Wind, Sand and Stars Study Guide

Wind, Sand and Stars by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

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Overview

Wind, Sand and Stars is an adventure story that also contains thoughtful observations about flying and about the remote areas of the world that SaintExupery visited in his travels. Since Saint-Exupery was one of the pioneers of flight (he patented a number of devices that helped to advance the technology of aviation and to make modern aircraft possible), his observations about flying are of historical interest.

The world view of this exceptionally philosophical man of action is well worth considering, for flying made him keenly aware of the bonds among people of different nationalities. Few writers have spoken of this solidarity better than Antoine de Saint-Exupery. Wind, Sand and Stars was translated from French into English by Lewis Galantiere, an American-born scholar and consultant who devoted much of his career to strengthening the ties between the United States and France.

About the Author

Antoine Marie Roger de Saint-Exupery was a rare combination: a man of action who was also a man of thought. A professional aviator and a skilled writer, Saint-Exupery is the author of some of the most highly regarded commentary on flying ever written. Born into an aristocratic family (he could trace his family name back to the fourth century) in Lyons, France, on June 19, 1900, Saint-Exupery had one younger brother and three sisters. His family was not, however, rich; the death of his father in 1904 left the family in need of money. His maternal grandmother helped support the family, making it possible for Saint-Exupery's sister to establish a home where SaintExupery often visited at Agay in the south of France.

The most important event in SaintExupery's youth was his rebellion against the strictness of his Catholic upbringing. He respected a disciplined The Little Prince, 1943 Letter to a Hostage, 1950 The Wisdom of the Sands, 1950 way of life, but found it difficult to conform. Some scholars believe that many of his later actions (including his inability to settle down in one place and his thirst for adventure) were reactions to this early constraint.

During World War I, Saint-Exupery was sent to Switzerland for safety; while there he learned of the death of his beloved younger brother, Francois, a loss from which Saint-Exupery never fully recovered. Scholars have suggested that the shock of his brother's death helped turn the budding author (who, from childhood, had written poetry) more and more toward internal fantasies and philosophical speculations.

After receiving his college education at the Marist College in Fribourg, Switzerland, Saint-Exupery—who had not proved a great scholar—was called up for military service. This event did not provoke the dismay that it usually does in young people. St.-Ex, as his comrades began to call him, looked forward to the challenge. He had been interested in the relatively new phenomenon of flight from childhood; military duty gave him the chance to join the French Air Force in 1921.

The aircraft flown in the early 1920s were exceedingly primitive; breakdowns were frequent, and forced landings had become expected events. Saint-Exupery did not at first seem well-suited for a career as a pilot—throughout his life, he was notably absent-minded and sometimes even clumsy—but he tended to be cool in emergencies, and his colleagues learned to trust him with their lives.

After several years with the French Air Force, he was hired as a commercial pilot by a company that later joined with several others to become Air France. His adventures with the airline are recounted under fictional guise in his novels, as well as in the autobiographical Wind, Sand and Stars.

His first book, Southern Mail, recounted the adventures and romances of a commercial pilot. Although Southern Mail did not meet with great success, his second novel, Night Flight, was well received. But it is the great French author Andre Gide, a close friend of

Saint-Exupery's, despite their differences in literary style, who is given credit for encouraging his fellow writer to stop writing novels and to use the form, at that time little employed, of the personal essay. The result, Wind, Sand and Stars—originally published in France as Terre des Hommes—won the prestigious Grand Prize of the French Academy in 1939. Saint-Exupery continued to write until 1943, when he returned to his old squadron in North Africa. Although he had been grounded on account of his age and old injuries (most notably those resulting from a nearly fatal crash in Guatemala many years before), Saint-Exupery was finally allowed to make reconnaissance flights over southern France. On July 31, 1944, he failed to return from one of these flights. It is generally thought that he was shot down—an unverified account by a German pilot tells of an encounter with a plane similar to Saint-Exupery's—but no one really knows the exact time or circumstances of his death. Such an outcome would probably have pleased Antoine de SaintExupery, the world's supreme author about flight and, in many ways, always a man of mystery.

Plot Summary

Antoine de Saint Exupery's WIND, SAND AND STARS tells the story of a number of his more remarkable experiences as a pilot for the French Air Post, Aeropostale. He tells the stories of the other pilots of the Aeropostale and seeks to instill in the reader the same awe in them that he felt flying among their ranks. Along with the stories of the men he admires, Antoine tells the stories of his own travels to places far and different from anywhere he has ever been and his own battles with danger.

The book begins just as he career began, walking the reader as if he is an aspiring pilot into the old hangars, getting in on the instructional lectures about which level of the clouds it is safe to fly at and at what altitude death waits. He shares conversations among the young pilots about the astonishing feats of the men who blazed the trails ahead of them. Each chapter moves the perspective to reveal a different aspect of the lives the pilots lived and the world as it reveals itself to them.

There are two men to whom Antoine pays particular homage, Mermoz being the first, admired for his ability to fly a plane in any way necessity deems. A man named Guillaumet is the second; the author reveals Guillaumet's mettle both as a sincere friend and teacher to the men, and in Guillaumet's fighting unbearable cold and solitude in order to return to his family.

Several of the stories take place in the desert, where the extremity of conditions shape the men who live there into different men than any he has ever encountered and serve to test the author more intensely than he has ever been tested. The influence he and the other pilots exert on the desert men opens the nomad's awareness to the different world that lies beyond the boundaries of the desert and to the way freedom can change a man's life.

In Spain after his time in the desert, he tells of his time helping a man free people from execution from one of the warring factions in the Spanish civil war. He is astonished at the readiness with which the civil war participants extinguish each other's lives and bomb their cities. He wonders what inspires men to make themselves a part of an armed force, which brings him to one of his overarching themes: men are motivated by their love for those in their own "world."

Other themes include the value of the inherent gifts that lie inside every human; the value of relationships with family, comrades and countrymen; the terrible beauty and power of nature when it is experienced as its own element, and the effect society has on the individual and his ability to cultivate the gifts that lie within him.

Chapter 1: The Craft

Chapter 1: The Craft Summary and Analysis

Antoine de Saint Exupery begins the memoir of his time as a pilot by taking the reader into the world of the student pilot taking classes on meteorology in tired old hangars and seeing the pilots returning from harrowing flights across France and Central Europe as death-defying heroes. He and his fellow students would become delivery pilots for Aeropostale flying between Toulouse in southwestern France and Dakar in French West Africa. It is a dangerous flight through clouds below which, according to one of his instructors, lies eternity. Antoine and his fellow students learn that just below the clouds through which they will navigate are mountain ranges and all manner of obstacles on the ground unmarked on any map.

It is in this state of coming to recognize the enormity and finality of the danger he faces that Antoine has a very helpful conversation with a more experienced pilot named Guillaumet. Guillaumet encourages Antoine with the reminder that other pilots have been successful on the same route, and anything they can do, he can do. Then he walks Antoine through the map of Spain where the majority of the danger lies. Pointing out features on the ground that do not appear on the map, he shows him things like trees, farms, creeks and favorable landing fields, so that by the end of their conversation, Antoine sees the country much more as a fairyland full of promises and obstacles and leaves their conversation feeling like an other-worldly shepherd walking among his oblivious sheep. He proudly anticipates the task of carrying and safely delivering the letters and business documents it would soon be his responsibility to transport across that dangerous place.

Next comes Antoine's description of the morning of his first flight. He boards a bus filled with office workers who are all on their way to dull and repetitive bureaucratic jobs and thinks about the contrast between what they are anticipating and the kind of day he is about to have, battling like all the other pilots the dragons in the lightning and having the freedom once his work is done to fly over mountains or sea. As anonymously as he rides among them on the bus, he retains the same feeling of privilege and freedom that he felt the night he spoke with Guillaumet. Recounting a conversation he had before boarding the bus with another bureaucrat, Antoine recalls his saying how, from his comfortable indoor office he pitied the man who did not know the land he was about to fly over very well.

This conversation leads him to a reverie about the bureaucrats in general. Writing in a sort of poetic direct address to the bureaucrat, Antoine expresses sympathy for being victim to the momentum of the necessities of life and never being shaken by the shoulders to consider the bigger and deeper questions of life. Now that they are settled into their adulthood, the clay that formed them is set and there is nothing that can awaken the artists or great thinkers that they may have had the potential to become in their youth.

