

# “Unique in All the World”

## Saint Exupéry's *Little Prince*

by **Elise Pearlman**

**H**IS HAIR IS STILL A MASS OF CURLS that hug his head like a fluffy golden halo. He is still diminutive and childlike, yet regal in his princely robes of green and red. However, despite all appearances, the “extraordinary little man” of whom Saint Exupéry wrote is now 60 years old.

*The Little Prince* is the best-known work of Antoine de Saint Exupéry, a charismatic Frenchman of aristocratic descent who was born in 1900 in Lyon, France. According to the French aviation magazine *Icare*, Saint Exupéry's “beau nom” could be traced back to at least the Eleventh century. Saint Exupéry lost his father when he was only a few years old, and his mother, Marie, was faced with the hardship of raising five children by herself. She took her young family to live with her aunt, Gabrielle du Tricaud, who lived in a chateau, Saint Maurice de Rémens in Ain, near Lyon. It was in this very special and sheltered environment that Saint Exupéry, once a golden-haired little prince himself, passed his happiest days. Nathalie des Vallières is the author of a recently released biography about her great uncle called *Saint Exupéry, L'archange et l'écrivain (Saint Exupéry, The Archangel and the Writer)*. In this book, she shares the charming image of a very young Saint Exupéry, the future storyteller himself, following his mother

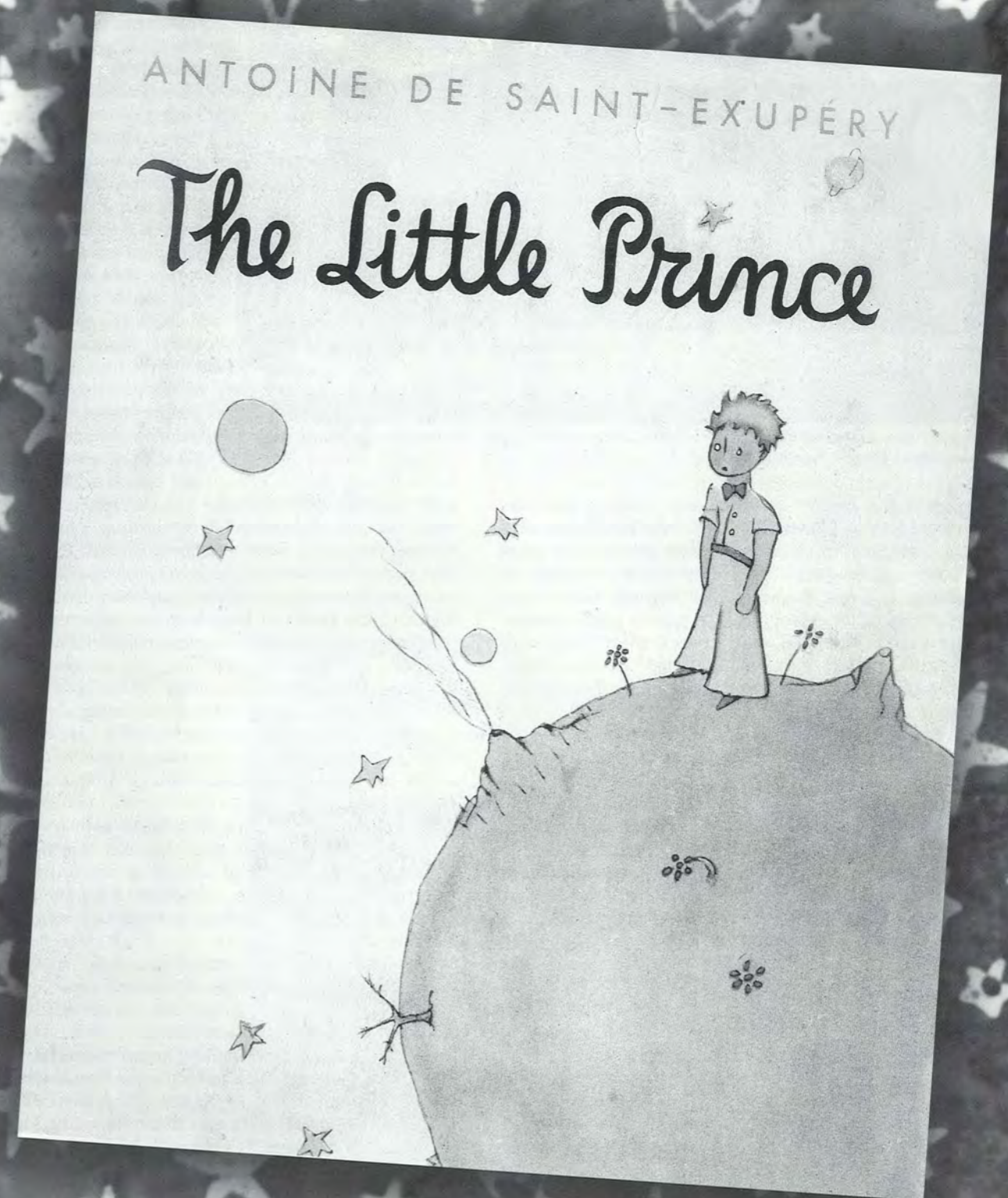
about the great house, toting a little green chair behind him and begging to be told stories.

