

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects

Honors Program

5-1995

Saint-Exupéry's Confession: The Little Prince as Autobiography and Credo

John L. Needham
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/honors>



Part of the [French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Needham, John L., "Saint-Exupéry's Confession: The Little Prince as Autobiography and Credo" (1995).
Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects. 367.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/honors/367>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



SAINT-EXUPÉRY'S CONFESSION:
THE LITTLE PRINCE AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND CREDO

by

John L. Needham

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DEPARTMENT HONORS IN FRENCH

in

Department of Languages and Philosophy

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

1995

"Saint-Exupéry Confession:
The Little Prince as Autobiography and Credo"

At some time, everyone reads *The Little Prince*. And most readers take great interest in its exotic story of the solitary heir of Asteroid B-612. "He is a cosmic urchin who leaves his asteroid," writes biographer, Stacy Schiff,

because of a misunderstanding with a troublesome rose; he makes a speedy survey of adult logic in six visits to neighboring asteroids, each [inhabited] by a man more ridiculous than the last; he lands in the Sahara, where he meets the aviator who serves as the book's narrator; and learns a few crucial lessons from a fox before disappearing into the air.¹

As with all good fairy tales, readers of *The Little Prince* are enchanted, instructed, and left dreaming of their own private worlds. Although *The Little Prince* is classified as a book of children's literature, it is warmly shelved in the memories of young and old readers alike. For many of these readers, the symbols of the Little Prince's voyage remain vivid. The emotions evoked by the words of the Little Prince and the book's narrator—the nostalgia, loneliness, discovery, despair, and connection—leave some to wonder. In the mind of the attentive or troubled reader, the metaphors of *The Little Prince* take root and enlarge, just as the Baobab trees on Asteroid B-612, to haunting proportions.

Who wrote this story which has been variously described as, on one extreme, a "fantasy novella,"² and on the other, suggested by Martin Heidegger,

1. Stacy Schiff, *Saint-Exupéry* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 383.

2. Isabelle de Courtivron, "At Home in the Air," *The New York Times Book Review*, January 8, 1995, 33.

"one of the greatest books of existential philosophy of this century?"³ Like his hyphenated name, the life of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of *The Little Prince*, reads with some difficulty. A French aristocrat by birth, aviator by trade, and man of letters *par excellence*, the enigma of Saint-Exupéry's life equals that of his hero, the Little Prince. Saint-Exupéry's gypsy-like wanderings in the sky and on land complicate any attempt to navigate his life and writings. Born in Lyons, France in 1900, Saint-Exupéry died at age forty-four—similar to his Little Prince who witnesses forty-four sunsets—while flying a reconnaissance mission over his homeland during the last months of German occupation. As perhaps the "most famous French writer to go down as a casualty of World War II," according to Schiff, "Saint-Exupéry did not so much live fast as die early."⁴

Published one year before the author's death, *The Little Prince* has become Saint-Exupéry's "most familiar and beloved statement to humanity."⁵ Under the stolid Roman numerals of twenty-seven chapters, Saint-Exupéry, a writer not known for clarity, delivers perhaps the most spare yet philosophically sophisticated work of as many words in print. Part children's allegory and part existential dialogue, the symbol-laden words and illustrations of *The Little Prince* continue to challenge readers. And although written at the height of World War II, while its author was engrossed in the ills of his time, *The Little Prince's* timelessness

3. Curtis Cate, *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry* (New York: Paragon House, 1990) 465.

4. Schiff, Introduction.

5. The Pierpont Morgan Library, "Exhibition Notes" (9/15/1993 - 1/2/1994), 2.

inspires readers to this day.