Antoine soon becomes quite comfortable in the sky, and describes the unity of the team that makes their flights possible. Men on the ground watch gauges and dials while pilots in the air watch the landscape and react until they forget that they are in the air. There are, however, moments, when he feels completely removed from earth and the places beneath him and flies as an element among elements in a world galaxies away from the earth.

Next comes Antoine's narrative of a night that finds him lost in a fog and unable to see the lights of any airport. His flying partner, Neri, and he try to communicate with the ground but are both blind and deaf in their plane. Antoine dreams of landing after their harrowing night at Casablanca and having a breakfast of laughing over coffee at their close call. He calls the coffee and roll communion with the earth, remembering the beauty of fields of harvest in the memory of the first swallow of coffee and milk. Earth is for him the ultimate good; his flying partner continues praying to the stars. At last Neri receives a transmission from Casablanca telling them that they must be disciplined for flying too close to the towers on taking off. It is true they did, but the two are amused at the pettiness of the request considering their present rank and danger and revived in the hope that communication is able to reach them.

The musing that occupies him during this time of blind flight and being at the mercy of nature's fog, wind and sea is the likeness of a pilot to a peasant, for whom every natural occurrence carries with it life and death consequences. Flying blind in the air, they are at the mercy of a clearing of the fog; being hydroplane pilots, they are at the mercy of a calming sea, and flying over mountains, clarity of vision is the only thing that will keep them from meeting eternity on the side of the mountain.

When at last the airports begin waking up, they contact his plane to offer comfort and encouragement, and Antoine says they are like people gathering around a sick bed. The only helpful transmission, however, comes from Casablanca who says that their fuel tanks are larger than regulation, and the extra hour they allow will get them safely to Cisneros. His relief returns him to his reverie about the cooperation with nature and faithful delivery of vital cargo that is his charge. He concludes that the thing that makes his death-defying task noble is not the orders or the cargo, but the men the task creates.

Chapter 2: The Men

Chapter 2: The Men Summary and Analysis

Chapter two describes the mettle of the men who fly for Aeropostale, typified by two men in particular. The first is Mermoz who was charged with the task of charting a traversable route through the Andes from Buenos Aires to Santiago de Chile. He is proven for this type of task in that he is the man who did the same project in the Casablance-Dakar route. A pioneer of flying uncharted areas, Mermoz is the pilot who teaches Antoine and his fellow pilots how to land on unlit airstrips and in the ocean.

In the beginning of this particular expedition, Mermoz and his mechanic find themselves trapped on top of a mesa with sheer cliffs and a plane that won't start. His solution to the problem is simply to drop off of the cliff's edge and let the speed of the drop engage the plane's engines again. Innovative use of planes and landscapes are part of what make Mermoz great in Antoine's eyes.

Antoine tells a story of one night when Mermoz was out and radioed that he was cutting his second engine and of the long wait before they heard from him again. He talks about the time it takes for something to happen for a pilot, and how soon is too soon to worry, and that leads him to a verbal contemplation of the passing of a fellow pilot and its effect on the pilots left behind. Enough time elapses between one meeting and the next with pilots even who are close friends that it is easy not to think about a departed friend every day. But the moments when that pilot would be there, sharing stories and recounting another of the experiences that create the brotherhood of pilots, it's like realizing a favorite garden is locked to visitors forever.

He compares old and established friends to large and established trees who will never again be able to offer their shade once they are gone. Antoine concludes that the moral of lives like Mermoz's is not the ability of the craft, but the fellowship the craft creates between the men who wield it. He records that the moments that he most savors are moments spent with those people with whom he has cultivated deep and lasting relationships. The extraordinary quality of the pilots' shared experience only serves to deepen their communion by itself being such a remarkable thing, both requiring and creating such remarkable men.

In another story, he talks about a service and retrieval mission of which he and 10 pilots and mechanics were a part and the remarkable night they spent in an area of the Sahara dominated by tribes that had killed one of their fellow pilots. They kept watch all night and told stories, and he says of that night that there was something about it that felt like Christmas. Nothing, he observes, can create that kind of fellowship but the richness of their unifying shared experiences. Their riches were simply the wind, sand, and stars.

The second man of whom Antoine writes he addresses directly, dedicated the recounting of his story to Guillaumet, the remarkable man who lived it himself. Before beginning his story, he tells of how another man who recorded the tale characterized Guillaumet as having been gay and giddy in his defiance of the danger he faced and of how false a characterization it was. Guillaumet, according to Antoine and those who know him best, is a man who approaches a task like a carpenter approaches a block of wood: he sizes it up and determines to treat it honorably never cheapening an adversary before facing it.

So he begins Guillaumet's story: He had been a week over the Andes, and several other pilots were out looking for him to no avail. It was winter, so snow covered tracks and evidences of whatever crashes there might have been, and with every day that passed, it made the chances of Guillaumet's survival more unlikely. Not even the locals would join the search parties because they had never observed the Andes to give up a man in winter. Being advised from every angle to give up the search, Antoine goes one more time into the mountains, and sitting in a pub one night, hears the news that someone has found Guillaumet.

He is in terrible condition and reports that what he went through, "no animal would have gone through." He recounts the story to his fellow pilots. There was an enormous storm that brought fifteen feet of snow in forty-eight hours, and it was in that storm that Guillaumet was caught. A down draft had taken his plane down from the height at which he was trying to fly over the storm, and he righted it by finding a lake and circling it until he was out of fuel and crash landed on its shore. He crawled out of the plane and was knocked down twice by the wind immediately upon standing. Instead of trying to get anywhere in the wind, he shelters for two days and nights in his plane, the mail bags around him for warmth.

Then, he walks for five days and four nights. In that time, he never sleeps, knowing that to do so will mean hypothermia; he has nothing to eat in that time, nor hope of being found. The thing that motivates him to force his limbs to move and his heart to beat is the fact that his wife and sons think he is alive, and as long as they believe it, he must be on his feet. He talks about the battle he does with his mind and his instinct to stop moving and give in, about the ways he might be found once the mountains thawed if he did, and about the fact that if a man vanishes, his death is postponed for four years, meaning his family would receive no insurance money in that time and be penniless. Eventually, Guillaumet has gone long enough with no sleep that his waning memory makes him his own worst enemy. Without realizing it, when he stops to cut open more of his shoes to allow for the swelling of his feet, he leaves behind crucial items like a glove and his compass, and begins to know he won't last much longer. It is just shortly after Guillaumet finally succumbs to sleep that he is found.

Antoine concludes the chapter describing the virtue in a man that makes him take on responsibilities purely for the good they will do for the people around and following them as Guillaumet did. His sense of responsibility to a good greater than he is what made him fight through the pain and the instinct to give in to the brutal cold. He fought to live

through circumstances much more dire than those that have caused others to take their lives for the sake of the people he served in his family and in his fellowship of pilots.

Chapter 3: The Tool

Chapter 3: The Tool Summary and Analysis

Chapter three opens with a description of the remarkable thing it is that the key to really excellent and functional design is not to add as much as possible, but to take away as much as possible, until ultimately what is left is very like the lines of the naked human body. That simplicity is what makes a thing as aerodynamic as possible and what takes hours and drafts by the greatest engineers before it is perfected. In a particularly elegant analogy, Antoine says it is like the artist's visioning the finished sculpture from a block of marble; it is not crafting that he is doing as much as releasing the already perfect image from its stony prison. Engineers just have to discover the lines that are already there and free them from encumbrance.

In the same way, engineers strive to invent a machine that disappears from notice in its perfect functioning, so the pilot can use it as an extension of his own body. It is then possible for the metal to disappear enough from the notice of the pilot that it becomes possible for him to rediscover nature in the way he described in the first chapter, plunged into the temperament and majesty of it. Here he enters a discussion of those who bemoan the evolution of the machine into more and more of daily life. He proposes the flaw of the argument of the plow's superiority to the tractor to be that one steel tool is no closer to the earth than another. He observes that it is toward the machine that society is headed, and that machines serve humans very well in that they annihilate time and space in their helping people to travel, communicate, teach, and entertain. The greatest technological advancements observable at the time he wrote served to bring people closer together.

