characters in the narrative embody Žižek’s alternative practices of action. Unlike previous research, this study emphasizes exploring the intricate ideological dimensions within Žižek’s perspective, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the ideological layers employed in “The Little Prince.”

**Keywords:** “The Little Prince”, Žižek Study, Ideological Critique, Sociology of Literature

## 1 Introduction

In society, the most powerful are the ones who establish the rules. These authorities control society through norms that appear to be beneficial for everyone when in reality, they also support the authorities’ interests [1], [2]. Norms or values are typically seen as *true* or *right* in our life. In fact, to see whether the norms or values are *right* cannot be seen objectively because humans are unconsciously influenced by their ideologies [3]. In their journey, humans are influenced not just by a single ideology, but also by the intersection of multiple ideologies, affected by the social institutions where the individuals live.

An ideology is something that can represent us. Ideology shapes how we can see the world. Based on his film titled “The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology”, Žižek argues that humans see the world by using “glasses”. In that film, he gives an example of human ideology in *They Live* by John Carpenter. “They Live” is a movie that tells a man who discovers that the planet is governed by aliens who utilize subliminal messages to influence the human population. He would only see past the illusions and comprehend the real reality by wearing special glasses. Žižek argues that we, as a human, use

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“glasses” to see the world (which is metaphorical as ideology), and he wants us to take off that glass by questioning everything about society, especially when something appears to be so obvious and should not be questioned [4].

The representation of ideology in our life is illustrated in many literary works, including the legendary novella, “The Little Prince” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. This novella has been translated into various languages and has a movie adaptation. However, the author will use the English translation published in 1943. This fable tells the story of a little prince who travels around the universe and meets a variety of creatures. This French allegory allows us to explore a deeper look into life through children's eyes by criticizing the use of ideology in adults' rationality.

This research provides a sociological analysis of ideological constructs employed in “The Little Prince” by adopting the concept of political ideology by Žižek. Žižek thinks that we are all influenced by the prevailing ideology even if we believe we are not. In undertaking social life, Žižek has categorized subjects in carrying out the ideology of the authorities. He proposed three categorizations of subjects based on how they act on the ideology: (1) The Bartleby Politics, a political withdrawal by the individuals who choose to be apathetic to their circumstances (2) Radical Violent Act, the individuals take action that transcends the symbolic structure of their reality (3) Interdependence between the subjects and “local pragmatic interventions”, the subjects choose to accept any ideological idea instilled by the ruling government [3].

Furthermore, many studies have been conducted on this literary work using some perspectives, such as psychological analysis [5], language analysis [6], postcolonialism [7], and translation studies [8], [9], [10]. Thus, this research focuses on how the concept of Zizekian ideology represented by the dominant characters in “The Little Prince” can criticize norms and values in society. This criticism is demonstrated by the thinking of adult rationality in this story, making the Zizekian ideological dimension relevant to today's society.

## 2 Methods

This research embodies a sociological literary analysis and qualitative approach by focusing on the complex ideological dimensions in Zizek's perspective. Non-numerical data such as text, video, or audio are collected and analyzed in qualitative research. Qualitative research seeks to fully understand social phenomena in their natural setting [11]. Besides, this research uses sociological literary analysis. This approach employs a sociological perspective to investigate literary works in social, cultural, and historical contexts. The sociological analysis approach seeks to understand how literary works influence societal values, norms, and power relations [12].

The data sources of this study were taken from the novella “The Little Prince” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The book is an English translation version by Richard Howard, which was originally written in French. The research sample data used consisted of quotations from the story to support the evidence of the analysis process.

This study included several steps for the data collection: (1) reading the data source of the novella English-translated “The Little Prince” repeatedly and thoroughly; (2) marking words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs that could serve as potential research samples; and (3) classifying the research sample by organizing it as data related to Zizek’s ideological construct based on the applied theoretical framework.

The researchers proceeded with the data analysis by following the selection and refinement of the sample based on its relevance to the research topic. Furthermore, this study uses sociological analysis. By implementing a sociological qualitative approach, this research provides novelty to previous studies examining how the ideology represented by the characters in this novella criticizes the social discourse of reality.

### **3 Result and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Ideological Constructs Employed in “The Little Prince”**

People of power often control the perspective and practices of individuals through the hegemony of ideologies [13]. The hegemony is conducted in a number of mechanisms, such as education, law and regulation, mass media, or popular culture, which are unconsciously instilling ideologies. In these ways, the ideologies are not only accepted consciously but also unconsciously in the subconscious. Over time, the ideologies attached to norms, values, and beliefs become a part of habits and practices that do not need to be considered anymore but are directly accepted as natural reality. Thereby, more than just a way of seeing the world, ideology is also a tool through which individuals are seen by the world.

The influence of ideology is highly evident in how individuals navigate life and address existing challenges. This is also reflected in several characters in “The Little Prince”, who represent individual perspectives on societal values and norms. In “The Little Prince”, several characters represent different views on the values and norms that exist in society.

First, the Little Prince. In this novel, the Little Prince symbolizes the innocence and wisdom of a child searching for meaning and beauty in life by traveling around five asteroids. As shown in [14], the protagonist’s journey in the desert reflects self-discovery and values of life. It becomes the prince’s pilgrimage in search of spiritual essence. While traveling around the first asteroid he visits, asteroid 325, the prince

meets the king who represents authoritarianism, where he believes that everyone should submit to his orders, reflecting that power can be unreasonable.