Many who knew the aviator and writer, "Saint-Ex," find an uncanny reflection of his life and philosophy in the pages of *The Little Prince*. But, given the deeply meditative content of *The Little Prince*, distinguishing which elements of the narrative arise from the author's experiences from those that flow from his imagination represents a daunting task. For, *The Little Prince* was written at a time when Saint-Exupéry experienced both a physical and spiritual exile in New York. The grounded aviator felt torn by what he later termed "[a] ghastly atmosphere of polemics."⁶ During the composition of *The Little Prince*, Saint-Exupéry shared the affection of two women, endured the foreignness of a depersonalizing American culture and longed for the presence of his mother and dearest friends in occupied France. And, perhaps most agonizing to this "man of action," the aviator found himself an ocean away from his comrades at the front.

But what of the messages presented in *The Little Prince*? What did its author, a writer neither trained nor accustomed to the writing of fairy tales, mean to say? Who is Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince?

In the essay that follows, I will provide partial answers to these and other questions raised by readers of *The Little Prince*. In extrapolating on the text of *The Little Prince*, I will highlight and discuss the autobiography, the craft, the philosophy and the genius that have made Saint-Exupéry's book the single most translated and

6. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wartime Writings, 1939-49* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 132-138.

read work of French literature of the twentieth century.⁷

The same "grown-ups" who saw nothing but a hat in the narrator's youthful drawing of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant⁸ have likewise had difficulty recognizing a work of literary substance in pages of *The Little Prince*. A review of words used to describe and categorize *The Little Prince* reveals that these very grown-ups maintain the same love of systematic terminology as those who would only know the Little Prince's asteroid by its number, "B-612."

When announcing *The Little Prince* to the book trade, Reynal and Hitchcock, Saint-Exupéry's American publishers, sheepishly explained, "Reviewers and critics will have a field day explaining to you just what kind of story it is. As far as we are concerned it is the new book by Saint-Exupéry."

In the reviews that followed its release on April 6, 1943, *The Little Prince* was neither classified as a children's book nor was it recommended to adults.⁹ As predicted, most reviewers were baffled. The public responded with cautious

7. Schiff, 445.

8. *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993) 1-3. All references to *The Little Prince* in this essay refer to the page numbers contained in the Harcourt Brace & Company and Pierpont Morgan Library's joint-publication of *The Little Prince*. This hardcover, slip-cased edition contains, in addition to the pages of *The Little Prince*, twenty five pages of illustrations and writing reproduced in facsimile from Saint-Exupéry's working manuscript. Purchased for 1968 for the Elisabeth Ball Collection, this portion of the original manuscript is in The Pierpont Morgan Library under manuscript number MA 2592. The 1993 edition of *The Little Prince* was published to commemorate the release of the book's first edition on April 6, 1943. The numbering of the pages varies only slightly from that of other Harcourt Brace English editions.

9. Schiff, 400.

interest, buying only 30,000 and 7,000 copies of the simultaneously published English and French editions respectively by the fall of that year.¹⁰

Publishers, critics, booksellers, librarians, and readers continually struggle in their attempts to pigeonhole *The Little Prince* and its author. The publisher of the book's Latin translation subtitled *The Little Prince*, "Children Only are Wise." Its Dutch edition appears in the "Little Novel" series.¹¹ Even in the bookstore of The Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the resting place of Saint-Exupéry's original manuscript, one finds the paperback edition of *The Little Prince* shelved alongside books of children's literature. The confused identity of *The Little Prince* extends into French literary studies wherein books and articles sport titles such as: "The Dialectic of *The Little Prince*," "The Esthetic of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,"¹² "The...Lessons of *The Little Prince*," "Saint-Exupéry: Mystic Without Faith," and "The Esotericism of *The Little Prince*."

In the conclusion of the book's first chapter, the narrator writes to his young readers,

In the course of this life I have had a great many encounters with a great many people who have been concerned with matters of consequence. I have lived a great deal among grown-ups. I have seen them intimately, close at hand. And that hasn't much improved my opinion of them.¹³

10. Ibid, 400.

11. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "Le Petit Roman" (1959).

