

A N T O I N E
DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY



WARTIME
writings
1939 • 1944

With an Introduction by ANNE MORROW LINDBERGH

"This is the record of passionate intelligence."
—Chicago Tribune

ANTOINE DE
SAINT-EXUPÉRY

WARTIME



Translated by Norah Purcell

*With an Introduction
by Anne Morrow Lindbergh*

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Note from the French Publisher

The pages we present here are the miscellaneous writings of a man who went to war, then was forced into inaction, and finally returned to die on a military flying mission.

Some of these writings were published in journals or newspapers now no longer available. Many are unpublished. These are mostly letters, but also drafts, jottings cast aside, radio broadcasts, or bulletins to the American press.

We have arranged this material in chronological order, adding only brief explanations. The chronology in fact begins shortly before the declaration of war. We wanted to show Saint-Exupéry in his activities, thoughts, and contacts during the summer of 1939.

We wish to thank the owners of unpublished texts by Saint-Exupéry who very kindly put them at our disposal.

The letters mentioned as "Letter to X" are messages to persons who do not wish their names to appear.

These documents were collected and arranged by Nicole and Louis Evrard.

Introduction

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, pioneer mail pilot on one of the world's earliest lines; war pilot in World War II; and author of several best-selling books, is remembered in the United States today chiefly for his small haunting "fairy tale"—supposedly written for children—*The Little Prince*. The first books of flying adventure have gone into many editions and are still selling in paperback. They will remain the classic literature of early aviation, but they are not limited to one period or one profession.

In the last fifty years flying has changed radically, but human values have an enduring importance. *Wind, Sand and Stars*, an epic account of the author's travels through skies and over earth, reflects a point of view that is astonishingly timeless. Written before the war, before rocket propulsion, before man traveled to the moon, the book gave a farsighted plea, repeated later by many others. "I wrote *Wind, Sand and Stars*," Saint-Exupéry states, "in order to tell men passionately that they were all inhabitants of the same planet, passengers on the same ship."

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In 1939, shortly after the American publication of *Wind, Sand and Stars*, my husband and I were fortunate enough to meet Saint-Exupéry while he was in New York. We were then living on Long Island Sound. My diary vividly recalls the details of that radiant August weekend, when carefree conversation sparked against storm clouds of impending war.

Earlier that month we had received through my publisher a letter from Saint-Exupéry, containing a preface he had written for the French translation of my book, *Listen! The Wind*. The letter explained that he had agreed to write a polite one-page preface, in honor of the Lindbergh name, before reading the book. But after reading it on the boat crossing the Atlantic, he cabled the publishers that he needed to say more and had written nine pages, which he enclosed.

As my diary* records on August 4, I found the preface intensely beautiful and was moved "not only with the importance he attaches to the book and his analysis of it . . . but I am startled by what he has seen of me. The note says he would like to meet me."

August 5. "We call Saint-Exupéry. He speaks 'pas un mot' of English. I have to talk to him—what a prospect! Yes, he would be delighted to come out for dinner and the night." C. leaves for upstate New York and will pick him up on his way home. At three he calls and says he cannot make it. Will I pick up Saint-Exupéry?

"I tear into town, rather cross to be late." At the hotel they say that M. Saint-Exupéry is in the bar. He appears—a big man, stooping slightly and somewhat bald—not really good-looking—"an inscrutable sort of face, almost Slavic in its solidity and inscrutability, his eyes turn up at the corners a little.

"Oh—it's *that* man, is it? I think, with a confused dream feeling that I have seen him often before—met him, even. I

* Published as *War Within and Without* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).

recognize him immediately. I apologize for being late and we go across to the car and start out. We hardly get around the block when the car stalls and will not start again. And all this time we are talking at top speed—with a kind of intensity that precluded any attention to practical details.” He is talking about my book and pulls the preface out of his pocket. I am distracted, trying to talk French, always an effort, and talking to a taxi driver and trying to explain in French and then in English what was wrong with the car.

“But perhaps you do not like the preface?” he says at some point.

“Oh, yes—yes!” I try to reassure him. I was astonished at his modesty about his writing and his anxiety lest I had not understood it all.

And so the weekend went on, chiefly in conversation. My husband and Saint-Exupéry compared notes on the early days of aviation. They talked of the current crisis: Germany’s power, England’s next move, France’s inherent strength. Breaking through the surface conversation, the deeper concern of Saint-Exupéry’s books emerged: the place of the machine in modern life. He was “optimistic that man would come out on top of the machine—use it as a tool for greater spiritual ends.” He spoke also of danger and solitude being the two factors that go to form a man’s character. I noted in my diary: “There is a kind of mountaintop austerity about him that reminds me of a monk, dedicated to something—what?”