Addressing the complaint that human values have declined since the machine has advanced in ways that can be observed by comparing the village filled with folksongs and craftsmen with a Hollywood-fed city of people who have lost their creativity, Antoine proposes that it is merely a problem of language. Since the technologies that help people to travel are so new, and people are such an old race, they are dependent on the language that described the world before technology to describe their new reality. Since the familiar language still reflects the old reality, people's souls still hold the old world up as the superior reality.

He suggests that with time, new folksongs will evolve that describe this new reality, and the old ideals will be replaced. "Young barbarians still marveling at our new toys—that is what we are," he suggests. He supports his theory by pointing to the desire in men to race and give prizes to record-setters. Citing the examples of the train and the boat, he suggests that every new machine will soon lose its mystery to its function and retreat into normalcy as a means instead of an end. Then, they will serve their purposes of allowing men to dance with nature in a way they couldn't without their vessels. Men will take off from water to sail through air and so be plunged more deeply into nature than they could ever have gone before the machine.

Chapter 4: The Elements

Chapter 4: The Elements Summary and Analysis

In the opening of "The Elements," Antoine is preparing to describe a typhoon but bracing the reader for what he is sure will be a disappointing recounting of the tale. Pointing to Joseph Conrad, he points out that he made no attempt at describing the storm itself, only the effect in had on the people and objects contained in the ship being tossed in the storm. And so, with the point established that he expects to sound like an exaggerating little boy remembering things with more terror than he experienced them with at the time, he begins.

He is preparing to fly through a particularly turbulent area of the Andes where high and low pressure regions converge and bounce around over the mountains, giving pilots a workout in controlling their planes as they fly through it. Knowing that planes could always be trusted to hold together, and that the turbulent area is only an hour of flying, he proceeds. But on this particular day, doesn't like the color that has replaced the old familiar turquoise. Today, the sky is pure, hard blue. Antoine describes his preference for a storm he can see, rather than one that he is completely unable to quantify or predict.

He sees a trail of ashy gray leading from the mountains to the sea and is disturbed but only experiences the slightest tremor as he comes over the mountains. Then, his plane stops moving in mid-air. Before he can decide to drop to a lower altitude and take shelter against a mountainside, he begins to be sucked down toward the ground. He compares himself with a waiter who only realizes once he has slipped that he is dropping an entire pile of plates. As the wind tosses him at the bottom of a valley, he begins to understand how pilots crash without fog and lose their perspective on the difference between the horizontal and the diagonal. Continuing to be tossed, he is eventually sucked fifteen hundred feet straight up and at once tossed out to sea.

For over an hour, he struggles to make progress in any direction to no avail, so pressed against the ocean. He observes pools of turquoise amid foamy lines on the water, making the ocean look like a shattered mirror. There are occasional tunnels of freedom from the wind for which he tries to navigate, and after a long struggle, flying into and out of these areas of freedom from the crushing wind, he begins to make an observation of himself. The moments of calm are by far the worst of the moments he experiences during his battle against the cyclone. Far worse than actually flying against the wind is sitting in terrorized anticipation of its next assault.

Slowly he discovers he has lost communication with his hands. They, gripped so long and tightly around the throttle of the plane, that his hands and his brain, so long engaged in the battle, have lost communication one with the other. The result is that he can no longer feel nor loosen his hands' unrelenting grip. He becomes aware of the saturation of his fatigue and of his desire to stop fighting. His engine sputtering and his

plane being torn to shreds, he determines that he can drift south along the shore to a place where he will be able to climb to safety.

Covering five miles in an hour, he is able to shelter under a cliff and keep enough altitude to land safely in the field that was his destination. There waits for him a platoon of soldiers, and he is unable to say anything to them but "Imagine a white sea... very white... whiter still" as he emerges trembling and exhausted from his plane.

This account is, however, unable in Antoine's view to elicit any kind of emotion or drama at all. It is a non-story in that it was a struggle alone. There was no human relationship about which either the reader or the writer might become emotional. While the elements are a major character in the lives of the men who interact with them, the men who walk around the day following have very little in common with the men they were when they did battle. His contention remains to the last that "the physical drama itself cannot touch us until someone points out its spiritual sense," like the fact that the burning flesh of children and their elders are a part of the burning rubble that contribute to a pillar of smoke. No story is a story without humanity.

Chapter 5: The Plane and the Planet

Chapter 5: The Plane and the Planet Summary and Analysis

Antoine opens this chapter by pointing out that planes' allowing humans a birds-eye-view of their planet has allowed for a certain removal of innocence and the possibility of romanticizing their home orb. Where roads are able to run along the most choice of landscapes, highlighting and touring the traveler through the plush and civilized, planes pull away the curtain on the barren and desolate as well as the remote and beautiful.

The first of three sections in this chapter opens with his description of the lava planes south of the Gallegos River on the way to the Straits of Magellan. Quiet following their centuries of eruptions, they are barren and mute, covered with black glaciers. Then south of those, older glaciers of volcanic rock that have begun to incubate life in the form of small plants and animals. And further into Chile still, a little north of Punta Arenas, the hills roll smooth under a lush carpet of moss, he suggests one might forget the travail that made their lushness possible, and muses at the strangeness that people can visit this place for a single day and be satisfied.

Landing in Punta Arenas, he begins to contemplate the miracle and oddity of womankind. Mankind alone among animals separates himself from others of his kind, and try as he may, he cannot completely penetrate or comprehend the world of women. Each one creates her own universe in her imagination, a language all her own, and he calls her already half divine. He sees himself as a stranger among the people of this village and then records how much a stranger mankind is on earth; civilizations wiped away by a single volcano or a new arrangement of the desert or the sea. Even the lake on which the little village sat, thinking itself secure, churned in obedience to the unearthly moon beneath its thin bark of ice.

The second section narrates Antoine's discovery atop virgin mesas in Spanish Africa. He is sure no human could have trod on them before, their being too high for an Arab to have climbed and in a region no European had yet ventured to explore. The surfaces of the mesas are made up of crumbled and crumbling shells, and the deposits harden to calcified rock at their bottoms. This is not news to Antoine as much as the anomaly he finds among them. Sticking up from the ground is a black rock, looking to be made of cooled lava, about the size of a man's fist. Deducing that since fruit falls from the trees that bear them, and that the only tree under which these mesas sit is the sky full of stars, these anomalous rocks must be fallen meteorites. He gathers a group of them, scattered across the surface, and observes amazed: he is now the only mirror in which this cosmic occurrence has ever been reflected.

Section three tells the story of a night he spends sleeping on the roofless desert floor of the Sahara and of the dream that comes to him. More as a memory to comfort him on a night filled with solitude and the potential for danger, his childhood house begins filling

his senses with their memory. He remembers smells and linens, the cupboards that held them and the housekeeper who fretted over keeping them, and him, in that order. He remembers the housekeeper with particular fondness and wants to tell her about this night and shock her with the strangeness of his adventures. The scope and variety of his adventures impressed upon her, he wanted to hear her call him a wild lad. He understood her to be small-minded and of very limited experience, but the night he spent remembering her, he also understood and fully appreciated her value.

He concludes the chapter with the observance that he has been shaped, along with his dreams much more profoundly by his childhood home and the old housekeeper at the spinning wheel than by his exotic adventures in strange and far-off places. He hopes he will always remember why one's childhood world is so important.

Chapter 6: Oasis

Chapter 6: Oasis Summary and Analysis

Antoine's chapter on the oases that served him opens with the story of a family in Paraguay who took him in for a night. They lived in a house that was once beautiful and regal and has since become charming in its age, broken-down, and very clean. The couple had two daughters. The daughters disappeared and reappeared at random moments due to the age and secret passageways in the house. He was certain the daughters spent their time away feeding and otherwise tending to their array of animals. He notes being charmed by the place and the family but was in fear of being judged too harshly by the little girls. He sits at the table in this fear until the girls announce that the motion he feels under the table, brushing up against his legs, is a collection of snakes. The girls seem to him even more regal and omnipotent now that he understands that a whole army of snakes are at their command.

Reflecting on the girls, he wonders what ever became of them. By the time he is remembering, he imagines that their dreams have evolved to include hopes for young men. He supposes that an imbecile came along at some point and the girls fooled themselves into thinking that his small hints at charm indicated a man full of charm. He would be given the heart of whichever girl, and her wild garden would be trimmed and tamed by the imbecile, and the princess made into a slave.