12. François, Carlo. *L'esthétique d'Antoine de Saint-Exupéry* (Neuchâtel: Éditions Delachaux & Niestlé, 1957).

13. *The Little Prince*, 3.

Joseph Campbell, the mythographer, said the following of his Catholic upbringing,

Anyone who has not been a Catholic in [a] substantial way has no realization of the ambience of religion within which you live. It's powerful; it's potent; it's live-supporting. And it's beautiful. The Catholic religion is a *poetic religion*.

Campbell continued,

I notice that when I read the work of scholars or artists or novelists who are really interested in myth as a life-structuring thing—not something that's just fantasy, but deeper, *significant* fantasy—nine times out of ten they [are] Catholics.¹⁴

Like Joseph Campbell, Saint-Exupéry's rearing in the Catholic faith informed what has been called his "brand of mystical rambling"¹⁵ Described by one reviewer as "a soliquizing angel,"¹⁶ in his later writings, *Wind, Sand, and Stars*, *The Little Prince*, and *The Wisdom of the Sands*, Saint-Exupéry clearly drew from the ethos of his Catholic heritage.

To a newspaper reporter who asked, "What does Monsieur de Saint-Exupéry like to read?," Saint-Exupéry summed up his tastes in literature, "I like books which give the impression that civilization still exists."¹⁷

Elsewhere, he explained that "his constant companions at the front were Rilke, Pascal and Baudelaire."¹⁸ Saint-Exupéry read works of eclectic but deeply

14. Phil Cousineau, ed., *The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on His Life and Work* (New York: HarperSanfrancisco, 1991), 6.

15. Schiff, 363.

16. E. Edman, *New York Herald Tribune Books*, February 22, 1942, 1.

17. Georges Altman, *Le Progrès* (Lyons), October 30, 1940, 1.

18. Schiff, 341.

meditative substance. And as an adult, he did not shy from rereading the literature of his youth. While he recovered from a surgery during the fall of 1942, visitors found a collection of fairy tales by Hans Christian Anderson at Saint-Exupéry's hospital bedside. Consequently, many of Saint-Exupéry's biographers attribute the fairy tale-like content of *The Little Prince* to the influence of Anderson's style.

The influence of these works becomes clear in the words of Luc Estang, a reporter for the *Figaro Littéraire*, who interviewed Saint-Exupéry following his receipt of 1939 Grand Prix du Roman de L'Académie Française. Nearly muted by the austerity of Saint-Exupéry's presence, Estang wrote,

His modesty, his distaste for talking about himself, the near timidity of the big man, put an end to questions. They all seem pointless in the presence of someone whom one knows and senses to be accustomed to long meditation, who is at home with the dramas of the heavens and yet who stands so solidly on the earth.¹⁹

During his career as an aviator, Saint-Exupéry took up semi-permanent residence on four different continents. The diverse landscapes he encountered in the Sahara Desert, Patagonia, and Southern France appear in the words and watercolors of *The Little Prince*. But, except for a passing reference to "a small Pacific islet,"²⁰ the geography of his fourth residence, New York City, is noticeably absent. Considering the aviator's general distaste for American commercialism,

19. Luc Estang writing as Boisgontier, "Cinq minutes avec Monsieur Antoine de de Saint-Exupéry, lauréat du grand prix du roman," *Le Figaro Littéraire*, May 27, 1939, 1.

20. *The Little Prince*, 57.

such sarcasm is to be expected. That Saint-Exupéry indeed refers to New York is clear in the French edition of *The Little Prince* wherein the narrator suggests that, if "crowded together for...*un meeting*," "all humanity" could fit on this islet.

