

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* : Dual-Targeted Audience

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Abstract

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* is a worldwide phenomenon considering it was translated hundreds of times over and across cultures. However, *Le Petit Prince* is so often mistaken for only a children's book due to its simple language and colored illustrations displaying itself as a picture book. In fact, its apparent simplicity is what hides a world of unnoticed meanings that are embodied by the characters in the story: allegorical and philosophical meanings that only adults can grasp. This paper will discuss what children's literature entails and what makes *Le Petit Prince* as dually addressed. From the replacement of *vous* and *tu* to *you*, from *apprivoiser* to *tame* and from *perdre* to *waste*, some aspects of the story are obscured, reducing its children audience. By an examination of both the original and the English translation, I will argue that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's original is designed for a dual audience. On the contrary, Wood's English translation slightly loses the dual-audience aspect and targets more towards adult readers, thus slightly takes away what Saint-Exupéry intended for his child and adult readers. The reader then understands why *The Little Prince* by Katherine Wood somewhat restricts its child audience.

Keywords: French, Children's Literature, Dual Audience

Le Petit Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is a renowned, meaningful, illustrated French narrative appreciated by many readers. It was first published simultaneously in French and in English, *The Little Prince*, in the United States of America in 1943. Translation plays a large role in this success since there are over 300 translations available along with ten more translations that are currently in

progress. This makes *Le Petit Prince* as one of the most translated books of French literature in the world. One of the most interesting features of the story is its dual address: it is a mystical story for children and a fable story for adults as a reminder that they were once children. In *Le Petit Prince*, the fox said, “le langage est source de malentendus,” stating that even though some languages may have similarities, no language is ever the same thus misunderstandings between languages is inevitable (Saint-Exupéry 67). I will discuss how the targeted-dual audience found in the original French is somewhat lost in the English translation by using the Oxford English Dictionary, Le Petit Robert, and Collins Robert French-English Dictionary. First, I will present reviews about the debate of whether *Le Petit Prince* is for children, for adults or for both simultaneously. I will further explain what defines children’s literature and how their books differ from other literature books. Next, I will argue how the politeness in French is obscured by translating *vous* and *tu* to *you*, affecting the reader’s perception of the main character the Petit Prince. Furthermore, I want to demonstrate the effects of translating *apprivoiser* to *tame* and *perdre* to *waste*. By analyzing selected passages and comparing the word choices used in the French original to the English translation, this paper will justify how the Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s original is designed to address a dual audience while the Katherine Wood’s English translation removes some of the aspects of the original. In result, Wood targets an adult audience and, in a way, somewhat restricts its children audience.

Le Petit Prince is a story of about an aviator, the narrator, who crashes in the Sahara Desert. This is where he meets the Petit Prince who lives on a small planet known as Asteroid B 612, a planet with three small volcanoes and a unique flower he loves, a rose. The Petit Prince explores seven planets each having their own representation: a planet of authority, of appearance, of possession, of work, of desire, of knowledge and lastly, of friendship (Cerisier 283). Each planet is occupied by a strange adult: un roi [a king] who thinks of himself as a man with absolute power; un vaniteux [a conceited man] who sees himself as the most handsome, best dressed, richest and most intelligent man; un buveur [a drinker] who drinks to forget that he is ashamed of drinking; un businessman who believes that owning stars provides wealth; un allumer [a lamplighter] who lights and extinguishes a streetlamp; and un géographe [a geographer] who collects

information from other the explorers, such as the Petit Prince, whom he sends to earth. The earth is the seventh planet and it is the important aspect of the story because the Petit Prince discovers friendship with le renard [a fox]. *Le Petit Prince* expresses the author's philosophy of life and aspirations in allegory form. The book is about life as the author looks back at his childhood, and contrast the aspects of being a child and an adult. The story deals with themes, such as friendship and relationships that adults encounter throughout their life. Their imagination, hopes, and dreams gradually die off as an adult seeing that they look at things more realistically. In fact, its apparent simplicity is what hides a world of unnoticed meanings that are embodied by the characters in the story, which requires children and adult readers to read the book more than once. I will analyze and explain that the reader's perception of the original is different in the English translation.