Chapter 7: Men of the Desert

Chapter 7: Men of the Desert Summary and Analysis

The seventh chapter begins with an admission that men might be tempted to believe they are wasting their lives in the mineral world of the desert while the living, breathing world outside it is growing more beautiful and then passing its prime. He contends, however, that he and his fellow pilots looked on the desert as the place in which they lived the best years of their lives. He determines to tell the stories of a few of the desert places closest to his heart.

The first of five sections opens with Antoine's recounting of his first day in the Sahara Desert. He was piloting a plane carrying the mail that lost a connecting rod. Guillaumet was piloting the convoy plane, but to board a plane together would make it too heavy to fly. So, he stays behind so they can drop the mail and come back for him. Intending to instill in him the proper awe and respect for their desert, the two pilots leave him with a gun and extra cartridge clips and with instructions to shoot anything he sees. He remains enchanted, however, and sees only a gazelle he believes is revealed to him in secret by the golden sands. The two return and retrieve him, and he keeps his enchanted meeting to himself.

The man to whom they had delivered the mail, and the host at their next destination, was a sergeant in the French army. His enthusiasm at seeing them was the kind of enthusiasm borne out of the loneliness that comes from months and months of tidying, polishing, preparing a place for a proper presentation to superiors with very brief actual contact with another human being. They drank wine on the roof of the outpost and talked about the stars, all visible and bright and just as they are from the plane, only stationary.

The second section begins by talking about the Aeropostale airstrip on the Sahara and the measures they took to ward of the danger of the razzia - the Moorish marauders who roamed the desert. Protected by their poverty, they make plans to continue their routes. The other danger on the desert, however, is sandstorms, and on the night Antoine is to intercept a load to fly it north, he receives warning from the insect kingdom that one may be imminent. Moths and butterflies have fled their oasis in the direction of their camp and are now flying around his oil lamps. He knows it before the first breaths of wind reach him and is filled with barbaric joy at having learned a piece of the language of the desert.

Section three tells of the influential Moorish chiefs who the pilots would occasionally take on tours of Europe in order to educate them about the rest of the world. They seemed always to maintain their disdain and contempt for Christians, unimpressed with the technological innovation of the Europeans but are astounded repeatedly, some to the point of shedding tears, at the sight of trees. All the lushness of gardens, pastures for grazing, and the peaceful interaction of thousands of people together astonish them.

But perhaps most astonishing of all and the thing they thought might inspire their tribes to stop making war on the French, was the fact that the women in the French circus could jump from one galloping horse to another.

They muse over the fact that the God of the French gives them Paradise - gardens filled with running streams - on earth, without the cost of thirst or martyrdom. In the French Alps, they stand transfixed at a waterfall, knowing that in this place God is manifesting Himself in the form of life-giving water. The thing their children beg for and caravans travel hundreds of miles to find is roaring forth here in a purer form than they have ever seen it. They consider it a miracle and wait astounded for the end of God's fit of generosity.

On their return, however, they say nothing of it. They are, Antoine remembers, blood of El Mammun, a former vassal of the French. Formerly a prince, he had struck a deal and become a shepherd. Overcome with loyalty for his countrymen, however, he submits to the temptation to treason against his French friends and murders them all in their sleep. The Moors, then, are understood to be a violent people of singular focus, and the men deal with them gently as a result.

The fourth section tells the story of Bonnafous, a French captain who has outmaneuvered the razzias to the point of becoming legendary among them. Antoine learns of a plan to march on Bonnafous to retrieve the camels he stole from them with a force of three hundred rifles on the offensive. Unable to determine whether love or hate is the more powerful motivator for these men, Antoine observes that he has learned their secret. The power and survival of Bonnafous torments them, and they admire and desire his presence among them.

The fifth and final section begins with the story of Mohammed, a former shepherd christened "Bark" by his Arab captors and sold into slavery at the station where Antoine was temporarily chief. Every night before he made Antoine his tea, he would implore him to hide him on the Marrakech plane so that he might return home. Telling about the other slaves he knows, he is moved to observe the patterns into which their homeland forces their habits. The intense heat of day inspires them to move toward evening with singular motivation, when they will rest in the cool and quench their thirst. The evening, then, is so cool that they long for the warmth of the sun. In a beautiful bit of poetic writing, he talks of land in which seasons are poets, writing verses of pining for the seasons that will balance them. In the Sahara, balance comes as surely as night follows day.

Next follows a discussion that reveals the matter-of-fact acceptance of the system of slavery both on the part of the masters and, peculiarly, of the slaves themselves. Calling him "the black," Antoine describes the submission with which Mohammad gave up his life among his own people and now serves. He imagines that, as he has seen in other slaves, when his usefulness has expired, he will be stripped of his cloak and denied food until he at last succumbs to a quiet death in the desert sun. Children will play near him and report when he has stopped moving, and the earth will take him back. All the memory of the people and places that made him who he was will be lost with him to the

sand. Mohammed, however, held out hope of return to the home and family he loves and resists that quiet death in the desert more than any other slave Antoine had observed.

After a time of negotiations with the men who owned Bark and of raising money among his fellow pilots, Antoine arranges to buy Bark and arrange to fly him back to a town from which he can take an omnibus to Marrakech. The pilots send him with a thousand francs worth of copper, and the man they send with him to take care of him until he is on his bus returns to report the resurrection process he observed in Mohammad.

Having spent the day wandering the town and having tea, being flirted with by the local prostitutes and remaining unsatisfied, he finally comes to meet a small, sickly child. Struck with an idea, he goes to the Jewish shops and spends every last bit of his money on gold-threaded shoes for all the children. Having been unnecessary and without connection to any of the other people he had seen that day, Mohammad recognized that the way to rejoin the human race was to serve it. Of his own free will, he was now free to make gestures of humanity to his fellow humans, and it is with that joy that he is finally ready to return to his family.

Chapter 8: Prisoner of the Sand

Chapter 8: Prisoner of the Sand Summary and Analysis

In the eighth chapter, Antoine tells the story of his trip from Paris to Saigon. Before he left, he and the meteorologist look at the weather over the Middle East which he would be crossing, and spot something Antoine thinks is a sandstorm. He and his mechanic, Prevot, begin their journey with Antoine feeling strong and ready for a beautiful and uneventful flight. Flying through thick clouds, however, and unable to get above or below them, the two eventually crash land, unaware of their proximity to the ground, in the middle of a desert.

Not knowing whether they have crossed the Nile or not and with no reason to hope that any rescue party will be coming for them, the two make a plan to set out on day-hikes to see whether they can find water or human civilization, and then return to the plane to sleep. They are unsuccessful to the east, although it is the direction Guillaumet set out in and was rescued, so Antoine feels strangely confident that it is best. Water eventually runs dry, and their desperation to be rescued increases. Prevot takes comfort in the practical advantage of having a gun, but Antoine remains determined to keep moving until he finds water or rescue.

Setting out on his own one day and leaving Prevot at the plane, Antoine walks forty hallucinating miles seeing cities, caravans, even a pair of Arabs on his return to the plane and all the while arguing with himself about his own madness for believing them to be real. They pair creates a bonfire of the wing of their plane, hoping that the signal will be seen by someone in the night. Both driven by the inability to endure the thoughts of abandoning their families to the despair of having lost them, they are desperate to make themselves visible.

Nearly collapsing into despair, the two identify a source of water in the dew that, mercifully, has continued to come on the wind off the Nile, and lay out a piece of parachute to collect it. Ringing out the dew into a magnesium-lined bucket in the morning, the two drink and are sickened to vomiting. It is in this pitiful state that they set out on their last nearly hopeless search for rescue. The two walk with lips blistered and each hallucinating their own Deus ex machine to the edge of their abilities to walk when, both thinking they are still hallucinating, they hear the bell around the neck of a camel in a passing caravan. They spend the last of their strength getting the man's attention, and he rewards their efforts with pails of water they drink with alarming greed. And, just as the wish not to disappoint their families was the only thing making them continue their excruciating battle with extreme dehydration, the news of their rejoicing when they learned of their rescue was the thing that assured them both that their battle was worth the fight.

Chapter 9: Barcelona and Madrid

Chapter 9: Barcelona and Madrid Summary and Analysis

The chapter devoted to Barcelona and Madrid marks his turn toward the politics of men and for what things they are willing to die and kill. Flying over a town he remembers as quiet and peaceful, having spent time there during a previous assignment, he daydreams about sitting in the café, listening to musicians. Flying further into Spain, he flies over a town he knows to be scarred by the civil war happening there and is struck by how, from above, there is nothing detectable about the war. Once he and his companion are on the ground, they start to see smoking churches and observe as they move from town to town how strangely this war is working itself out.