It is no small irony that Saint-Exupéry's ever-popular fairy tale was composed during his twenty-eight month exile in the U.S.—the land of the bestseller. Over 200,000 copies of *The Little Prince* are purchased annually in the U.S. alone.²¹ Schiff writes, "his popularity enrages [literary] critics, who have made a punching bag of the awkward, oversized author." To this day many critics do not know what to make of the aviator turned writer who is incapable of systematic philosophical analysis but whose books of "quasi-mystical musings"²² are purchased by the millions. Most in the French literary establishment find *The Little Prince* and, by extension, Saint-Exupéry's larger work muddled, mawkish, and according to one critic, merely "prop-driven platitudes."²³ Saint-Exupéry's reputation has particularly suffered under the weight of *The Little Prince*'s world-wide acclaim. As Françoise Giroud laments, "Saint-Exupéry's image has aged badly."

With the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of his disappearance, before and during 1994, three major biographies of Saint-Exupéry and a handful of other commemorative works appeared in France, England and the U.S. Each was received differently. A writer for *L'Express* dubbed Paul Webster's *Saint-Exupéry:*

21. Schiff, 445.

22. Schiff, 360.

23. Schiff, 444-45.

Life and Death of the Little Prince, "innovative."²⁴ But a spokesperson for l'Association des Amis de Saint-Exupéry—a Paris-based organization which fosters the study of Saint-Exupéry's life and works—was of a different opinion. "Not as good as [the biography] Curtice Cate's," suggested Françoise Grimmer, in reference to Curtice Cate's widely-read *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*.²⁵

The biography by Emmanuel Chadeau, a professor of contemporary French history who has published extensively on the history of French aviation, was the least well-received by an audience more accustomed to hagiography. Under court order, Chadeau's portrait of Saint-Exupéry as an absent-minded pilot and womanizer was banned during January and the first part of February 1994 because of alleged copyright infringement. It is supposed that "les ayant-droits Saint-Exupéry"—those who benefit from the annual harvest of royalties—did not like how Chadeau darkened the legend of the great Saint-Ex. When asked about Chadeau's work, Grimmer remarked, "We support the family [Saint-Exupéry] in the suit."²⁶ And with Saint-Exupéry's disciples in mind, Chadeau informed readers of *L'Express*, "He would have laughed at his legend."²⁷

Among the hyperbole and criticism heaped upon Saint-Exupéry is the

24. Paul-Jean Franceschini, "L'hommage et la ferveur", *L'Express*, May 26, 1994, 57.

25. Private conversation at the office of l'Association des Amis de Saint-Exupéry, August, 1994. Curtis Cate, *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry* (New York: Paragon House, 1990). "Moins bon que celle [la biographie] de Curtice Cate,"

26. "Nous soutenons la famille [Saint-Exupéry] dans le procès.", *ibid.*

27. Jean-Maurice de Montremy, "Il aurait ri de sa légende," *L'Express*, May 26, 1994, 56.

following paragraph from Alfred A. Knopf's fall 1994 catalog. The announcement of this most recent biography, *Saint-Exupéry* by Stacy Schiff, bespeaks much of Saint-Exupéry's elusive character:

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was perpetually broke, petulant, disorganized, hypersensitive, absent-minded, uncommonly lucky, a master of sleight-of-hand, and a lousy pilot; still, he was a towering figure in the golden age of aviation, a combination of Lindbergh, Hemingway, and Sir Richard Burton.²⁸

Schiff's biography bursts with anecdote-laden observations from her research of "previously unpublished materials" and "extensive interviews"²⁹ of Saint-Exupéry's contemporaries. Her work drew favorable reviews from U.S. publications ranging from *The New York Times Book Review* to *USA Today*" and has garnered the attention of many.

Viewed together, these biographies and the other commemorative works leave one to wonder why, fifty years after his disappearance, elegies to Saint-Exupéry continue to be written. Evidently, the enigmas of his life and the other-worldly flavor of his writings have not yet settled in the minds of admirers and critics alike.