Saint Exupéry's love and talent for writing manifested itself at an early age. According to Curtis Cate's *Antoine de Saint Exupéry: His Life & Times*, the author wrote his first poem at the tender age of six. A year later he was already outlining his ideas for a five-act opera. At age 13, for a school assignment, he wrote a short story about the journey of a top hat that was so good it was used as a model for other students for years to come.

At the same time, Saint Exupéry developed a bad habit that would follow him throughout his life, much to the discomfort of his friends and family. Even as a child, if he needed an audience, he would wake his sleeping siblings. Later in life, Saint Exupéry thought nothing of telephoning friends during the middle of the night to share something he had just written.

Saint Exupéry was not the only gifted writer in the family. As biographer Paul Webster notes, Saint Exupéry's mother, Marie, and his sister, Simone, would both eventually immortalize their days at Saint Maurice de Rémens in *I Hear My Tree Singing* and *Five Children in a Garden*, respectively.

Saint Exupéry also became enamored with flying at an early age, and this passion for flight would





Saint Maurice de Rémens, Ain, France, May 2003. Saint Exupéry's childhood home. (Courtesy of Patrick Bouquerel).

shape his career and forever change his life. According to Curtis Cate, his "baptism of the air," his first flight in an airplane, took place at age 12 at a small airfield near his beloved Saint Maurice de Rémens. Saint Exupéry later became one of the pioneers of the Aéropostale, a private plane company that established mail routes from France to South America and North Africa. Because flight was still in its infancy and the mail routes covered such difficult terrain, this was an extremely hazardous occupation. There were many accidents, narrow escapes and, unfortunately, fatalities, but the friends Saint Exupéry made during his years with "la Ligne" [the Line] lasted a lifetime. Saint Exupéry's adventures in the exciting arena of the sky became the basis for several highly acclaimed and prize-winning works of fiction and nonfiction. These books included *Southern Mail* (*Courrier Sud*, 1929), *Night Flight* (*Vol de Nuit*, 1931), and *Wind, Sand, and Stars* (*Terre des Hommes*, 1939). In France he was awarded the very prestigious Prix Fémina for *Vol de Nuit* (*Night Flight*). *Wind, Sand and Stars* (*Terre des Hommes*) received the Grand Prix du Roman from L'Académie Française in France; in the United States, Saint Exupéry received the National Book Award. As Joy D. Marie Robinson notes in her 1984 biography of the author, Saint Exupéry was not a prolific writer; his combined works total only around 1,000 pages. However, his poetic descriptions of stars anchored in the nighttime sky and of the magic of the desert's shifting sands made his books huge successes both in France and the United States. Such