And yet his sense of play enlivened the weekend: doing card tricks at a friend’s house, obviously enjoying in a childlike way our bafflement. Sitting at supper on our porch, when I took a June bug out of my hair and set in on the table, he picked it up gently and examined it. “It is trying hard to take off,” he remarked. When it did, only to land on his arm, he observed, “It was hardly worth taking off for such a short flight!”

He told many stories of the desert, its beauty and its danger,

mysteriously linked. Stories bloomed from his conversation like monstrous flowers, leaving us spellbound, oblivious of where we were or what we were doing. Listening to one of these while driving in the car, my meticulous husband absentmindedly ran out of gas! The desert obviously had Saint-Exupéry in thrall. But one never forgot that he was a Frenchman, rooted in France. He spoke nostalgically about Provence, the region of his old home, where he said we must go and which we would like, and of people he would like us to meet. We in turn spoke of Illic, our wild Breton island, where we wanted him to come. "Though in this changing world," I wrote, "I fear none of these things will come true. We are living in a dream interlude—before what cataclysm I don't know but fear." We never saw him again but because of this brief interlude on the eve of hostilities, Saint-Exupéry became for me the lens through which I saw the war.

"The war," as we have been reminded lately by the anniversary celebrations of its end, is now forty years behind us. America has had two wars since. We have other problems today, many of which Saint-Exupéry foresaw: "Once the German problem has been dealt with . . . then the fundamental problem of our time will have to be considered: the meaning and purpose of humanity."

What does this writer, man of action, moralist and hero in an age of anti-heroes, have to say to us today in his last writings? Certainly, all his early admirers will want to read his observations, conflicts, and beliefs during the war itself and trace the unraveled mystery of his disappearance on his final reconnaissance mission over France.

For those to whom he is unknown or forgotten, one might glance again at his most popular little book, still read by children everywhere and, happily, by adults reading to children. What does it say? What is the secret of its popularity? Why are we universally drawn to it? *The Little Prince*, if you remember,

comes down to earth from his miniature planet, touching several other worlds briefly en route. He is confused and distressed by what he finds on these outer realms. He meets a king who only wants to wield authority; a conceited man who lives for applause; a businessman who counts the stars; a geographer at a desk with his nose buried in scientific data; and a lamplighter, obeying outworn orders. None of these planetary beings can give him any reason for their occupations, or any sense of life. At last, on Earth's African desert, he meets a snake and a little fox who give him some answers. What is the point of life? What is essential?

"What is essential," says the little fox, "is invisible to the eye. One can only see with the heart." What is important are the bonds that link us to one another in a concept greater than oneself.

Basically this myth and its ramifications run through Saint-Exupéry's books. Myths speak to us with more immediacy than sermons. This is why we listen to *The Little Prince*. The message is there in all Saint-Exupéry's writing—more openly, perhaps, in his unfinished posthumous book, *The Wisdom of the Sands*, where a desert monarch meditates and gives advice to his subjects, again on "what is essential" and "what is invisible." But it is harder for us to accept in this form.

Wartime Writings is not another *Little Prince* but it carries again what Saint-Exupéry wanted to give to man. Collected after his death, the book is not a polished whole, nor could it possibly be. We have the impression that we are looking at the back of a beautiful tapestry. His finished books (rewritten, he claimed, as much as thirty times) are the tapestries, with the pattern standing out clearly in design and color. In this collection we see the underside, full of knots, tangles, and broken threads pieced together. Here, one realizes, is what his books cost him; what, in fact, his passion for perfection cost him in action as

well as art; what his sense of nobility and dedication cost him in life and, finally, in death. The pattern, although intermittent, is still visible on the underside.

This miscellaneous collection contains letters, notes, speeches, prefaces, and a long letter (later published in book form) to a friend caught in occupied France. Here is an account of his terrible ordeal of inaction after the collapse of France. He was, he tells us, against the armistice and "stole" a transport plane in Bordeaux to convey forty young pilots to North Africa in a vain attempt to continue the war there. When he discovered that the armistice extended to North Africa as well as France, he was at an impasse. In this period, the Vichy government was being formed under the aged Marshal Pétain. Without being consulted, Saint-Exupéry found himself nominated for a position on the Vichy National Council, an offer he immediately refused. He did not, however, feel he could join the "Free French" group behind General de Gaulle. ("I should have followed him with joy against the Germans, but could not follow him against Frenchmen.") He opposed any division of France into warring camps, and foresaw the bitterness and bloodshed that would follow. With enormous difficulty he obtained a passport for the United States, hoping to persuade President Roosevelt to release American aircraft for use in Europe. In December 1940 he sailed from Lisbon to America.