In June 1943, while stationed with an allied air reconnaissance division in Oujja, Tunisia, Saint-Exupéry wrote the following in a letter that he never sent:

There is one problem and only one in the world: to revive in people some sense of spiritual meaning...We can no longer live without

28. Fall 1994, Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc., 58.

29. Ibid, 58.

poetry, color, love...One absolutely must speak to humanity.³⁰

Addressed to a "General X," these words embody a message that Saint-Exupéry would advocate until his death, one year later, in the cockpit of an American built P-38 Lightning.³¹ In his diverse wartime writings, Saint-Exupéry's desire to "speak to humanity" appears in many forms. In the brief preface to *Wind, Sand and Stars*, his dramatic memoir of human will, Saint-Exupéry recounts an evocative image from his first night flight over Argentina. Comparing the lights that burn as fires below to the stars that light up the night sky, he writes, "We must attempt to come together. We must try to communicate with some of these flames which burn further and further away in the countryside."³²

This same desire for dialogue resonates with great immediacy in his "Letter

30. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wartime Writings, 1939-49* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 134.

31. First published in *Le Figaro Littéraire*, on 10 April 1948, later in pamphlet form under the title, *Que faut il dire aux hommes? Lettre au général X*. According to General Chambe, who intervened with Eisenhower's headquarters to grant the forty-three year old Saint-Exupéry permission to fly with the reconnaissance unit 2/33 in Oujja, Algeria, this letter was "the precise continuation of a conversation we had in Tunisia." See Richard Rumbold and Margaret Stewart, *Saint-Exupéry tel quel* (Paris: Del Duca, 1960), 329-31.

32. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1939). The preface which appeared in the French edition was not included in the English translation. The text from the preface to the French edition, *Terre des hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), referred to follows: "...une nuit sombre où scintillaient seules, comme des étoiles, les rares lumières éparses dans la plaine...Dans cet astre, peut-être, on cherchait à sonder l'espace, on s'usait en calculs sur la nébuleuse d'Andromède...Mais parmi ces étoiles vivantes, combien de fenêtres fermées, combien d'étoiles éteintes, combien d'hommes endormis...Il faut tenter de se rejoindre. Il faut essayer de communiquer avec quelques-uns de ces feux qui brûlent de loin en loin dans la campagne."

to a Hostage"³³ and in the musings of *The Wisdom of the Sands*. Published just months before Saint-Exupéry composed the "Letter to General X," in *The Little Prince*, Saint-Exupéry appears equally engrossed with this desire for communication. In the book's longest chapter, Saint-Exupéry chooses a Fox as his mouthpiece.

As the crestfallen Little Prince mourns in the grass, having discovered that his is not the only rose in the universe, the Fox appears. To *The Little Prince*'s invitation, the Fox replies, "I cannot play with you...I am not tamed." The persistent Little Prince then inquires three times after a definition of the term, "to tame." "It is an act too often neglected...it means to establish ties,"³⁴ the Fox explains. In the paragraphs that follow, the Fox broadens the definition of this lost art, teaching the Little Prince the rites of friendship.

Perhaps no French writer of the twentieth century—excepting Albert Camus— writes of the desert with more eloquence than Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. In a chapter of *Wind, Sand and Stars*, Saint-Exupéry considers a Moor:

who is not about to defend his freedom. For in the desert a man is always free; who is not about to defend his visible treasure, for the desert is bare...a secret Kingdom...In the silence of the sand-waves...³⁵

Having spent years of his life dwelling, flying over, and one occasion,

33. *Wartime Writings*, 102-19.

34. *The Little Prince*, 67-68.

35. *Wind, Sand and Stars*, 150.

crashing his French-made Simoun into the sands of Northern Africa, Saint-Exupéry's narrator could rightly speak of the desert's mysteries. In *The Little Prince*, virtually the only landscapes which appear in the narrative and in Saint-Exupéry's watercolors are deserts and desolate mountain peaks. For his earthly journey, the Little Prince's point of arrival and departure is the Sahara Desert.