Divided between Communism, Fascism, Anarchism and Socialism, each town becomes harbor to certain camps at a time but otherwise appears to continue with life as usual. Antoine compares the atmosphere to that of a hospital in which those who think differently than the men with the guns are simply shot and the germ eliminated. As Antoine and his companion are sitting in a café, soldiers come a carry a man off, and the people in the restaurant continue as if nothing has gone wrong. A man who knows he is the only one of his belief in his town makes himself as sociable and human as possible, so he will be harder to kill by the men who know him.

Struck by the frequency of men killing other men for difference of belief, Antoine observes that to end a life is to eliminate a whole world in that man's set of memories and experiences. The loss of one life affects a whole community of people that man's life has touched. We hold lives sacred enough to mount rescue efforts for lost and trapped men, and yet men gather in firing squads to squash by means of execution those men who entertain opposing philosophies to their own. Nonsensically, it is merely those who are too weak or peaceful to resist who are shot the most blatantly, like a parish priest and his housekeeper. Men who look peaceful and mild-mannered capture and shoot their own countrymen.

Pepin, his companion, and a French Socialist, is there to see who he can rescue from a list of names, and Antoine gets the chance to encounter a number of scenarios as a result. Particularly, on an evening when Madrid is being bombed, the two sit in a safe road out of the line of fire, and Pepin points out to him which shells are meant for Madrid, and they count them. Antoine compares Madrid in a poetic bit of writing to a ship being torpedoed on the sea and bearing souls to their beyond. He comments on how stoically Madrid receives her beating and how little purpose the resulting deaths serve except to unify the defenders against the attackers. Innocents die and cities are damaged by men who share the same homeland with both.

Again he turns to the idea that the spark of humanity in those souls who are lost is an irreplaceable thing, and he grieves the brutality of what he sees. It isn't until the forth

section of chapter nine that his tone turns to hope in humanity. On a night in the trenches with a lieutenant, a sergeant and three men, the pair witness a remarkable exchange. One of the men from their trench called across to the men they were sure were hiding opposite them in the same valley to see if they could talk to one of them. After a time of waiting and being fired upon for lighting cigarettes, they are able to get a response. An attempt at diplomacy even in the middle of the field, asked for humanity and reason in the respite between bouts of killing. When they are finally able to send the question across, "What are you fighting for?" the answer come back, "Spain! You?" to which they reply, "The bread of our brothers." "Good night, friend" from both sides demonstrates a unity of purpose that makes Antonio wonder that this kind of meeting of minds has never yet prevented men from dying in battle against one another.

That evening, Antoine observes a group of soldiers drinking in a room completely sealed against the possibility of escaping light, all of them grim and awaiting battle. When the news comes that there will be no battle in the morning, the whole mood of the group changes. Not, Antoine observes, because they were in some way unwilling to fight to the death but simply because it was no longer the imminence it had been. Telling the sergeant who was to lead them into the fray would be the real revelation. The men creep in to find him still dressed and ready for battle, sleeping soundly on an iron cot. They wake him with the second attempt, and Antoine describes in great detail the swim back to consciousness that was necessary for this man. The really remarkable thing, however, is that as soon as consciousness begins to emerge in him, he asks whether they were off to battle and reaches for his rifle before his eyes have even opened.

This readiness to go into battle sets Antoine's mind into motion on the subject of what makes a man willing to die. He learns that the sergeant had been an accountant, and when all his friends joined, he felt the irresistible compulsion to join, too. Antoine compares him with a bird caged on the ground who, when it sees migrating birds flying south in formation, becomes suddenly overwhelmed with the urge to fly with them. The essence of Man is awakened in men who see the need for battle, and they are compelled to join the fray at whatever cost. There is freedom for men in jumping to follow that instinct, in being a part of a unified force of men, and fighting nobly for the people he loves. He gives an example of disparate groups unifying behind a cause involving a Spanish battalion in the desert and their Bedouin guests. When the fort is attacked with the Bedouin guests still inside, they united against their own countrymen to defend their hosts. The Spanish general recognized their sacrifice and repaid them in gratitude.

The world is full of different reasons for men to unite, and Antoine demonstrates with examples like wooden idols, civil wars and fanatical dictators to demonstrate the more carnivorous causes. The desire in men for companionship and using their warrior instincts for a noble cause can only be pacified and bring meaning to life and death when it is for a family and love that a man gives his life to a cause. The things a soul remembers are the things that unite it with other souls. He suggests that "the birth of man is not yet accomplished," but men must continue to search for the truths and loves that will bring forth the nobility from their souls.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Chapter 10: Conclusion Summary and Analysis

Returning to the image of the bureaucrats on the bus the day of his first mail flight, Antoine closes by drawing a comparison with the peasants he sees on a train. The people were all sleeping and all worn and dirtied by lives of labor. People who once fell in love and dreamed romantic and lofty dreams had been hammered with the same stamp of labor and tossed about by the economic winds until every dream of a quiet and peaceful pastoral life was washed from them. Their national identities and the items that distinguished their homes, even their physical forms, had been sacrificed to the necessity to labor and to travel to where the labor could be found.

Sleeping between two worn and ragged of these peasants, Antoine sees a child, still golden with youth and full of delicacy and intelligence. He imagines the child to be a small Mozart, miraculously conceived by these two extinguished souls, but destined for the same life to which they had been condemned. He identifies the tragedy of the loss of the potential of these minds as the loss it is to the rest of the world and curses industry at large for driving these creative, soulful, poetic individuals to make themselves machines. The gardener in him looks at these wilted and withering plants and weeps at the loss.

Characters

Antoine de Saint Exupery

The writer of the book, Antoine de Saint Exupery, is a poetic observer of the human experience and describes his observations in this book of the men and experiences of the French Aeropostale. His admiration of each element of the profession is observable in the subjects to which he dedicates his chapters: "The Craft," "The Men," "The Tool," "The Elements," "The Plane" and "The Planet" are all examples of the elements of the trade that inspire his admiration and love.

But more than the craft, his love is for the brotherhood the struggles and the unique experiences bring to the pilots who share them in common. He loves the essence of a man that survives struggle to see the poetry and lasting relationships that make the struggle worth while. In his observations of war, the thing he grieves the most are the lost universes in the souls lost to it. He recognizes the value of the unique set of memories contained in each individual, and the senselessness with which they are taken away. He also values the potential that begins in every man and can either be cultivated to create a soul fully alive and contributing to the life and culture of the human race or be drowned in a lifetime of working as a soulless tool making a life of drudgery and artless existence.

While he advocates no singular spirituality, it is evident throughout his writing that the eternal soul of a man is the part he believes ought to be valued most highly and to which humanity ought to be dedicating its attentions. He advocates the writing of a new set of values that will unite humanity instead of dividing it.

Guillaumet

Guillaumet is a pilot who earned Antoine's undying and loyal respect both as a pilot and as a man. There are two stories that demonstrate his value to Antoine. The first is when, before Antoine has flown his first mission, Guillaumet teaches him on his map of all the unmarked dangers and oases, marking things like fields that serve as good places to land and creeks that will crash a plane if landed on. He shows him the homes of friendly residents and becomes to Antoine a sage source of life-saving experience.

The second story demonstrates the mettle of which Guillaumet is made and the inspiration he is to all of the pilots who know him. Crash-landed in the Andes in the winter, Guillaumet walks for days against the instinct to fall asleep and succumb to death by hypothermia because of the love he has for his family. His knowledge of their grief and of the hardship losing him would be for them inspires him to endure starvation, freezing temperatures, damaged limbs and to continue to walk for days in hope that he would be found, but with no promise that he would be. Nobility and love for family only

are the virtues that made him find his strength and made him serve as an example to the other pilots of what can be survived with the proper motivation.

Mermoz

Mermoz is a similarly heroic predecessor and inspiration in his ingenious use of the planes he had come to know so well he could wield them in nearly any circumstance. The story Antoine tells of Mermoz's adventures takes place when he is given the assignment of searching for gaps in the Cordilleras through which deliveries could be safely flown. Mermoz had landed with mechanical trouble with his mechanic on a plateau with sheer drops at every edge. Unable to start his plane, he knew flying off would be his only escape from the point at which they found themselves, so he coasts the plane off the cliff. It is then in falling that the plane picks up enough speed to respond to the controls, and the two fly safely on with their mission. He flew missions just like it in the Andes, surmounting the obstacles of mountains no other pilot had been able to survive, so that the men who followed him would know the safe passages.

