

Night Flight Short Guide

Night Flight by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Night Flight Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns/Themes.....	4
Techniques.....	5
Literary Precedents.....	6
Copyright Information.....	7



Characters

Although Fabien's disappearance is the focus of the brief story, *Night Flight*, Riviere occupies the central role.

Modeled on Saint-Exupery's own Operational Director, Didier Daurat, to whom the story is dedicated, Riviere reveals the author's admiration and respect for his director. Riviere is a complex character, severe, but not inhuman. When he demotes Riblet, a mechanic of twenty years, he feels pity for the decision he must nevertheless make. When faced with Fabien's wife, he disguises the grief he feels, and the night flights continue. His interior monologues carry the philosophical portion of the story, as he searches for the reason for the dangerous operation he directs. Yet like a vigilant parent, he keeps watch all night for his pilots on duty. Andre Gide, who wrote a preface to the book, admired Riviere, and "the paradoxical truth . . . that man's happiness lies not in freedom, but in the acceptance of duty."

Fabien, the tragic hero of the story, emerges through his experiences in the sky: his ecstasy when he rises through the stars, and his panic when he realizes that all is lost. Less complex than Riviere, he seems to mirror Saint-Exupery's own conflict between the love of a woman and flying, as he leaves his anxious wife on his lengthy mission.

He tries desperately to cling to life, which he loses by flying too high, and tasting the forbidden fruit of the heavenly stars. His real life model was the pilot Elysee Negrin, who was lost in the waters of La Plata, near Montevideo in May 1930, the event which inspired the story.

Among the minor characters, Robineau, the inspector without much inventiveness, yet in need of companionship, whose sad duty it is to give reprimands, is depicted as a solitary yet faithful worker. Pellerin, whose name means pilgrim, returns successfully despite the snowstorms he has encountered; he represents man's victory over the elements of nature. Simone Fabien is the devoted young wife, who as in the medieval courtly love poems distrusts the love of adventure in her beloved and seeks his undivided attention. All emerge as true to life portraits, in their dialogue and action.



Social Concerns/Themes

Less clear and definite in his humanistic convictions than in his later works, Saint-Exupery in this early novella presents the conflict between the value of a human life and progress in society. Illustrated in the person of Riviere, the general director of the mail-carriers in Buenos Aires, the dilemma occurs when Fabien, one of his best pilots, does not return from a mission. He faces Fabien's desolate wife of six weeks, Simone, and at the same time knows that it is his duty to keep the mail service going. He compares it to the loss of life in the construction of a bridge. People would at first reject the bridge, but they continue to build bridges. In the same way, human beings experience a compulsion toward progress, discovery, exploration. Yet the question remains, "Is it worth the risk?"

Riviere is the model of devotion to duty. Somewhat like religious rites, often unintelligible, orders given by commanders change individuals into human beings, adults, and heroes.

Riviere expects an unquestioning obedience from the pilots who work for him, yet somehow he creates fraternity with them. By insisting on courage and fidelity to duty, he calms the fears of timid pilots. Yet he insists on rigid hierarchical structures with his staff.

Like his classical predecessors, Corneille and Racine, Saint-Exupery explores a theme dear to French literature, the conflict between duty and passion.

Night Flight, as its title suggests, is an exaltation of night. Saint-Exupery's favorite time plays an important role in all his works. At the beginning of this touching story, and again towards the end, the pilot Fabien, who is destined to perish in a severe storm after his fuel supply has failed, glories in the beauties of the stars and the twinkling lights of distant homes. Along with the glories of the night and a near-paradise experience which is to bring destruction to Fabien, Saint-Exupery evokes the terror of storms which he describes graphically and fearfully. In short, the profession of aviator which he so loves occupies an important part of this early work.



Techniques

Of the three works of Saint-Exupery considered, *Night Flight* is the only work that has the characteristics of a true novel, although its brevity puts it rather in the category of a novella.

Saint-Exupery had originally submitted four hundred pages to Gallimard, these were reduced to one hundred fifty. In this way the story gained in rigor and precision, yet lost much of the poetry that was Saint-Exupery's forte. *Night Flight*, however, has been called "a work which gets as close as it can to a poem stretched out into a book of prose." Curtis Cate calls it, "a treatise on leadership written in the form of a novel in the language of a poet."

In addition to the poetic descriptions of the night, of the impending cyclone that was to cause Fabien's disappearance and of the philosophical implications of the text, Saint-Exupery also makes use of dramatic qualities.

He uses dialogue to great advantage, such as in Riviere's reprimand of Riblet, the farewell of Simone and Fabien, and Robineau's interview with Riviere, who warns him against creating bonds with his subordinates. Dramatic suspense is created in Fabien's last minutes in the air, and in the heroic grief of Fabien's wife Simone. As in most of Saint-Exupery's works, the elegant poetic beauty and delicate, respectful portrayal of people contribute to *Night Flight*'s charm and popularity.

Literary Precedents

More than any other work, *Night Flight* shows the influence of Nietzsche, for whom Saint-Exupery claimed great admiration. The superhuman devotion to duty in Rivizere and reflected in his pilots harks back to Nietzsche's superman ideals. The inspiration for Riviere comes not only from Didier Daurat, Saint-Exupery's Operational Director, but also from a story of Jules Verne, *Les Indes Noires* (1877; *Child of the Cavern: or, Strange Doings Underground*, 1877) which he remembered from his boyhood days. The influence of Joseph Conrad, seen in all Saint-Exupery's works, is equally present here.

Sister Irma M. Kashuba, S. S. J.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994