a profoundly difficult time for the gifted writer, who had left everything of importance behind in France. As Joy D. Marie Robinson notes, this saddest period of Saint Exupéry's life was perhaps his most productive. In an effort to awaken the United States to the plight of France in the hope that our country would intervene on France's behalf, Saint Exupéry did what he did best: he wrote. Saint Exupéry's book, *Flight to Arras* (*Pilote de Guerre*, 1942) was based on his experience during a reconnaissance mission in war-torn France. He wrote *Letter to a Hostage* (*Lettre à un Otage*, 1942) because, in his eyes, all Frenchmen were hostages under Hitler's regime.

It was during this time that the American publishers Eugene Reynal and Curtice Hitchcock encouraged the depressed author to write a book featuring the little man that Saint Exupéry constantly drew when doodling on napkins and the margins of letters.

The author's wife, Consuelo, sought a rental home in the suburbs of Long Island, New York, where the couple could escape the heat of Manhattan. To his surprise, Saint Exupéry, who could barely speak a word of English, found himself living in a house that had once been the pride and joy of a wealthy industrialist, Cornelius DeLamater. The history of DeLamater's house, documented by local resident Edward Carr, is a story in itself. The summer retreat DeLamater called "Vermland" was built during the Civil War with the wealth accrued when one of the first ironclad ships, the Monitor, was constructed in his shipyard. Later, when Laura

was *Night Flight's* popularity that two years after its publication it had already been translated into numerous languages and was made into a film starring Clark Gable and Helen Hayes. A year later, *Courrier Sud* (*Southern Mail*) was made into a movie in France.

It is not commonly known that *The Little Prince* was written in New York rather than in Saint Exupéry's native France. Unable to continue living in occupied France, Saint Exupéry left his beloved homeland for New York towards the end of 1940. This was

Bevin, DeLamater's daughter, inherited the property, the house became known as the Bevin House. It has been suggested that the Bevin House, located in Eaton's Neck, Long Island, inspired Saint Exupéry to write his most famous story because the great mansion resembled his beloved childhood home, Saint Maurice de Rémens.

Like Saint Maurice de Rémens, the Bevin House was a three-story mansion constructed in the Second Empire style, with windows adorning the front and sides of the house, like numerous eyes looking out into the world. The Bevin House's crowning feature was perhaps the French-styled sloping Mansard roof. From the windows in the Bevin House, Saint Exupéry could see Duck Island Harbor, which was perhaps a gentle reminder of the Ain River, a favorite bathing spot for the Saint Exupéry family when they gathered in Lyon.

While in Long Island, Saint Exupéry received English lessons from Adèle Breaux, a local foreign language teacher. Saint Exupéry's goal was to learn enough English so that he could communicate with cab drivers and find his way around Manhattan more easily. Saint Exupéry told Breaux that the Bevin House was the best place he ever had for writing. Breaux later wrote about the time she spent with Saint Exupéry in *Saint-Exupéry in America, 1942-1943, A Memoir*. She had the privilege of reading from the original manuscript for *Le Petit Prince*, and she was allowed to choose a keepsake from among the many discarded drawings from the book.

*The Little Prince* can be read on a myriad of levels and is arguably more a book for adults than for children. The week of its publication, John Chamberlain, a reviewer for the *New York Times*, accurately referred to *The Little Prince* as a "fable" or fairy tale for adults. As in Saint Exupéry's other books, *The Little Prince* was based on autobiographical elements from his life. Like the aviator of *The Little Prince*, Saint Exupéry once crashed his plane in a remote desert and faced the life-or-death challenge of repairing his aircraft before his water supply ran out. In the book, the stranded aviator encounters an

otherworldly little person whom he calls the Little Prince. It is through the Little Prince's stories of his travels around the universe that the aviator learns what is truly important in life.