Captain Bonnafous

Capain Bonnafous is the first Frenchman the thieving Moorish tribes of the Sahara came to respect as able to outsmart them. Former masters of their desert, they had been outwitted and out-maneuvered by Bonnafous and his men several times, and came to see him as the only worthy adversary. Antoine observes that this inspired in them a kind of affection for the Frenchman in them, so that if he were to return to his own homeland and leave them without the challenge he presented, they would inwardly mourn their loss.

Bark (Mohammad ben Lhaoussin)

The Marrakech-native slave the men called Bark at one of the forts in the Sahara is a source of moral compulsion for Antoine. He finds himself compelled by his determination among submitted slaves to retain his own identity and the hope of his eventual return home. Bark asks at the beginning of every evening whether he may be smuggled on the next plane to Marrakech and then continues to serve faithfully without another word. Antoine is able to raise the money to buy him from his captors, and on Bark's return home, he becomes an inspiring story of what a man has in him to do upon being gifted his freedom from slavery. His escort returns with the story that Mohammad spends all the money they gave him to make a start to buy golden slippers for the begging children in his hometown,in order that he might return to his family having been restored as a benefactor to someone else in need.

Prevot

In the episode that finds Antoine crash-landed in the desert with little hope of being found and even less food or drink, his companion is the man who rode as mechanic on that particular flight. He is a level-headed, practically-minded and resourceful man, and the two of them hold each other to their sanity and hope as they await rescue.

Pepin

Pepin is the man from whom Antoine learns so much about the Spanish civil war during their mission there to rescue a group of men from certain execution. He is a socialist and very acquainted with the ins and outs of the war in the midst of which they needed to be. He teaches Antoine both about the social dynamics among the factions and about the implements and sounds of war as they sat outside Madrid watching her be bombed.

Sergeant R—-

The most remarkable man Antoine has the chance to observe in his soldiering in the Spanish civil war is Sergeant R—-. He prepares willingly to lead his men into battle with near certitude that he will be killed in the effort. Antoine inquires after his entering the army, and the sergeant describes his life as an accountant and the compelling obligation he felt for the cause for which so many of his friends were uniting. Antoine wonders what would inspire in a man such a willingness to die and discovers in the sergeant that it is love for his country and his fellow soldiers that awakens the warrior within him.

The Child on the Train

The golden child sleeping between the peasant worker parents on the train seemed to Antoine like a young Mozart full of potential and promise. The heartbreaking thing to Antoine is the seeming absence of possibility that whatever gifts lie in the golden child would ever be cultivated so that the world may benefit from his presence. The child comes to symbolize the unaddressed potential in whole populations who will be swept out of themselves by the necessity of work and submission to a system that has no desire for their more soulful gifts.

The Bureaucrats on the Omnibus

The group of business people among whom Antoine rides to his first delivery flight are, in Antoine's perspective, a group of people in whom the light of potential greatness has burned out with years of drudgery. Their goals never having aligned with their passions, their lives were given to the cause of their daily tasks only, so that any imagination, poetry or music that might once have dwelt in them was allowed to die. He compares

them with clay, once mold-able and since then dried and hardened, set in the shape their tasks have created.

Objects/Places

The Planes

Planes to the men in this story are both portals to worlds of discovery and adventure and silent enemies when they don't stay in the air.

The Maps

Pilots inform one another of the dangers and helps that don't appear on the maps, sharing the benefit of their experiences and making the maps invaluable resources.

The Elements

Wind, clouds, light and dark and every manner of precipitation become world-changing characters when a pilot is thrust out into the middle of them.

The Desert

Both beautiful and deadly, the desert introduces the pilots to whole cultures they would never have encountered outside it. It creates a culture completely focused on the acquisition of water and of a better afterlife.

The Potential in a Soul

Antoine identifies something in every person that can either be cultivated and made a visible sharing of their essence or can be neglected and allowed to wither and disappear.

Water

In the desert, it is the only thing standing between the men and insanity and death. It is the thing that so astounds the Moors who go to France when they see their first waterfall.

Cities

As hallucinations in the desert and as demonstrated when Antoine watches the bombing of Madrid, cities are havens for humanity and places to be highly valued for that reason.

France

France is seen by both the men who originated there and by the Moors who visit it as a kind of Eden, flowing with life and beauty.

The Andes

The Andes mountains are the place where Guillaumet proves his mettle and his loyalty to and love for his family.

Weapons of War

In Spain, Antoine witnesses battles and executions he can hardly understand, and sees Madrid continuously tormented by bombs, knowing that within its boundaries, people who have committed no offense were being killed.

Setting

The action of the book takes place from the mid-1920s through the 1930s.

Saint-Exupery describes his experiences as an aviator in places ranging from Europe to Africa to South America.

He traces the topography of Spain field by-field and farm-by-farm with his friend Henri Guillaumet before embarking on his first real flight for the Latecoere Company; he crashes in the Sahara Desert with his engineer Prevot during an attempted long-distance flight from France to Saigon; he visits the battlefields of the Spanish Civil War as a correspondent and observes the strength and the sadness of the soldiers there. Saint-Exupery is a sensitive and observant traveler, and Wind, Sand and Stars derives its power from his insightful descriptions of the exotic sites to which his restless wings take him.

Social Sensitivity

Wind, Sand and Stars is a book that stresses the importance of human bonds, and as such it stands as a positive and thought-provoking reading experience. Saint-Exupery's delicate portraits, gentle sense of humor, and overarching regard for basic human dignity inspire respect for every character in his narrative. Readers may be put off by the author's use of a racial slur in chapter 7, but should be reminded that, inexcusable as the word is in presentday society, it was a popularly used—if unfortunate—term in the 1930s. SaintExupery concludes the book with a biblically inspired phrase: "Only the Spirit, if it breathes upon the clay, can create Man." No technology is capable of creating a marvel to match that of human life. Even the airplane, a product of human intelligence, is ultimately secondary in importance to the people who fly it and who, in flying, gain a new appreciation for the world.

Literary Qualities

A series of incidents loosely connected by the author's personal reflections, Wind, Sand and Stars places the reader in the cockpit with Saint-Exupery as he recalls the early days of aviation. The book's central episode, Saint-Exupery's plane crash in the Sahara, displays the author's highly developed powers of narration. Because radar has not yet been invented, neither Saint-Exupery nor his mechanic Prevot have any idea where they are. Saint-Exupery tells his story with suspense and animation, and the reader shares in his death thirst, sees the same mirages that appear on the horizon, and draws strength from his indomitable will to live. SaintExupery's narrative skills are displayed in the book's briefer episodes as well.

Personal, philosophical ruminations connect the various chapters, but Saint-Exupery is saved from moralizing by his poetic talent. His writing style has been justly praised for being both straightforward and remarkably evocative. His analogies are masterful and reveal not only his thoughtfulness but also the wide range of his experience. He compares a range of mountain peaks shrouded by heavy fog to a group of loose mines in the sea, and concludes that, just as the mines make navigation nearly impossible, so too do the unseen peaks, of unknown height, turn the whole sky into a danger zone. The layers of snow on certain mountains, as seen from the air, appear to Saint-Exupery like large white scarfs. This figure of speech not only creates a clear visual impression, but also suggests a personification of the mighty mountains over which he flew.

Almost any scene viewed from the air can inspire a telling image for this flying poet. Saint-Exupery describes the windy sea as a shattered mirror, "the crust of the earth...as dented as an old boiler," and a waterfall as a "braided column roaring over the rocks." Such images add substance to the text and make the reading enjoyable. SaintExupery extends his use of picturesque language to his descriptions of human subjects, as well. He notices the clogs worn by a sergeant in a combat zone: "Enormous clogs, iron-shod and studded with nails, the clogs of a sewer-worker or a railway trackwalker. All the poverty of the world was in those clogs. No man ever strode with happy steps through life in clogs like these: he boarded life like a longshoreman for whom life is a ship to be unloaded."