Once established in New York, he was depressed by the isolationist reaction of American citizens to war and shocked by the conflicts between exiled French groups. Many friends welcomed him warmly, but gossip about his (rejected) nomination to the Vichy National Council brought insults and calumny from Gaullists. Partly to answer his critics and partly to plead for American aid, he turned to writing two more books. *Flight to Arras* describes the hazardous air missions he carried out in the early months of war. In nine months of flights over Germany his reconnaissance group lost three-quarters of its members. The

swift collapse of France, he claims, was due to the criminal lack of equipment ("We set up our haystacks against their tanks"), and to the unequal strength of the forces engaged (the French were outnumbered two to one by the Germans). More profoundly, *Flight to Arras* expresses his belief in man's responsibility for man. "As the inheritor of God, my civilization made each responsible for all, and all responsible for each." "A Democracy must be a brotherhood, otherwise it is a lie."

Letter to a Hostage is his expression of deep anxiety for a friend hidden in occupied France. "The man who haunts my memory tonight is fifty years old. He is ill. He is a Jew. Will he survive the German terror?" As the letter lengthens, one realizes that Saint-Exupéry is pleading for understanding of France itself. All France was being held hostage—forty million hostages silenced by the occupation. Those Frenchmen outside of France, he argues, could not properly judge her, but only serve her. "It is always in the deepest recesses of oppression that new truths are born."

The Little Prince has overtones of farewell—perhaps to all his readers. In 1941 the "miracle" for which he had waited took place: The United States entered the war. With the recapture of North Africa, Saint-Exupéry was at last able to return to the fighting front under U.S. Army auspices. He crossed the Atlantic in a convoy with 50,000 American soldiers who "were going to war not for the citizens of the United States, but for man, for human respect. . . . How could I forget," he writes in a letter to Americans, "the great cause for which the American people fought?"

On arriving in Tunisia, Saint-Exupéry was assigned to his old Group 2/33, now based there under the Allied Photo Reconnaissance Command. Before he could carry out missions he was trained for several months in a converted P-38 Lightning, in which photographic equipment replaced guns. In July 1943 he was sent on his first photographic mission over France, flying

down the Rhône Valley and above his much loved landscape of Provence. But because American regulations had set 35 as the maximum age for a P-38 pilot, Saint-Exupéry, then 43, had difficulty persuading the authorities to allow him to continue on active duty, the only assignment he desired or would accept. "I have no taste for war, but I cannot remain behind the lines." By special intervention, after an acutely depressing eight-month delay, he was finally allowed to fly five missions over France. He carried out eight and never returned from the ninth mission.

What Saint-Exupéry wrote between 1939 and 1944 was not addressed just to immediate issues, urgent as those were to him. These pages are illumined with searchlight beams into the future. The warning phrases ring in the mind with prophetic clarity. "Somewhere along the way we have gone astray. The human anthill is richer than ever before. We have more wealth and more leisure, and yet we lack something essential. . . . We feel less human; somewhere we have lost our mysterious prerogatives."

He has much to say about these prerogatives, which the war and his forced exile had clarified for him. "What frightens me more than the war is the world of tomorrow. . . . I don't mind death, but I do mind the spiritual community being endangered." Like many artists and writers of our century, he viewed the technological civilization of the West with apprehension, but not without hope. In his letter of gratitude and advice to Americans he elaborates on this theme: "You see it seems that something new is emerging on our planet. It is true that technical progress in modern times has linked men together like a complex nervous system. The means of travel are numerous and communication is instantaneous—we are joined together like the cells of a single body, but this body has as yet no soul."

And surely we are now ready to hear his plea for peace, born out of his hatred of war, written before the atom bomb fell on Hiroshima, and long before its deadly power had ex-

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panded worldwide and grown to its present towering threat.

“Let there be an end to games that have become too dangerous to be played, that destroy more than they save. . . ! If we do not all want to die in the mud, we must make peace someday. . . . There are so many conquests open to man!”

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh

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1939

Germany. I once asked Lazareff what impression Hitler had made on Chamberlain, who had just been in contact with him.

"Tremendous," he answered.

It was to be expected. If you confronted Bergson with Attila, Attila would undoubtedly astound Bergson. As for Bergson, he could not possibly make any impression on Attila.

A drunken sailor makes more noise than a philosopher. And the SS man who, thumbs stuck in his belt, walks up and down beside a humiliated physicist as he bends over to clean the latrines likewise astounds the physicist.

Saint-Exupéry¹

In order to cure a feeling of malaise, you have to throw light on it. And we certainly live in a condition of malaise. We have chosen to save peace. But in saving peace we have harmed our friends. And no doubt many among us were ready to risk their lives in the interests of friendship and now feel a kind of shame. But if they had sacrificed peace, they would feel the same shame; because they would then have sacrificed humanity: They would have accepted the irretrievable destruction of the libraries, cathedrals, and laboratories of Europe. They would have accepted the ruin of its traditions and transformed the world into a cloud of ashes. And that is why we shifted from one opinion to the other. When peace seemed threatened, we discovered the shame of war. When it appeared that we were to be spared from war, we felt the shame of peace.

. . .