Saint Exupéry wrote eloquently about what causes us to become attached to others and how the work we put into our relationships develops into the most cherished feelings of love and friendship. His widely quoted statements that "one sees clearly only with the heart" and "what is essential is invisible to the eye" are poetic embodiments of his philosophy regarding matters of the heart. Saint Exupéry had a stormy relationship with his wife, Consuelo, who is believed by some to have been the model for the vain and capricious Rose the Little Prince left behind on his home planet, Asteroid B-612.

The publishing firm of Reynal & Hitchcock was established when Eugene Reynal and Curtice Hitchcock joined forces in the early 1930s. The firm had hoped to publish *The Little Prince* in December 1942 and thereby capitalize on the Christmas market. However, it was not until April 6, 1943 that the "petit bonhomme" who had lived in the heart of Saint Exupéry finally made his formal debut. Saint Exupéry, who liked to put his words on paper in the tranquility and solitude only night can provide, was a perfectionist. According to his great-niece Nathalie des Vallières, he would rewrite each sentence many times. This meticulous



Bevin-DeLamater House, where Saint Exupéry wrote *The Little Prince* in 1943. (Courtesy of the Northport-East Northport Public Library, Northport, New York).

writing style and the care that he exercised with respect to his drawings probably prevented an earlier publication of *The Little Prince*.

The first edition of *The Little Prince* was a slender volume of 91 numbered pages bound in salmon cloth-covered boards. The color of the boards is sometimes erroneously described as tan, but this is probably due to fading of the salmon-colored cloth. The front board is embossed in maroon with an outline drawing of the Little Prince and the title is shown below in script. Adding considerably to the charm of the book are more than 40 illustrations, some in color, some in black and white. All were originally hand-drawn by Saint Exupéry and painted with watercolors he purchased in Manhattan. Although the pilot/narrator of the story is never shown in these whimsical drawings, they do provide us with an indelible image of the endearing Little Prince. It should be noted that Saint Exupéry's mother was a talented watercolorist and he undoubtedly inherited his ability from her.

The book, which was translated from the original French by Katherine Woods, was dedicated to Saint Exupéry's dear friend Léon Werth, who remained in France during the war. The dedication sets the tone for the book, advising us that "all grown-ups were once children—although few of them remember it." This dedication emphasizes the importance and value that Saint Exupéry attributed to children and their perception of the world, and at the same time reminds us of the innocence that we lose in the inescapable transition to adulthood.

The front flap of the original dust jacket for *The Little Prince* contained these prophetic words: "There are some stories which in some way, in

\$2.00

## THE LITTLE PRINCE

Written and drawn  
by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

"SIX YEARS AGO," writes Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "I made a forced landing in the Sahara, alone, a thousand miles from help, and faced the necessity of repairing my motor by myself within the number of days my supply of drinking water would last. The first morning I was awakened by a gentle but determined voice which said 'If you please, draw me a sheep'." Thus it was that he met the Little Prince, whose strange history he learned, bit by bit, in the days that followed.

The Little Prince lived alone on a tiny planet no larger than a house. He possessed three volcanoes, two active and one extinct, although one never knows about volcanoes. He also owned a flower, unlike any flower in all the galaxy, of great beauty and of inordinate pride. It was this pride that ruined the serenity of the Little Prince's world and started him on the travels that brought him at last to the Earth where he learned finally, from a fox, the secret of what is really important in life.

To preserve his memory of the Little Prince, Saint-Exupéry has made some forty watercolors, whimsical, gravely meticulous in detail. Each is an almost essential part of the story.

There are a few stories which in some way, in some degree, change the world forever for their readers. This is one.

REYNAL & HITCHCOCK, Inc.  
386 Fourth Avenue, New York

some degree, change the world forever for their readers. This is one." In the 60 years that have passed since the publication of *The Little Prince*, this prophecy has been more than fulfilled. The book has already been translated into more than 230 languages and dialects and awaits further translations. More than 50 million copies have been sold and there are even foreign language editions in Braille. The book was recently voted "book of the century" in France. According to Nathalie des Vallières, it is the third most read book in the world, following the Bible and Karl Marx's *Das Capital*.