Before addressing the original and the translation, it is important to understand what a targeted-dual audience is and what defines as children's literature. It is also essential to recognize that books classified as children's literature is not only limited to child readers. It is also beneficial to examine reviews written about *Le Petit Prince* to acquire a better understanding as to why Katherine Wood's translation possibly took away Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's purpose of having a dual-targeted audience theme.

Children's Literature

When it comes to children's literature, especially French literature, *Le Petit Prince* is on the recommendation list. It may be classified under children's literature, but it is important to know who defines what is categorized as children's literature. Not only "it is society's perceptions that determine to a large extent what children's literature is but adults are the one who decides on what is regarded as literature for children" (Nodelman 248). There is a generalized idea of what is children's literature, however it does not have a fixed definition according to Nodelman. As stated by Nodelman, children's literature cannot be defined:

There is no such thing as children's literature, only literature. And in an important sense, that is true. Children are not a separate form of life from people; no more than children's books are a separate form of literature from just books" (139)

Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown expressed that "children's books are about the experiences of childhood... a child protagonist and an issue that concerns children" (190) yet *Le Petit Prince* focuses on issues of the real world of an adult; the author's "detachment and distance from his wartime experiences" (Higgins 1). In addition, the story does not have a happy ending for it does not "imply an optimistic view of reality" nor does it have a hopeful and optimistic tone (Nodelman 216). This explains why the dual audience is one of the most interesting aspects of *Le Petit Prince* because adults can read this children's book just as they read other, more adult-oriented, books. Nodelman discussed his theory of children's literature:

Children's literature [can] simultaneously [fulfill] both adult and child desire, simultaneously offering children what they live and adults what they believe children need... it perceives adult needs as different from and opposite to children's needs. It perceives pleasure as inherently and inalterably opposed to learning. And it sees children as themselves double and divided" (179)

Maria Nikolajeva suggested that adults are the "true audience of children's literature" since adults have experiences and knowledge of both their childhood and adulthood (Nodelman 218). Children only have experience of their childhood and see adulthood from their perspective. I will now discuss different reviews of *Le Petit Prince* published throughout the years from the New York Times. These reviews reveal that no one knows who Saint-Exupéry specifically addressed his book. These reviews tell us that *Le Petit Prince* is readable for both children and adults; a fairy tale for children as it provides talking animals and an allegory for adults due to the fact that these talking animals present a philosophical message.

The Debate of Dual Audience

There are numerous reviews of *Le Petit Prince* published in the New York Times newspaper on whether the story is for children, for adults, or for both. Pamela Lyndon Travers, the author of *Mary Poppins*, could not tell if it is children knowing that the story has a moral attached and connects “to the grown-up world rather than the nursery.” A few reviews comment on how the story was meant for a specific type of reader. A review by Ellen Glasgow commented that *Le Petit Prince* is not for children while another review by Beatrice de Lima Meyers announced that adults will not like it, which is indirectly affirming that it is a book for children. Moreover, Anne Morrow Lindbergh wrote, “non, pas du tout pour en-fants. C'est un adulte au cœur d'enfant” stating that it is for an adult who is a child at heart. Furthermore, a book by Raphaël Enthoven considered the story as a bible for the youth rather than a book for children, principally targeting adults. He also compared the story to Pascal's *Pensée* (Enthoven 96). *Pensée* is “about how man lives between the abyss of the infinitely large and the infinitely small” and this recognizes the distinction between child and adult (*Pensée* 239). Pascal mentioned “le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point” (Pascal 467) and Saint-Exupéry says “on ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur” (Saint-Exupéry 71). Both Saint-Exupéry and Pascal exhorted their readers to think and seek with their hearts, an allegory that adults can grasp. The ongoing debate on where to categorize the book showcases that the *Le Petit Prince* is readable for adults and not limited to only a child audience.

On the contrary, several reviews, also from New York Times Magazine, mentioned how the story can be read simultaneously by both children and adults. A review by John Chamberlain considered *Le Petit Prince* “a fascinating fable for grown-ups [and that it will appeal to adults] but of conjectural value for boys and girls of 6, 8, and 10.” Another review, this one by Beatrice Sherman, *Le Petit Prince* referred as “a parable for grown people in the guise of a simple story for children... a lovely story in itself which covers a poetic, yearning philosophy – not the sort of fable that can but rather reflections on what are real matters of consequence.” Moreover, Jason Zinoman shared the same perspective. He pointed

out in his review that the story “is not just one of the most beloved children’s story of all time it is also a parable celebrating the wisdom of the innocent...yet there is also something about its prose and sensibility that makes it seem at times just as much for adults.” This showcases that children can read the book as well as adults, therefore, shows the story’s dual-targeted audience. These reviews suggest that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry did not address his story to any reader in particular: it is neither specifically a children’s book nor is it a book for adults; rather, it addresses both readers at the same time.