Readers familiar with Saint-Exupery's classic fable The Little Prince will note that nearly all the important ideas in that earlier book are expressed in different form in Wind, Sand and Stars.

Whereas The Little Prince is allegorical, Wind, Sand and Stars is autobiographical, poetic, and at times mystical. The need for human communication that drove the Little Prince to earth is the same bond that unites the mail carrier pilots in their dangerous profession, and the sense of responsibility to other human beings and the desire for a humane world is central to each book.

Critics have noted that the fairy-tale quality of both Wind, Sand and Stars and The Little Prince echoes the work of Hans Christian Andersen, SaintExupery's favorite author from childhood.

Themes

Society and Human Potential

Twice Antoine discusses the potential in people for greatness of individual creativity and spirit, and in both contexts, he is saddened to see that where there used to be light and aspiration, there was nothing but weariness and resignation to a life that would amount to very little in the way of leaving a mark on the world they will leave behind. His suggestion is that while people are young, while the possibilities of growth and cultivation of their gifts is still reachable, society ought to give priority to keeping them free to explore those gifts and become the artists or thinkers it is in them to be. Instead, he observes that in a society where business and war are the biggest receptacles of men's energies, the freedom to cultivate the gifts of the mind simply don't exist in the same abundance.

He also observes that in places like the Sahara, where the lifestyles of the people living there are completely dictated by the search for water and food, virtues take on a very different shape than they do where life comes from the earth more abundantly. The violence of their creeds grows out of their constant competition for resources, and their belief that this life is intended to be a brutal struggle, to be neither valued in others nor clung to in oneself in an effort to secure a better afterlife comes from the same observation of the setting in which they find themselves. In France, men sit and dream, create, think and philosophize in poetry and make an art of enjoying their lives. Men from the desert who see France are astounded at the plenitude of water and vegetation and are changed by it. Little such creativity has the opportunity to blossom in their culture because so much of their time is given to survival. Even so, Antoine makes his observations of the business demands of society killing people's creativity in his own country of France, reminding the reader that the loss of the resources of those minds is of society's own choosing.

The Value of Human Relationships

There are several stories that culminate with the declaration that the people these experiences bond together are the things that give a struggle its value. In the case of Guillaumet in the Andes, as well as of Antoine and Prevot in the desert, it is family and the wish to keep them from grief that motivates the men to fight the impulse to give in to their environments and let the elements kill them. The slave, Bark, endures his years of slavery because he clung to the hope that one day he would be given his freedom and be able to return to his family.

Fraternities forged by common experiences are relationships Antoine holds in high regard as well. The brotherhood among the pilots is the strong and unbreakable thing it is because each of them recognizes the dedication that is required for the men who pilot to endure what they endure. No one else has experienced either the ecstasy of seeing

the world from their perspective or the battle to stay alive when the plane meets the ground and is rendered unable to leave it again. The men admire, trust, understand and confide in each other in a way that only comes from that kind of shared experience.

The Value of Human Life

Antoine's time spent in Spain during its civil war presents him with the startling revelation of the ease and indiscriminate generality with which lives are ended. As he watches Madrid's bombing, he considers the likelihood that the innocents being killed in that ethereal white city are children, women, and lovers—all of them minds that will now never benefit the collective human race. He imagines that lovers holding hands would be separated by bombs that would take one, leaving the other bewildered at the suddenness of her absence.

When he learns of the executions being performed by members of one faction in the war, he muses that all the memories once contained in that mind and all of the relationships that individual had forged are ended with that life, and for what? People who have lived peacefully next to each other and who share the same country, are suddenly made willing to take each other's lives in a war that will be ended in places and by men having nothing to do with their having just killed another human being. The entire community suffers a loss when one of its members is taken, and Antoine takes care to point that out frequently.

Themes/Characters

Since Wind, Sand and Stars is a series of reflections upon various incidents in his flying career, Saint-Exupery does not introduce characters as one would expect in an ordinary novel. Nonetheless, his portraits emerge with accuracy and realism. The narrator himself becomes the principal character, a devoted pilot who believes that bravery without a deep consideration for one's duty and the welfare of others is hollow bravado. As a pilot in South America, he spends several years helping to open new air routes for the mail, and later for freight and passengers; he remarks that the letters he and his colleagues carry may be unimportant, but that the mail itself is sacred. To do one's duty regardless of personal safety is one of SaintExupery's imperatives, and his friends Jean Mermoz and Henri Guillaumet emerge as heroes in his book for their admirable sense of responsibility.

In one of the book's most fascinating episodes, Saint-Exupery tells of Guillaumet's crash in the Andes Mountains of South America. Lost in a region from which even the natives believe nobody can escape alive, Guillaumet displays great courage and, more important, an unshakable responsibility to himself, his wife, and the mail he is to deliver. At one point, when Guillaumet is almost sure that he cannot go on, he moves out of the probable path of future avalanches so that his body will be found and his wife will be able to collect his life insurance.

The sense of comradeship that marks the relationships between the author and nearly everyone he meets on the job becomes a vital theme of Wind, Sand and Stars. The French title, Terre des Homines, or "Man's Earth," emphasizes the bond between human beings and the earth, and hints at the bond among people of all nations that is cemented by their common tie to the planet. SaintExupery preferred the English version of the title, since for him it evoked a particular atmosphere that he wished to describe to others. It is a new earth that the pilot observes from the sky, gliding on wind, passing over sand, blanketed by overhanging stars. Here the pilot comes in contact with natural elements and forces; according to Saint-Exupery, an airplane is "the means that helps one to analyze and discover the face and the secrets of the planet earth." SaintExupery does not fly to escape the earth but to understand it; he concludes that the only true joy in life is to be found in the relationships one forms with friends and colleagues.

Along with Saint-Exupery's focus on the need to rise above adversity and to make the most of human contacts, he dwells (especially in the later passages) on his attempts to find out what men will die for. In his meetings with soldiers in Spain, Saint-Exupery constantly examines the reason that these men will fight, often against overpowering odds and in ghastly circumstances. While visiting the Madrid front, he happens upon a corporal lecturing a group of filthy and worn-out troops on the subject of botany. As the young corporal speaks about the fragile parts of the flower he is holding out to the gathering, Saint-Exupery wonders what has impelled these men to attend such an unlikely event. He concludes that some force within them, some spirit, has urged them to stop being brutes for a time and to join up with "humanity."

Saint-Exupery then observes that only by being aware of the sacredness and sweetness of life can one be happy: "Only then will we be able to live in peace and die in peace, for only this lends meaning to life and to death."

Style

Perspective

Most of the story is told in first person narrative, as it is Antoine's recounting his own experiences and impressions. The only time he breaks from that pattern is when he addresses Guillaumet directly in the chapter entitled "The Men." Antoine is a pilot and a student of human nature living in France in the late 1930s. He is a gentleman among gentlemen, passionate to see the world from as far above it as he can get. Flying is at the time he is writing, still a very new industry, so he and his colleagues are at the cutting edge of adventure and discovery. Their countrymen rely on them for transportation of their business and personal correspondences, so he sees himself as something of a shepherd to them. To the men he encounters out in the world, he is a respectful learner and student of their natures and the reasons they live and behave as they do. The perspective he gains on the world leads him to believe that people should be free to cultivate the gifts that lie within, outside of the obligation to stifle them in order to conform to the demands of either industrious economy or warring governments.

Tone

The book takes place in a number of places reachable by plane along the Aeropostale routes in the late 1930s. The pilots are all from France and set out from there to places all over the world, including South America, Africa, the Middle East, and the mountain ranges throughout Europe. There is, as a result of the profession of the main characters, a good deal of the story told from inside the planes themselves. Outside the planes, however, the story takes the men to fascinating places. The story of Guillaumet takes place in the Andes in the bitter and snowy cold of winter, Mermoz's story is in South America and the Andes; all the stories in the desert take place in the Sahara, and the stories about Barcelona and Madrid span small villages in the area to trenches of war to sealed-tight drinking and sleeping rooms from whence no light can show through.

Structure

Each chapter of the book is its own set of commentary and story-telling about some aspect of the life Antoine lived as an Aeropostale pilot. While there are themes that continue throughout, each chapter could be read as its own independent essay. The majority of the book is straight narrative prose, but there are moments of contemplation poetically written as sorts of asides. In the original French, it is possible that more formal poetic form would be more easily detected, but in the English, it is still full of beautiful imagery and tender address to the human heart.