Despite its immense popularity, there is often considerable confusion as to how one identifies a first edition of *The Little Prince*. First of all, the front flap of the dust jacket should list Reynal and Hitchcock as the publishers, at their 386 Fourth Avenue address in New York. In addition, a price of \$2.00 appears in the upper right-hand corner of the front flap. Due to the fact that there were many later editions, later dust jackets are sometimes found on first or other early editions of the book.

Cloth covered boards that are clearly salmon in color immediately suggest that the book is a first edition, as it seems that this color was never used again in later printings. I have never seen a salmon book that was not a first edition. However, I have seen copies of the book so discolored that it is impossible to tell whether the cloth is salmon or tan. The copyright page of a first edition lists Reynal & Hitchcock as the publishers, along with the date, 1943. No further printings are mentioned. There were at least seven or eight further printings of the book by Reynal & Hitchcock, with the number of the printing shown on the copyright page. These later printings were bound in cloth boards in

various shades of blue, green, turquoise, gray and tan. The dust covers of later printings—for example, the sixth printing—indicate that, at some point, Reynal & Hitchcock moved to other locations, such as 383 Madison Avenue, New York.

The copyright page on a first edition lists Saint Exupéry's prior publications up to this point, which were *Night Flight*, *Wind, Sand and Stars* and *Flight to Arras*.

Finally, first editions of *The Little Prince* are identified by a colophon at the end of the book. The colophon appears on an unnumbered page before the last free endpaper. The colophon specifies the printing information and reads: "This book is set in Linotype Granjon. Composition and binding by the Cornwall Press, Cornwell, New York. Printed by offset lithography at the Jersey City Printing Company, Jersey City, New Jersey, on Montgomery offset paper, manufactured by W.C. Hamilton & Sons, Miquon, Pennsylvania. Typographical arrangement by Wendel Roos."

Perhaps the most precious of all copies of *The Little Prince* can be found among the 525 salmon-colored copies that were numbered and signed by Saint Exupéry himself. The tipped-in limitation page containing this handwritten information is placed between the front free endpaper and the half-title page. Of these 525 copies, 25 were kept for family and friends and 500 were made available to the public. The limitation statement reads: "Five hundred and twenty-five copies of the first edition of THE LITTLE PRINCE have been autographed by the author, of which five hundred are for sale. This is copy number \_\_\_\_." The number was then handwritten by Saint Exupéry in this space, with his signature positioned below. In addition, the spines of the dust jacket were neatly hand-numbered in ink to correspond to the numbers on the limitation page. Based on a sticker found on an autographed copy that recently sold, it is believed that these copies originally sold for \$3.50 as opposed to \$2.00 for a regular trade edition.

A first edition of *The Little Prince* can range in price from several hundred dollars for a copy out of jacket to \$5,000 for a fine copy in a like dust jacket. Prices for signed first editions start in the \$8,000 neighborhood and can go as high as \$20,000, depending again on the condition of the book and the dust jacket.

The first French-language edition, *Le Petit Prince*, was published by Reynal & Hitchcock later that same year. The French-language first edition is essentially identical to the English-language one, and is also bound in salmon-colored cloth. Again, first editions are identified by the salmon-colored boards, the dust jacket that lists Reynal & Hitchcock at their Fourth Avenue address, and a copyright page that does not list any further printings.

The French-language edition, however, lacks the colophon at the end of the book. Fewer French-language editions were published, making them scarcer. As with the true first [American, English-language] editions, there were signed and numbered copies. Once again, these are harder to find than their English-language counterparts, as there were only 260 of these signed copies, 10 of which were retained "hors de commerce," indicating that these copies were not offered for sale, but were reserved for friends and family members.

