

My father, an airline pilot, loves airplanes more than anything. Determined to share his love of flying with me, he gave me his favorite book for my eleventh birthday: *The Little Prince*, by French pilot and author Antoine de Saint Exupéry.<sup>1</sup> I read it immediately and cried at the end. No book had ever made me so sad, though I sensed that I did not quite understand its complexity. At the sunny kitchen table, I looked at the black-and-white image of the author's face on the back flap and wanted to connect with him, longed to understand why he had written such a sad ending, wondered what he had meant to say. These questions began my collection.

To find answers, I set about searching for Saint Exupéry's other five books, which were listed in the front of *The Little Prince*. My collection started with English-language editions of Saint Exupéry's works pilfered from my father's bookshelf while he kindly looked the other way. I started a journal of my favorite quotations, ones that I thought best expressed the beauty of flying or the tragedy of war; from Saint Exupéry I learned that "what is essential is invisible to the eyes." For my twelfth birthday, I received a biography of Saint Exupéry for my very own, and discovered that my favorite author had never learned to speak English. I knew then that I could never truly understand him without speaking his language. After persuading my parents to drive me to the local Borders, I acquired the French edition of *The Little Prince*, laid the two editions side by side, and tried to puzzle out the French. I felt a connection with "Antoine" that I had never felt with another author; his native language was mysterious and beautiful, he was a pilot like my father, and his face on the book flap had looked so kind, and so sad.

As I grew older, I saw more clearly how complex Saint Exupéry's stories were. Both his fiction and nonfiction works are part autobiography, part philosophy, part adventure story—and all have hidden meanings that only became clear to me once I started to read in earnest about his life. *What was most important to him?* I wondered. *Who did he love most? What made him smile?* As classes and French movies improved my language skills, I started to collect the French editions of his books, collections of his drawings and letters, and memoirs written about him by his family and friends. Consulting the bibliography of my first Saint Exupéry biography, I ordered books online from Amazon.fr and AbeBooks, visited used bookstores in my hometown to scour their French sections, and when my family made the yearly drive to visit relatives in Boston, I begged to stop in New York to visit the French bookstore Éditions de la Maison Française. At this point in my collecting experience, I bought every French book about Saint Exupéry that I could find—there were so few that this posed no problem! Through my reading, I came to understand that duty to a higher cause was important to him, that he loved open cockpit airplanes and sometimes loved his wife, and that playing the piano by rolling oranges on the keyboard made him smile. I created a fuller picture of him as a human being by reading the anecdotes of his friends, and I was able to understand the origins of many of his favorite themes (responsibility, friendship, the complexity of human nature).

Soon I became interested in more than Saint Exupéry's own life and stories; he wrote so fondly of his airline and his friends who joined him on adventurous flights down the coasts of Africa and South America. I started my investigation into the lives of his friends by looking at the dedications of his books. *Terre des hommes* is dedicated to Saint Exupéry's fellow pilot and best friend with the phrase "Henri Guillaumet my friend I dedicate this book to you." *Vol de nuit* is dedicated to Saint Exupéry's favorite airline boss, Didier Daurat.

On my first visit to France, a family vacation in eighth grade, I made a beeline for the Aéropostale sections of a Parisian aviation bookstore and the gift shop of the Musée de l'Air et

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<sup>1</sup> Though his name appears on book covers as "Saint-Exupéry," I have chosen to write it without a dash ever since I learned that he preferred it that way (American publishers added the dash so that readers wouldn't call him "Mr. Exupéry").

de l’Espace. I had never seen so many books about Saint Exupéry and his friends—more books than I could afford or fit in my suitcase. For the first time, I had to decide which books would become part of my collection. Thinking back to the dedication of *Terre des hommes*, I chose to focus on Saint Exupéry’s best friends Henri Guillaumet and Jean Mermoz. I picked out biographies of those two men and relished the chance to see pictures of them and read their stories for the first time. I was thrilled to have tracked down the only two (short) biographies of Guillaumet ever written, and stored them carefully next to my biographies of Saint Exupéry when I returned. Next to these I placed a collection of Mermoz’s writings and a full-color history of the friends’ mail airline, Aéropostale, which I chose because of its long section on Didier Daurat.

Understanding the lives of Saint Exupéry’s friends and the history of his airline gave me more nuanced insights into his writing. I had never been interested in literary criticism of Saint Exupéry, as I had decided that I wanted to figure him out on my own terms. Each time I reread his main works, I recognized in them more of the names, more of the landscapes, and more of the emotions from his life. I began to collect with the intention of tracing the effects of Saint Exupéry’s life on his writing—how did the deaths of his friends affect his themes and his tone? How did his writing change when he left the airline to fight in World War II?