An earlier version of chapter twenty-four reveals a nebula of Saint-Exupéry's ideas on the desert. In the stricken out text on manuscript pages 479 and 480,³⁶ Saint-Exupéry appears to struggle for words with which to describe the desert landscape. In the published book, the Little Prince simply exclaims, "The desert is beautiful," to which the narrator silently responds, "I have always loved the desert. One sits down on a desert sand dune, sees nothing, hears nothing. Yet through the silence something throbs, and gleams..."³⁷

But in the working manuscript one finds, "The desert, one cannot say why, speaks to the heart...Therein silence is soft...as a secret...a desert has secrets." In the published book, the Little Prince remarks, "What makes a desert beautiful...is that somewhere it hides a well..." In the manuscript, Saint-Exupéry juggles different combinations of "houses, flowers, stars, wells," but in the final version of *The Little Prince*, his narrator offers what becomes the enlightened response: "The house, the stars, the desert—what gives them their beauty is something that is invisible!"³⁸

36. MA 2592, 479-480.

37. *The Little Prince*, 78.

38. MA 2592, 479-480 and *The Little Prince*, 78.

These pages of the working manuscript confirm that, as a stylist, Saint-Exupéry, did not hesitate to cross out whole blocks of text and, in this example, even an entire series of ideas. Elsewhere on this transcription of pages 479 and 480³⁹, Saint-Exupéry writes of diamonds, love, flowers and other hidden treasures of the desert never mentioned in the published book, *The Little Prince*.

Saint-Exupéry's narrator concludes chapter 24 with an expression of parental affection:

As the Little Prince dropped off to sleep, I took him in my arms and set out walking [across the desert] once more. I felt deeply moved and stirred. It seems to me that I was carrying a very fragile treasure...I felt the need of protecting him, as if he himself were a flame that might be extinguished by a little puff of wind...⁴⁰

With the Little Prince in his arms, the narrator finds no barrenness in the desert. Clearly, the longings that permeate the conclusion of chapter 24 are those of the childless Saint-Exupéry. He once wrote to his mother, "I have such provisions of paternal love stocked up within me. I would like to have a lot of small Antoinettes."

One wonders if, in conceiving the *The Little Prince*, Saint-Exupéry wished to father the child that was never his. Or perhaps his narrator merely expresses the angst of a lonely pilot in a world "where increasingly there is 'no gardener for men.'"⁴¹

39. MA 2592.

40. *The Little Prince*, 78-79.

41. Cate, 457.

Saint-Exupéry's *Little Prince* speaks of his body with moderate disdain. This is understandable given the author's lifelong troubled existence in his oversize frame. During the last decade of his life, Saint-Exupéry suffered from or complained of symptoms of stomach cancer, back pain, kidney infections, impotency and an array of other illnesses mostly due to his life of flying. In *Flight to Arras*, Saint-Exupéry's memoir of a reconnaissance mission in Northern France, the aviator writes with apathy for his mortality. "I don't care a button what becomes of you...One way and another, I have dragged you through life to this point; and here I discover that you are of no importance."⁴²

One could conclude that in these words Saint-Exupéry—a known hypochondriac—simply expresses weak-heartedness. So thought Charles Lindbergh who declared, "I think it is awful the way he talked about his body...If I'd been his body I'd have gotten chicken pox just to get even with him!"⁴³

But, as Schiff suggests, Saint-Exupéry's disdain for the body may also represent "a cry of faith."⁴⁴ Indeed, to Saint-Exupéry, one's anatomy is a means to a more purposeful end. In *Wind, Sand and Stars* he writes that earth, and by extension, mortality, is merely an "obstacle." And that man discovers and confronts himself as he battles with his "tool," whether his body, a plane or a

42. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Flight to Arras* (from *Airman's Odyssey*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1984), p. 388.

43. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *War Within and Without* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 249-50.