In 1943, Reynal & Hitchcock made arrangements for the book to be published in Canada by Beauchemin, a Montreal-based company. These first Canadian (French-language) editions were also salmon in color. They are identical to the first French-language editions published by Reynal & Hitchcock, with one exception. While the dust jacket lists Reynal & Hitchcock as the publishers at the Fourth Avenue address, the title page lists both Beauchemin, Montreal and Reynal & Hitchcock, New York as the publishers. These Canadian first editions also lack the colophon at the end of the book. The Canadian editions of *Le Petit Prince* are the scarcest trade editions of all the Reynal & Hitchcock editions, and one bookseller suggests that only 500 of these books were printed. A Canadian first edition in its book jacket usually sells for around \$1,000.

The first British edition of *The Little Prince* was published in 1944 by William Heinemann Limited of London. The cloth-covered boards of these editions are a light orange rather than salmon, and the book is narrower than the Reynal & Hitchcock edition. While the dust jacket has the same image of the Little Prince as the other versions we have discussed, on the front board of the U.K. edition the title appears above a red and blue outline drawing of the Little Prince being carried away by a flock of birds. There are only 87 numbered pages in the U.K. edition, as opposed to 91 pages in the edition published by Reynal & Hitchcock. One factor that accounts for this discrepancy is that the dedication to Léon Werth in the U.K. edition does not appear on a separate page as in the Reynal & Hitchcock editions. Instead, it shares a page with the list of other books Saint Exupéry wrote and the copyright information.

In 1946, a first French edition of *Le Petit Prince* was finally published in France, by the giant of the French publishing industry, Gallimard. At the time Saint Exupéry joined his ranks, Gaston Gallimard had an impressive stable of famous writers that included French legends such as Gide, Proust, Camus and Sartre. According to his biographer, Pierre Assouline, Gaston Gallimard modestly said, "French literature, c'est moi" ("I am French literature."), and he was right! It should be noted that

these first Gallimard editions are elusive; however, the extensive printing information contained at the back of many French books makes copies very easy to date. Details such as the name of "l'imprimerie," or the company that printed the book, their location, and the date the book was printed are all specified. The "dépôt legal," or registration, of copyright is also stated.

To illustrate, I will refer to a copy printed on November 30, 1950 in Paris by Paul Dupont (I do not have a copy printed in 1946). The copyright registration dates from April 1946, indicating that the company did, in fact, begin printing copies of *Le Petit Prince* that year. This book also happens to be one of only 3,050 copies or "exemplaires" whose binding is based on the designs or "la maquette" of Paul Bonet. According to William Lecomte, a book expert in France, this book is considered a limited deluxe version. Paul Bonet was a painter and illustrator who frequently worked with publishers such as Gallimard. He designed the motifs and chose colors and materials, be they leather or cloth; in short, he provided the framework for the binding of a book that would then be realized by the printers and the bookbinders. Paul Bonet was responsible for the wonderful bindings found on works by Claudel, and André Gide, among other French authors.

While the contents of this Gallimard edition appear to have been printed in 1950, the book itself was not bound until 1951, as indicated by the date on the spine of the book. The copyright reads, "text and illustration by Librairie Gallimard, 1946." The front and back boards of this copy are decorated with Bonet's design of broken concentric circles, punctuated by stars and spheres in green, yellow, red and blue on a once-white background. The book has 93 numbered pages due to the fact that it has two front end papers. This design can still be found today on some more current deluxe versions published by Gallimard.

It is interesting to compare the drawings in the Gallimard and Reynal & Hitchcock editions. A careful examination reveals differences both in the detail of the drawings and the colors, with the Gallimard illustrations being consistently more vivid in comparison with the muted tones of the Reynal & Hitchcock first editions. These differences were the subject of an article from the *Journal de la République des Lettres*. It seems that at some point, Gallimard became aware that tints of the illustrations in their volumes departed substantially from those of the original Reynal & Hitchcock version, which was, in fact, the only edition Saint Exupéry ever saw. A very obvious departure is the Little Prince's cape is green in

the 1943 Reynal & Hitchcock edition and blue in the Gallimard first editions. Moreover, certain fine details of the original drawings of the Reynal & Hitchcock editions are modified or absent in the Gallimard editions. Gallimard has since issued a Folio version that is more faithful to these original drawings.