When I arrived at the University of Chicago, short on money but excited by all the books around me, I used the library to expand my collection. Although I couldn’t keep the books forever, I spent many an evening in the stacks perusing the Saint Exupéry section and planning what to add to my own shelves. By this time, I knew the familiar stories of “my” Aéropostale pilots: Saint Exupéry in charge of a remote desert airport, Guillaumet in the Andes, Mermoz’s flight across the South Atlantic. In the stacks, I searched out books about Saint Exupéry’s lesser-known comrades. I also focused on books with images of Saint Exupéry I had never seen—most recycle the same images, so when I came upon a new picture, I added that book to my list. It is sometimes hard to believe that I will never meet Saint Exupéry, but I am glad to have many pictures of him.

When I studied abroad in Paris last year, I passed two bookstores on the walk to class. I saved money to purchase some of the books I had seen at the library, and found a new biography by chance. So that I could carry my suitcase home, I limited myself to books with new images and new anecdotes about Saint Exupéry and/or his friends. Now, I can reread my collection and answer many of the questions that were mysteries to me when I was younger. I see that Saint Exupéry’s life and his creativity were shaped by an often debilitating depression that I could not grasp when I was a child. My understanding of Saint Exupéry has grown with me, and my collection has allowed me to revisit the old stories and interpret them in new ways.

As I prepare to leave college and start my next stage of life, I will continue to search out books about Saint Exupéry and expand the Aéropostale part of my collection. Next on my list to purchase is Didier Daurat’s memoir, *Dans le vent des hélices*, as well as an amusing memoir by an American woman who tried to teach Saint Exupéry English in New York. Eventually I would like to acquire Bibliothèque de la Pléiade’s volumes of Saint Exupéry’s complete works, because this edition intersperses his published writings with relevant private letters and drawings.

Questions about how Saint Exupéry’s circumstances shaped his writing and what life was like at Aéropostale will continue to guide me as I collect. My collection will move with me wherever I end up; Saint Exupéry has become my friend. I keep collecting so that I can keep creating a deeper understanding of him, the author of the first book to make me cry.

## Bibliography

### **By Saint Exupéry**

Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de. *Carnets: texte intégral*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999. Condition: new.

———. *Citadelle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1963. Condition: good.

———. *Courrier sud*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999. Condition: very good.

———. *Écrits de guerre, 1939-1944*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994. Condition: very good.

———. *Le petit prince*. San Diego: Harcourt, 2001. Condition: very good.

———. *Lettre à un otage*. Paris: Gallimard, 2004. Condition: new.

———. *Manon, danseuse, et autres textes inédits*. Paris: Gallimard, 2007. Condition: new.

———. *Night Flight*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. New York: New American Library, 1942. Condition: very good.

———. *Pilote de guerre*. Collection “Voix de France.” New York: Éditions de la Maison française, inc., 1942. Condition: fair.

This is the first edition of *Pilote de guerre* and one of my most prized books because of its special story. The Nazis did not allow this book to be published in France during the war, so it was instead published in New York out of a respected French bookstore. As soon as I learned this story from a biography, I tracked down the book on AbeBooks. It includes a carefully preserved erratum note in the front.

———. *The Little Prince*. Translated by Katherine Woods. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982. Condition: very good.

This is the copy given to me by my father.

———. *Terre des hommes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1951. Condition: good.

———. *Vol de nuit*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971. Condition: very good.

———. *Wind, Sand and Stars*. Translated by Lewis Galantière. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939. Condition: very good.

———. *Saint-Exupéry raconte “Terre des hommes” à Jean Renoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999. [Audio Recording]

Though it isn't a book, this CD recording is a prized part of my collection because it lets me hear Saint Exupéry's voice and his sense of humor as he tells a story to his friend Jean Renoir. His voice is unexpectedly soft and shy.

Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de, Hayao Miyazaki, Delphine Lacroix, and Alban Cerisier. *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: dessins, aquarelles, pastels, plumes et crayons*. Paris: Gallimard, 2006. Condition: new.

This book is very special because it collects hundreds of Saint Exupéry's expressive drawings. Most biographies include only a few drawings, but this book puts them all on display and makes it easier for me to see how they connect to his life.

Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de, Frédéric d'Agay and Alban Cerisier. "*Cher Jean Renoir*": *projet de film enregistré en 1941 par Antoine de Saint-Exupéry d'après Terre des hommes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1999. Condition: very good.

This is the transcription of the CD recording. I ordered this book so I could follow the recording without missing anything. It also helped me improve my French!

Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de, and Marie de Saint-Exupéry. *Lettres à sa mère*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984. Condition: very good.

## About Saint-Exupéry

Des Vallières, Nathalie. *Saint Exupéry: Art, Writing and Musings*. New York: Rizzoli International, 2004. Condition: new.

This is the first biography of Saint Exupéry that I read, and its engaging style got 12-year-old me hooked on its subject. It includes many photographs and several of Saint Exupéry's drawings.

Estang, Luc. *Saint-Exupéry par lui-même*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1956. Condition: very good.

Fraisse, Thomas. *Antoine de Saint Exupéry: l'oasis à conquérir*. Paris: Transboréal, 2014. Condition: new.

Guéno, Jean-Pierre. *La mémoire du petit prince: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, le journal d'une vie*. Paris: Éditions Jacob-Duvernet, 2009. Condition: new.

