

Exile and Empathy: The Wars that Made *The Little Prince*

The Second World War, certainly. The Napoleonic Wars? Less obviously. Yet both strongly influenced Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, I argue in this historically-grounded analysis.

A first section reads the published tale alongside the manuscript, focusing on textual evidence of exile and strategies for eliciting empathy. I foreground traces of the author's New York exile (deleted references to dollars, Rockefeller Center, and Long Island), examine the excised final chapter (in which the Little Prince has become a "prisoner" on his asteroid), and set this evidence beside the book's one overt reference to the war—the dedication to Leon Werth, who is "hungry and cold" in occupied France. Because this dedication was famously revised to read: "to Leon Werth when he was a little boy," the World War II section concludes by relating wartime concerns to Saint-Exupéry's construction of childhood in the fable.

That construction derives from the figure of the Romantic child, the progeny of a literary movement arising, in part, from the Napoleonic Wars. In this connection, discussion turns to the inspiration for the Little Prince's military garb: *L'Aiglon*, Edmond Rostand's 1900 play about the Duke of Reichstadt, Prince Imperial, who—for a few days at age three—reigned as Emperor Napoleon II. Much as the Little Prince longs to go back to his asteroid, Rostand's Aiglon, a de facto prisoner at the Austrian court, yearns to return to the France from which he is exiled.

The historical Aiglon died at age 21. His ashes were ceremonially returned to occupied Paris in December 1940—precisely a century after Napoleon I's remains were repatriated—in a gesture of rapprochement orchestrated by Adolf Hitler. Saint-Exupéry, too, observes the symbolism of anniversaries by sending the Little Prince back to Asteroid B-612 exactly one year after his arrival on Earth. However, whereas Germany sought to "tame" France through a ritual focused on mortal remains, the Little Prince abandons his body when he goes home. Thus, I conclude, Saint-Exupéry subverts Hitler's publicity stunt, rejecting the values it embodied.