There is an enigma that relates to the Gallimard editions of *Le Petit Prince*. While the first edition was not published in France until 1946, many dark blue hardcover copies dated 1945 have been found. It is not known how these copies came into existence. The red titles of these copies contrast well with the deep blue backgrounds and a very good copy with an original dust jacket recently brought \$750.

It should be noted that, in 1945, before the Gallimard edition appeared, Reynal & Hitchcock were greeted with a rather unpleasant surprise. According to Stacy Schiff's 1994 biography of Saint Exupéry, Gallimard, with whom Reynal and Hitchcock had previously had cordial dealings, claimed that the American firm had no right to publish *The Little Prince*. After a four-year struggle, the legal wrangling between Reynal & Hitchcock and Gallimard was resolved to the satisfaction of both parties. Both of the companies could continue marketing and selling *The Little Prince*.

According to Christopher Morris' book *A History of Harcourt, Brace & Company*, Reynal & Hitchcock eventually was acquired by Harcourt, Brace & Company. Eugene Reynal had previously been associated with this firm, as head of Blue Ribbon Books, their reprint company. After Curtrice Hitchcock died, the two companies merged in 1948, again to the satisfaction of both firms. Eugene Reynal was appointed head of the trade department in addition to company director and, in turn, Harcourt Brace & Company gained many prize-winning and popular authors.

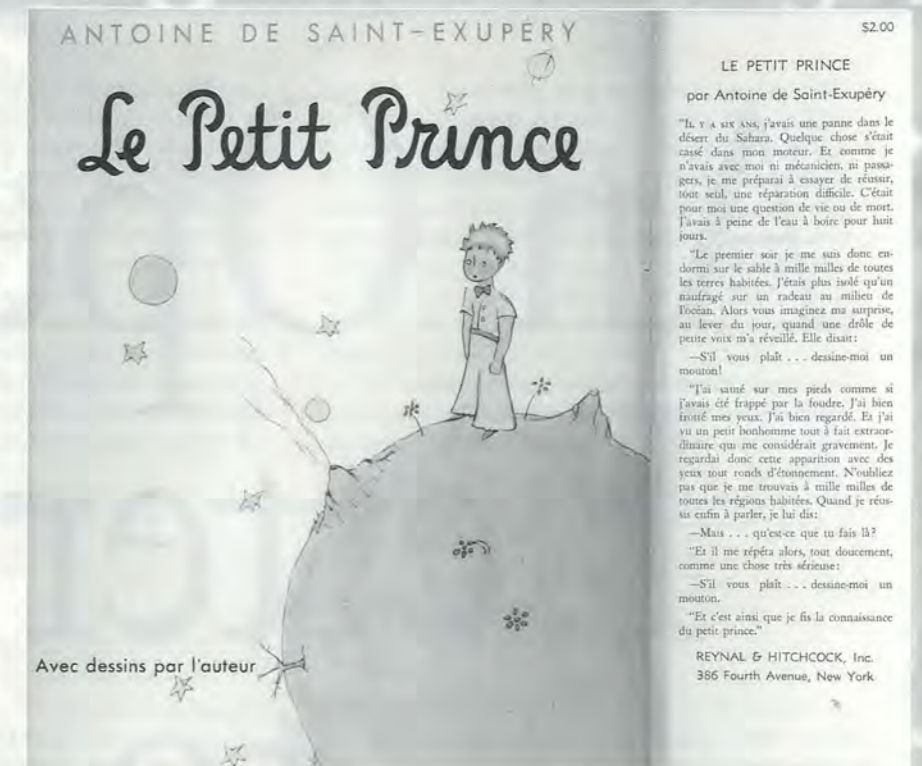
Morris notes that the sales of one title by an author who came to Harcourt, Brace & Company as part of the merger constituted "almost an entire publishing industry in itself." That book was, of course, *The Little Prince*. It became Harcourt Brace & Company's best-selling trade title. By 1994, Morris reports, Harcourt Brace & Company alone had sold over 7 million copies of various versions of the book.