44. Schiff, 360.

plough.⁴⁵

In the book's twenty-sixth and near final chapter, the Little Prince explains that before returning to his planet he must abandon the "old shell" of his body,

You understand...It is too far. I cannot carry this body with me. It is too heavy...But it will be like an old abandoned shell. There is nothing sad about old shells...

The narrator reports that after being bitten by the snake, the Little Prince falls to the desert sand, "as gently as a tree falls." In Saint-Exupéry's watercolor that appears opposite the final page of the book, the reader witnesses the death of the Little Prince under the light of a solitary star. In the watercolor opposite the epilogue, the star remains but, as the pilot explains, the body of the Little Prince is gone.

Although largely irreligious, soon after the publication of *The Little Prince*, Saint-Exupéry claimed that following the war he would enter the orders of the monastery in Solesmes, France.⁴⁶ When ending conversations with his companion on a troop convoy, the North Africa-bound reconnaissance pilot "[intoned] liturgical chants." Clearly, these images of the snake, the solitary star, the graceful death and apparent resurrection of the Little Prince were conceived by a writer of faith who viewed the body as a mere temporal tool.

According to Schiff, composing *The Little Prince* "was hardly a departure for Saint-Exupéry." In truth, the parallels between the writer and his subject abound.

45. *Terre des hommes*, preface.

46. *Wartime Writings*, 123.

Like his solitary "little man," Saint-Exupéry was ever in pursuit of what he called, "a realistic ideal."⁴⁷ During a particularly difficult winter in 1939, while serving in the French Army that would soon fall to German aggression, the aviator wrote of "this odd planet on which I live"⁴⁸ and intimated other sentiments that would later animate his Little Prince. "The next time around," he vowed, "I'm going to change planets."⁴⁹

The Little Prince laments that there is no "gardener for men." As did Saint-Exupéry, who wrote at a time when the Little Prince was only an occasional sketch on his correspondence with friends, "Too soon deprived of God at an age when one still seeks refuge, here we must struggle for life like little solitary fellows."⁵⁰

Although *The Little Prince* does not present a belief system on which to found a religion, it does offer readers a decalogue or sorts. These injunctions tumble from the text in which the reader meets the book's adult supporting cast: the King, the Conceited Man, the Tippler, the Businessman, and the Lamplighter. Saint-Exupéry's credo becomes most clear during the Little Prince's encounter with the Fox whose warning all readers remember: "...what is essential is invisible to the eye."⁵¹

The didactic overtones in *The Little Prince* come as surprise given Saint-

47. Gelée, *Icare VI*, 82.

48. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Écrits de guerre*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 66.

49. Gelée, 82.

50. Cate, 457.

51. *The Little Prince*, 73.

Exupéry's hesitation to join in France's propaganda efforts. Twice during World War II he refused the assignment, claiming that "He had no Bible to offer Frenchmen," even though, as he explained, "a Bible of some sort—as opposed to neat clichés about patriotism and the glories of France—was what they [now needed]." ⁵²

Today, most who delight in reading *The Little Prince*, which is now available in over eighty languages, know nothing of its author. But in 1946, when its first edition appeared in France two years after the Saint-Exupéry's death in 1944, this fairy tale of an innocent idealist who briefly visits earth then disappears without a trace read much differently than when the author was still living. *The Little Prince's* prophetic element—that Saint-Exupéry seemingly predicted his own death—gave rise to Elvis-like myths about the author's planned disappearance that live to this day. Rather than view *The Little Prince* as an autobiographical confession, its readers who know the author either eulogize or scorn the legends surrounding its composition. But the reaction of one Parisian, Adrienne Monnier, who had been the first to publish Saint-Exupéry, confirms the author's intent:

Initially *The Little Prince* struck her as puerile, but she found herself drenched in tears by the end. She realized she was crying not over the book but, belatedly, for Saint-Exupéry, who had poured so much of himself into it. ⁵³

52. Schiff, 326.

53. Schiff, 443.