As determined by Nodelman, “the only real difference between writing for adults or for children is whose eyes I am looking through” (Nodelman 191) It is important to acknowledge that children and adults are different kinds of readers; children interpret differently from adults. As a matter of fact, *Le Petit Prince* is a war story that “comments on the social ills of Saint-Exupéry’s time,”— an idea that adults are able to apprehend while children see it as a “fantasy novel.” *Le Petit Prince* teaches its readers the importance of friendship and how it affects one’s mental health and quality of life, this is the moral of the story for both children and adults simultaneously, while the english translation sexualizes the relationship.

Both the original and translation offer a loveable Prince who explores different planets, talking animals, and a perspective of the ridiculousness of the adult world. Adults are perceived to be dull, to lack imagination, to have symptoms of narcissism, and to have an ideology of power and ownership. Nevertheless, there are three main differences that will be analyzed. Saint-Exupéry’s original portrays the Petit Prince as a childlike character, describes how friendship takes time to build, and time spent on something shows its importance. On the other hand, Wood’s translation removes the Petit Prince childlike character. She describes how one must be submissive to build a friendship and time spent on something unimportant is wasted. She depicts adults in a more elaborated way yet still uses simple language for a child to read but not fully understand, let alone see that adults are monotonous, narrow-minded, sexual beings.

Tu and Vous to You

It's important to understand the importance of politeness strategies in French. The use of *vous* and *tu* is a way to establish and maintain good social relationships with others. In French, *tu* and *vous* means *you* in English, but it depends on the person being addressed, the number of people, their age and social status. *Vous* is a more formal way of addressing someone in French that is, “one should use *tu* for a person you know well, another person your age or younger, or an animal and use *vous* when you are talking to an adult you don't know very well, an adult with authority, or to more than one person” (Ismail, Aladdin, & Ramli 185.) I created a chart to better understand the politeness concept in French and how it is lost in the English translation. This chart will illustrate how the Little Prince addresses each character either formally or informally.

	Tu (Informal)	Vous (Formal)
The king		√ (formal)
The conceited man	√	X
The tippler	√	X
The business man	√	X
The lamplighter	√	X
The old gentleman	X	√ (formal)
The roses	X	√ (more than 1 rose)
The fox	√	X
The railway switchman	√	X
The merchant	√	X

In the original French text, the Petit Prince uses *vous* to address the king and the old gentlemen. In the French culture, this displays a sign of respect which distinguishes the relationship between child and adult. As a result, it makes the Petit Prince childlike. The use of *vous* and *tu* illuminates its value considering it structures the Petit Prince as a childlike figure thus sets him apart from adults. In the English translation, the Petit Prince addresses to everyone including the king

and the old gentlemen as *you*. This deprives child readers in English the distinction between the use of the *tu* and using the *vous* form. The idea behind using *vous* and *tu* characterizes the Petit Prince as childlike while in English, the Petit Prince can be perceived as an adult addressing to other adults.

Apprivoiser to Tame

The 21st chapter is the most important chapter of the book because it is where the Petit Prince has a meaningful discussion with a fox and learns about friendship. A review on the New York Times by John Chamberlain questioned “all of this foxy talk is quintessential wisdom. But is it for children?” The fox teaches the Petit Prince about friendship and how it is developed through time as well as what we have with other people, and what makes them unique and special to us. However, Wood does not present friendship the way Saint-Exupéry intended for his dual audience; therefore, friendship is presented differently from the original. The Petit Prince asked the fox to play with him but in return, the fox rejects him because he has not been *apprivoisé* (Exupéry 65). In French, *apprivoiser* means forging a friendship and so, the Petit Prince is taught the importance of the verb *apprivoiser* and through this action is what makes the relationship with that person or thing unique. As stated by Carroll, “friendship is therefore the only strong relationship freely chosen and consented to, based neither on family ties nor on sexual attraction (Carroll 73). The dual audience can see the bond between the fox and the Petit Prince with the exchange of *apprivoiser* between the two. On the other hand, Wood translates *apprivoiser* to tame; hence this gives a different connotation. The fox defines tame as “to establish ties,” explaining that they will need each other once tamed by each other (Wood 66). This is where we encounter a problem in translation. Before analyzing and explaining why tame gives a different intention than what *apprivoiser* was meant, it is necessary to take a closer look at the definitions of both terms. I consulted the Oxford English Dictionary and Le Petit Robert.