After Harcourt Brace & Company acquired Reynal & Hitchcock, the company published tan volumes of *The Little Prince* and *Le Petit Prince* whose title page listed Harcourt, Brace & Company yet the name Reynal & Hitchcock still appeared on the spine of the book. Harcourt Brace & Company, which today goes by the name of Harcourt, Inc., changed its name several

times during its history and this fact has led to much confusion for collectors. In 1960, the company merged with the World Book Company, and became Harcourt Brace & World, Inc. and continued publishing tan versions of both *The Little Prince* and *Le Petit Prince*. These books show a copyright of 1943 with no further printings listed. These tan books are still plentiful and are often confused with first editions, although they are later printings.

Sadly, Saint Exupéry did not live to witness his book's enormous success. He died a little more than a year after *The Little Prince* was published. Although many years have passed since Saint Exupéry's disappearance, the facts surrounding his death remain a mystery. Although at the age of 44 he was considered too old to fly combat missions, he managed to secure a few more reconnaissance missions because he had friends in high places. On July 31, 1944, Saint Exupéry failed to return from his final photographic reconnaissance mission over the regions of Annecy. It is believed that his plane was shot down by a German fighter plane as he flew over occupied France. Many biographers, such as Paul Webster, believe that he flew a bit off course to catch a glimpse of the area of France and the places where he had passed the happiest days of his life, such as Saint Maurice de Rémons and Agay. His body was never recovered, although several years ago, a fisherman found an engraved silver bracelet that is believed to be his. Surprisingly unscathed, the bracelet—called in France "une gourmette d'argent"—still bore the name of his wife, Consuelo, and his publishers, Reynal & Hitchcock.

*Citadelle (Wisdom of the Sands)*, by far Saint Exupéry's longest manuscript, was published posthumously in 1948. Set in the Sahara, and centering on the theme of an African chief imparting his secrets and his wisdom to his son, it is perhaps his most abstract and philosophical work. According to Stacy Schiff, Saint Exupéry gave the original manuscript for *Le Petit Prince* to his friend, Silvia Reinhardt, as he departed for active duty in France in 1944. This manuscript was eventually acquired by Pierpont Morgan Library in Manhattan. This library/museum houses the extensive collections of Pierpont Morgan and his son, J.P. Morgan.



In 1993, Harcourt Brace & Company published special editions in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Little Prince*. These volumes give us a rare and wonderful glimpse of the original manuscript by reproducing pages in Saint Exupéry's tiny rambling script and previously unseen illustrations. As Charles E. Pierce suggests in his introduction to the commemorative edition, these reproductions provide a unique insight into the creation of Saint Exupéry's most precious story.

*The Little Prince* continues to touch its readers after all these years because Saint Exupéry shared so much of himself in writing this magnificent story. Sharing one's private thoughts, feelings, struggles and even pain always entails risk. The process of writing any book, but especially *The Little Prince*, can be thought of as a voyage of self-discovery through uncharted terrain. Saint Exupéry was not afraid to undertake this challenge. The result was this gentle duet, this engaging exchange between two very different personalities who were, of course, both sides of Saint Exupéry: the disillusioned, skeptical and lonely pilot, and the innocent, otherworldly Little Prince.

For more than 60 years, Saint Exupéry has advised us to think clearly with our hearts. His reflections on the value and meaning of friendship, and on the responsibility that each of us has to our fellow man were based on wisdom distilled from a life that was lived to its fullest. Hopefully, his gentle proviso will continue to guide the lives of generations of readers to come.