

“And act too often neglected”: Considering Empathy and Answerability in *The Little Prince*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's beloved book *The Little Prince* has long been considered a tale of love, loss, and what it means to be “tamed” by another. As the little prince explores his solar system, he encounters many persons, human and non, who have lessons to teach him about all manner of existence. Many of these lessons are explicit; the fox he tames teaching him, for example, the oft-quoted, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye” (Saint-Exupéry 70). However, other lessons come more implicitly. It is not insignificant that the little prince encounters so many non-human others. In the first place, protecting his love, a vain rose, is the impetus for leaving his small planet. Moreover, these encounters offer much in the way of thinking through the ecocritical project of determining to what degree humanity has an ethical responsibility to protect not just ourselves but our environment. In his early unfinished work *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Mikhail Bakhtin posits that “to live from within oneself does not mean to live for oneself, but means to be an answerable participant from within oneself” (76). This call for an “I-for-the-Other” orientation toward being *in* and *with* the world is one that, when considered in conversation with *The Little Prince*, encourages readers to practice the kind of active and transformative empathy Bakhtin argues for, and to do so radically, extending that empathy, not just to living beings (whether human or non), but to all that encompasses our material world.