Le Petit Robert Apprivoiser (Exupéry 65)	S'apprivoiser a qqch., s'y accoutumer [habituate]
Oxford English Dictionary Tame (Wood 65)	To become tame; to grow gentle, submissive, or sedate.

Although *apprivoiser* and *tame* may share a similar meaning of an animal from wild state to a less wild state, *apprivoiser* in the French context means *s'y accoutumer* meaning to create ties to build a friendship than to cause an animal to be less fearful. In other words, friendships require patience, but they are strengthened over time and further develops each time both individuals become closer to one another. In contrast, *tame* in the English context can imply to both an animal and a human. To *tame* an animal or a person means having dominance over an animal and sometimes another human being. This word choice delivers a sexual tone and takes the original intended meaning away from its readers. The translation to *tame* introduces the idea that there is a sexual relationship between the fox and the Petit Prince. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *tame* as growing gentle, submissive, or sedate. This can be interpreted as in order to be loved, or even to build a relationship, there has to be some sort of “submissive.” Wood was criticized translating *apprivoiser* to *tame* seeing that it loses the meaning of establishing ties from the original and these displays of behavior reveal towards adults than it does to children.

Adults have more knowledge and understanding of such terms based from their experience of life as a child and as an adult. Sublimation by Nodelman is "a capacity of sexual instinct, an adult knowledge that children are incapable of knowing thus targets an adult audience (Nodelman 199). He stated that the “variety forms of knowledge – sexual, cultural, historical – theoretically only available to and only understandable by adults” (Nodelman 206). In addition, “being childlike is identified with lack of knowledge and being adult [is identified with] possessions of knowledge (Nodelman 78). It is probable to assume that an adult reader perceives the relationship between the fox and the Petit Prince as sexual than friendship. In other words, an adult reader may interpret that when the fox tells the Prince to *tame* him, he is asking to be sexually dominated. Unlike Saint-Exupéry, Wood confirms that children are too innocent to see the hidden

adult content in her translation and addresses to an adult audience that adults understand themselves as sexual beings.

Perdre to Waste

In the same chapter, the Petit Prince learns from the fox that his rose is unique. Before meeting the fox, he was upset to see a garden of roses because he truly believed his rose was the only rose in the world. However, the rose back in his planet is the only rose that Petit Prince *a apprivoisée* [past tense of *apprivoiser*] and this reveals that his rose is, in fact, different from the roses he found in the garden. Not only is the rose unique, but it is also important from the amount of time he spent taking care of his rose (Saint-Exupéry 71). Unlike Saint-Exupéry, Wood takes away the importance of the rose and translates the verb to waste. I created a comparison chart to better understand the differences and how each word is used and presented.

Perdre (Saint-Exupéry)	Waste (Wood)
C'est le temps que tu as <i>perdu</i> pour ta rose qui fait ta rose si importante (Saint-Exupéry 71)	It is the time you have <i>wasted</i> for your rose that makes your rose so important (Wood 71)
Ils <i>perdent</i> du temps pour une poupée de chiffons, et elle devient très importante, et si on la leur enlève ils pleurent... (Saint-Exupéry 73)	They <i>waste</i> their time over a rag doll and it becomes very important to them and if anybody takes it away from, they cry... (Wood 73)

Now here is the literal translation in French using two different dictionaries.

Collins Robert Dictionary	Le Petit Robert
Waste (time) → (of time) – Perte	Perte → Le fait de gaspiller (depenser inutilement); ce qui est perdu, gaspillé

Before analyzing the selected passages, it is important to know that *le temps perdu* can refer to the French idiom *tuer le temps*. The literal translation is to kill time, but the expression means to take care or amuse to escape boredom. This is common for children to do. Now here is a chart where I replaced Saint-Exupéry's original with the French expression along with a translation to thoroughly understand what the original intended for both children and adult audience.