Next, he meets the conceited men who represent narcissism and are too focused on the validation of others to ignore the deeper meaning of life, satirizing modern society filled with falsehood and self-image. After that, he arrives at asteroid 327 to meet the drunkard; the drunkard symbolizes an absurd and elusive adult life. In this phase, it can be seen that meeting these people gives the Little Prince philosophical reflection. This is consistent with the analysis results of [15] that question the target audience of “The Little Prince”, whether they are children or adults.

In Asteroid 328, he meets the businessman, who represents the ideology of capitalism and materialism over his obsession with the material wealth of the stars around him. On asteroid 329, he meets the lamplighter who is in charge of turning on and off the lights throughout the day without understanding the reason for doing so, satirizing modern society that is a workaholic and stuck in a routine without understanding the purpose. The last planet visited is asteroid 330, where the little prince meets the geographer who is detached from the reality at hand by only focusing on the books and maps he carries, limiting himself from direct experience that prevents him from understanding the reality of the real world.

### **3.2 Zizek’s alternative practices of action Reflected by Characters in “The Little Prince”**

In the complex tapestry of social interaction, it is essential to recognize that every person holds the inherent ‘authority’ to articulate their own ideology. This principle underlines the value of personal expression and the diversity of thought within the communal framework. It suggests that the fabric of our social life is enriched and made vibrant by the myriad of perspectives and beliefs that individuals bring to the table. This diversity, however, also interacts with societal structures and norms, often influenced by authoritative figures or governments. The complexity of this power dynamic makes Zizek offer several alternatives in dealing with it in the form of following the order of society, radical violent acts, and Bartleby politics.

Interdependence between the subjects and “local pragmatic interventions” is evident where individuals choose to accept any ideological indoctrination instilled by the ruling government, thereby aligning themselves with societal norms. This dynamic is illustrated through the character of the lamplighter, who adheres strictly to his routine without contemplating the reasons behind his actions, merely following “orders.”

“Orders are orders. Good morning.” And he put out his lamp.  
[16, pg 42]

Similarly, the encounter between the fox and the little prince is pivotal to the storyline, as it teaches the little prince the meaning of friendship. Initially, the fox requests to be tamed by the little prince, which highlights the importance of relationships and the processes that define them. The fox further emphasizes the significance of ceremonies and rules, imparting valuable lessons to the little prince about societal structures and personal connections.

“Here is my secret. It’s quite simple: One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.” [16, pg 63]

One alternative to subject action in the face of the complexity of power is passive, submissive but radical action (the radical violent act). “Radical violent act” refers to actions that defy the symbolic order of society. In “The Little Prince”, the pilot/narrator exemplifies this when he chooses a career as a pilot, isolating himself from others because he refuses to conform to the expectations of adulthood. His rejection of societal norms sets him apart, highlighting his resistance to the conventional adult mindset.

Similarly, the drunkard on one of the planets engages in a self-destructive cycle of drinking to forget the shame caused by his drinking. This behavior illustrates how individuals trapped in addiction often begin with a clear reason or goal, but over time, lose sight of their initial purpose. The drunkard's actions serve as a radical rejection of societal norms, as he perpetuates a cycle that only deepens his isolation and shame. Both the pilot and the drunkard represent acts of defiance against societal expectations, showcasing the ways individuals may resist and challenge the symbolic order in which they live.

In addition, one of the other alternative actions is the Bartleby politics where this action shows the indifference of a subject in facing the existing reality. For example, the Little Prince. Initially, the Little Prince displays a similar indifference, evident when he disregards the feelings of the rose on his home planet, Asteroid B-612, before embarking on his journey to other planets.

“You must never listen to flowers. You must look at them and smell them. Mine perfumed my planet, but I didn’t know how to enjoy that.” [16, pg 24]

The king on asteroid 325 epitomizes the desire to control, despite having no subjects to govern. His insistence on issuing orders to the nonexistent inhabitants highlights his need to assert his existence and authority. Similarly, the conceited man is preoccupied with being admired as the best, despite being alone. His constant need for praise underscores his reliance on external validation to affirm his existence.

The businessman, focused solely on acquiring stars, exemplifies self-centeredness, as his primary concern is personal profit. This obsession with ownership reflects his attempt to assert his significance in the universe. Meanwhile, the geographer, who

claims expertise in geography, reveals his lack of genuine knowledge. When asked about the mountains and deserts, he deflects responsibility, attributing such tasks to explorers. His indifference to the little prince's descriptions of his planet further illustrates his preoccupation with maintaining his status as a geographer, despite his superficial understanding.

## 4 Conclusion

Despite its publication many years ago, the themes presented in this novella continue to hold significant relevance in contemporary discourse, offering insights from multiple perspectives. This novella explores ideological dimensions according to Zizek by offering ideological layers such as capitalism, individualism, and so on to reveal these ideological messages reflected in the dominant characters.

In addition, the second finding is that the critique of adult rationality offered by this novella can be categorized in Zizek's alternative practices of action discourse. This study demonstrates that individuals are invariably and unconsciously shaped by the ideologies they embrace. This phenomenon is evident in the novella's representation of subconscious ideologies by several characters.

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