Pélissier, Georges. *Les cinq visages de Saint-Exupéry*. Paris: Flammarion, 1951. Condition: fair.

This book is a memoir written by Saint Exupéry's friend with whom he stayed during part of World War II. I value it for its anecdotes of Saint Exupéry's daily life and its insight into his depression (if one reads between the lines).

Phillips, John. *Poet and Pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*. New York: Scalo, 1994. Condition: very good.

Phillips was an American journalist who spent time photographing Saint Exupéry and his air reconnaissance group in the months before the author's disappearance during a mission. This book of photographs helps me understand Saint Exupéry's mindset at the end of his life; his face conveys his melancholy and the lasting physical effects of his earlier plane crashes.

*Saint-Exupéry: Première époque 1900 - 1930*. Vol. 1. 6 vols. Icare 69. Paris, 1974. Condition: very good.

This book and the five that follow are volumes of a journal published by the French union of airline pilots. It is extraordinarily valuable, containing interviews with Saint Exupéry's friends, rare photographs, and full-color replicas of many of his letters. It took me three years to track down all six volumes, in France and on the Internet.

*Saint-Exupéry: Deuxième époque 1930 - 1936*. Vol. 2. 6 vols. Icare 71. Paris, 1975. Condition: good.

*Saint-Exupéry: Troisième époque 1936 - 1939*. Vol. 3. 6 vols. Icare 75. Paris, 1976. Condition: very good.

*Saint-Exupéry: Quatrième époque 1939 - 1940*. Vol. 4. 6 vols. Icare 78. Paris, 1977. Condition: very good.

*Saint-Exupéry: Cinquième époque 1941 - 1943*. Vol. 5. 6 vols. Icare 84. Paris, 1978. Condition: very good.

*Saint-Exupéry: Sixième époque 1943 - 1944*. Vol. 6. 6 vols. Icare 96. Paris, 1981. Condition: very good.

Saint-Exupéry, Simone de. *Cinq enfants dans un parc*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000. Condition: very good.

This memoir by Saint Exupéry's older sister tells many sweet stories about their childhood and describes their home, which appeared many times in Saint Exupéry's writing.

Schiff, Stacy. *Saint-Exupéry: A Biography*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1994. Condition: very good.

This is the most thoroughly researched biography that I have come across, in French or in English. Schiff has both keen insight into Saint Exupéry's mindset and an extensive bibliography, which I have used to find books for my collection. I was able to meet Schiff in 2010; she signed this book and answered my questions about Saint Exupéry's love life.

Tanase, Virgil. *Saint-Exupéry*. Paris: Gallimard, 2013. Condition: new.

Werth, Léon. *Saint-Exupéry, tel que je l'ai connu*. Paris: Viviane Hamy, 1994. Condition: very good.

*Le petit prince* is dedicated to Léon Werth, who was not a pilot but was Saint Exupéry's best friend after Guillaumet and Mermoz died. Along with its valuable anecdotes, this memoir by Werth includes a set of photographs taken of Werth and Saint Exupéry during the war. In these photos, like in so few others, Saint Exupéry is smiling.

## **Saint Exupéry's Friends and Airline**

Bec, Christophe and Patrick Dumas. *L'Aéropostale: des pilotes de légende: Guillaumet*. Toulon: Soleil, 2013. Condition: new.

I chased this book down in Paris last year. It is a graphic novel rendering of Guillaumet's plane crash and walk through the Andes, and is very historically accurate. I value this book because it lets me visualize the Aéropostale pilots in color and in movement.

Heimermann, Benoît and Olivier Margot. *L'Aéropostale: la fabuleuse épopée de Mermoz, Saint-Exupéry, Guillaumet*. Paris: Arthaud, 2003. Condition: new.

*Henri Guillaumet: 1902-1940*. Icare 162. Pantin, 1997. Condition: very good.

This is my most prized book about Guillaumet because, like the Saint Exupéry *Icare* volumes, it includes interviews with the pilot's friends and many rare photographs of him. I made a special trip to an aviation bookstore in Paris to find this book, which has greatly increased my understanding of Guillaumet beyond his famous adventure in the Andes.

Herszberg, Catherine Thibault and Anne Proenza. *Mermoz*. Paris: Cherche Midi, 2001. Condition: new.

Kessel, Joseph. *Mermoz*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972. Condition: very good.

———. *Vent de sable*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966. Condition: very good.

Joseph Kessel, a famous writer himself, spent time flying with Aéropostale as an observer and became friends with the pilots. This book tells many entertaining and previously-unknown stories about Saint Exupéry's less famous friends.

Mermoz, Jean. *Mes vols*. Nouv. éd. Paris: Flammarion, 2001. Condition: new.

Migeo, Marcel. *Henri Guillaumet: Pionnier de l'Aéropostale*. Grenoble: Arthaud, 1996. Condition: new.

Tessier, Roland. *Henri Guillaumet: Chevalier du Ciel*. Paris: Editions Baudinière, 1940. Condition: poor.