Quotes

"Nobody grasped you by the shoulder while there was still time. Now the clay of which you were shaped has dried and hardened, and naught in you will ever awaken the sleeping musician, the poet, the astronomer that possibly inhabited you in the beginning." Chapter 1, page 23

"Nothing can match the treasure of common memories, of trials endured together, of quarrels and reconciliations and generous emotions. It is idle, having planted an acorn in the morning, to expect that afternoon to sit in the shade of the oak." Chapter 2, page 45

"To be a man is, precisely, to be responsible." Chapter 2, page 60

"Every step on the road of progress takes us farther from habits which, as the life of man goes, we had only recently begun to acquire. We are in truth emigrants who have not yet founded our homeland.... Young barbarians still marveling at our new toys - that is what we are." Chapter 3, page 71

"In a world in which life so perfectly responds to life, where flowers mingle with flowers in the wind's eye, where the swan is the familiar of all swans, man alone builds his isolation." Chapter 5, page 101

"Hillocks of sand offered up their luminous slopes to the moon, and blocks of shadow rose to share the sands with the light." Chapter 5, page 105

"The flow of a single second would have resuscitated whole caravans that, mad with thirst, had pressed on into the eternity of salt lakes and mirages. Here God was manifesting Himself: it would not do to turn one's back on Him. God had opened the locks and was displaying his puissiance." Chapter 7, page 143

"Under the blistering day he walked towards the night; and under the ice of the naked stars he longed for the return of day. Happy are the lands of the North whose seasons are poets, the summer composing a legend of snow, the winter a tale of the sun." Chapter 7, page 155

"Water, thou hast no taste, no color, no odor; canst not be defined, are relished while ever mysterious. Not necessary to life but rather life itself, thou fillest us with a gratification that exceeds the delight of the senses. By thy might, there return into us the treasures that we had abandoned." Chapter 8, page 234

"Seeing that this same whole is never again to take shape in the world. Never again will be heard exactly that note of laughter, that intonation of voice, that quality of repartee. Each individual is a miracle." Chapter 9, page 248

"Life has taught us that love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction." Chapter 9, page 288

"We all live in the same cause, are borne through life on the same planet, form the crew of the same ship.... To set man free it is enough that we help one another to realize that there does exist a foal towards which all mankind is striving. Why should we not strive towards that goal together, since it is what unites us all?" Chapter 9, page 295

"When by mutation a new rose is born in a garden, all the gardeners rejoice. They isolate the rose, tend it, foster it. But thee is no gardener for men. This little Mozart will love shoddy music in the stench of night dives. This little Mozart is condemned." Chapter 10, page 305

Topics for Discussion

Antoine de Saint Exupery suggests both that the tools of industrial progress are a benefit to society and help it commune better with nature and that industrial culture is drowning the creativity of the people who work to make it possible. Discuss the responsibility of a society to see to it that it can function without sacrificing great minds and creativity.

Do you think Antoine's assessment that the men in the desert sought so aggressively after the afterlife because their life on earth was such a struggle is accurate? Discuss their conclusion that the God of the French is a much more generous God that that of the Bedouin.

What do you see as the main differences in eras and cultures that make the writing of Antoine de Saint Exupery, his combination of prose and poetry, so different from non-fiction writers today? Do you think his style of writing is effective for communicating what he wished to convey? Would your answer be different for audiences of today and those of the 1940s?

People take the lives of other people in wars with much less discrimination than if the political climate were peaceful. A mere 70 years ago, civilians were killing other civilians in the Civil War in Spain. Discuss the beliefs we hold as a worldwide society that make that possible.

Do you agree that technology makes it more possible for men to commune with nature? Do you think that that is its goal today? Do you think it is moving closer or further from that definition or purpose?

What are the cultural and societal truths about our world today that keep men from cultivating their unique gifts? What about our world today encourages the cultivation of unique gifts? Do you think we are moving closer or further from that which what Antoine de Saint Exupery wished?

Do you think modern society has encouraged the kind of vocational camaraderie that Antoine de Saint Exupery describes being shared between the pilots of the Aeropostale? Do you observe solid and lasting friendships among men and women with a common labor? If so, what are the foundations upon which they are formed? If not, what has stopped them from developing?

Essay Topics

1. Of the various aviators and other friends of the author, which seems to be the one Saint-Exupery admires the most? Cite evidence from the text.

2. Do you agree with Saint-Exupery's claims that only a special kind of person flies for a career? Remember that these early pilots used planes of a very primitive sort, by today's standards.

3. Which of the author's adventures do you find most exciting? What sort of courage was required of Saint-Exupery in this particular episode?

4. Which features of Saint-Exupery's writing style are the most impressive?

Choose several examples of passages that you find especially striking, and explain what contributes to their effect.

5. What seems to be the author's final judgment about the nature of human life? Does he seem to be an optimist at heart or a pessimist, judging by his comments throughout the book?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Most of Saint-Exupery's flying was done between the two world wars, 19181937. What events during this twentyyear period helped to foster his interest in flying? What economic reasons spurred the fairly rapid development of aviation at this time?

2. In what ways might the original French title, Terre des Hommes, be a more accurate (from a philosophical viewpoint) indication of the thrust of this book? Why do you think the author, who was given a choice of a number of English titles, selected Wind, Sand and Stars over other possibilities, including a literal translation ("Man's Earth")?

3. All standard editions of the book contain a map showing the various routes along which Saint-Exupery flew.

Explain the vital importance for pilots, in the days before the invention of radar, to have a clear grasp of geography.

Describe some of the topographical features with which these early pilots had to contend.

4. During the early years of the Second World War, Saint-Exupery was deeply involved in both military and political activities. Were his efforts in these areas fairly successful? If he encountered difficulties, what was their source?

5. Saint-Exupery often speaks in the book about the perils of flying at night.

What solutions to this problem have been developed? What other developments in the science of aviation may have been inspired by such daring pilots as Saint-Exupery and his colleagues?

6. Read the author's other major essay, Flight to Arras. In what ways is Flight to Arras more successful than Wind, Sand and Stars, and in what ways is it less so?

Further Study

Gate, Curtis. Antoine de Saint-Exupery: His Life and Times. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970. This long study is probably the best English-language account of the life and milieu of SaintExupery. The book explains a great deal about the art of flying during Saint-Exupery's lifetime, and contains a fascinating set of photographs of Saint-Exupery, his friends and fellow aviators, and the rudimentary aircraft in which they flew.

Migeo, Marcel. The Story of SaintExupery. Translated by Herrna Briffault. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960. A fellow aviator and a friend of SaintExupery's, Migeo tends to emphasize Saint-Exupery's descriptions of flight over the philosophical content of his writing. Contains several helpful maps.

Richardson, Kenneth, ed. Twentieth Century Writing. New York: Newnes Books, 1969. The short entry on SaintExupery focuses on the author's philosophy; the discussion is clear and pointed.

Rumbold, Richard, and Lady Margaret Stewart. The Winged Life: A Portrait of Antoine de Saint-Exupery, Poet and Airman. New York: David McKay, 1953. A brief, authentic treatment of the subject's life and ideas. Includes a useful index and an excellent map showing the routes that SaintExupery flew.

Smith, Maxwell. A Saint-Exupery Reader. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1960.

While this short volume is essentially a collection of excerpts in French for students of the language (it has an English glossary of French words at the end), it also contains an informative preface, in English, and useful introductory remarks to each selection, also in English.

Fred B. McEwen Waynesburg College Sister Irma M. Kashuba, S.S.J.

Related Titles

Two earlier works by Saint-Exupery— the novels Southern Mail and Night Flight—deal with flying and the lives of fliers. Although inferior in quality to later productions, these books introduce themes which the author continued to explore for the rest of his life.

The allegorical The Little Prince, a deceptively simple tale that also features charming illustrations by SaintExupery, is the story of a little prince who leaves his home planet in search of companionship on earth. The most important of Saint-Exupery's "essays," for those readers who wish to understand the philosophy of this man of action and ideas, are Flight to Arras, which tells of the author's experiences as a pilot during World War I; Letter to a Hostage, a wide-ranging piece, about the great days of the past and the difficult times of the war, that contains restatements of many ideas and convictions found in Saint-Exupery's earlier works; and The Wisdom of the Sands, a posthumously published collection of Saint-Exupery's thoughts and beliefs.

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