The rose (Exupéry 71)

C'est le temps que tu as <i>perdu</i> pour ta rose qui fait ta rose si importante. (71)		It is the time you have <i>wasted</i> for your rose that makes your rose so important
C'est le temps que tu as <i>tué</i> pour ta rose qui fait ta rose si importante → <i>Tu as tué le temps</i> pour ta rose qui fait ta rose si importante. (71)	VS.	It is the time you have <i>spent/sacrifice</i> for your rose that makes your rose so important

The rag doll (Exupéry 73)

Ils <i>perdent</i> du temps pour une poupée de chiffons, et elle devient très importante, et si on la leur enlève ils pleurent... (Saint-Exupéry 73)		They <i>waste</i> their time over a rag doll and it becomes very important to them and if anybody takes it away from, they cry...
Ils <i>ont tué</i> du temps pour une poupée de chiffons, et elle devient très importante, et si on la leur enlève ils pleurent...	VS.	They <i>spent/sacrifice</i> their time over a rag doll and it becomes very important to them and if anybody takes it away from, they cry...

Comparing the selected passages from the chart, it is evident that Saint-Exupéry shows children and reminds adults simultaneously that the rose is important to the Petit Prince. "These simple, straightforward texts tend to resonate – to imply more subtle complexities than they actually say (Nodelman 77). In this statement,

regardless of the garden of roses that the Petit Prince discovered, his rose is the only rose that he cared for and loved, presenting its uniqueness from the other roses. The amount of time that the Petit Prince spent to have his rose *apprivoisée*, which was his choice, and the memories they built together is what gives value to the friendship between the Petit Prince and his rose. He also lets children know that toys such as ragdolls are as important to them as the rose is to the Petit Prince. For adult readers, Saint-Exupéry reminds adult that the rose the Petit Prince took care of cannot be replaced by another rose taking into account that memories were created by that one rose. He reminds adults they forget that their possessions are uniquely important to them.

Wood addresses to children readers that they *waste* their time on things, such as a ragdoll, that they believe is important to them but in fact, “for children, playing is the most important thing in the world” (Higgins 84). For adults, this gives a sarcastic tone due to the fact that it appears as if adult mock children for wasting a substantial amount of time on something that they find important but worthless for adults. This can be a reminder to adults that they should let children be, explaining that it is a childlike behavior to spend their time on anything to keep themselves from being bored. Wood shows children that they waste time on things instead of using their time wisely. Therefore, the Petit Prince should not waste his time on one rose when there are other roses found in the garden. In addition, it also shows the Petit Prince's fidelity for his rose, but it appears as if Wood is proposing that being loyal is a waste of time. The Petit Prince is considered as childish in the original, his innocence is somewhat taken away by Wood, realizing that the analogy for being childlike is gone.

Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* vs. Wood's *The Little Prince*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* is the perfect example to showcase as a dually addressed book while Wood's *The Little Prince* shows how targeted-dual audience is lost in translation; readers do not experience the story to its full potential. By analyzing the politeness strategies in French, we see a loss in the Petit Prince's childlike character. Moreover, comparing Saint-Exupéry's original to Wood's word choices, she sexualizes the relationship between the fox and the Petit Prince. In addition, the Petit Prince's fidelity for his rose as wasted. Wood's *The*

Little Prince may be close in translation to the original, but certain aspects of the story completely changed from her word choices that can affect the meaning entirely. Wood's translation seems to be less appropriate for children, therefore, removes the child reader from fully appreciating the story and her translation has depicted the perspectives of adults. Children and adults are different kinds of readers and will always interpret stories in many different ways. In result, the original should be read. It seems as if Wood did not properly take into consideration the target audience and respected the words used in the original version. For the non-French speakers, I would not recommend the English translation to children since it takes away what Antoine de Saint-Exupéry intended for his dual audience readers. It is recommended to find a bilingual version along with a dictionary on the side to fully grasp Saint-Exupery's allegory and philosophy of life. Furthermore, adults should read it alone, then read it to children. Afterwards have children read the book for them, and lastly have the children read it for themselves.

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