

Excerpts taken from the article ***New book of love letters that inspired 'The Little Prince'***

By AFP

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Much of *The Little Prince* hinges around the mysterious star-travelling prince's relationship with a rose—delicate and demanding—that he has been tending on his home planet.

Saint-Exupery's real-life rose was Consuelo Suncin (the author with Consuelo below), a Salvadoran artist who cut a swathe through high society in Latin America and beyond before marrying him in 1930.



Now, more than 160 of their letters and telegrams are being published in France on Thursday, adorned with dozens of their sketches, photographs and other mementoes.

Unsurprisingly for a marriage between a moody, philandering adventurer and an intensely spirited and sharp-tongued artist, it was tempestuous.

"Consuelo my dear, you do not understand how much you make me suffer," he writes at one point.

"I cry with emotion, I am so afraid of being exiled from your heart," she responds.

There were many break-ups and affairs, though just as many reconciliations. "Consuelo had an exuberant temperament, and he was a great depressive. His multiple affairs were not the sign of a Don Juan, but of an emotional failing," biographer Alain Vircondelet told AFP.

But there seems little room for doubt about their underlying feelings in one of Saint-Exupéry's final letters, when he writes: "Consuelo, thank you from the bottom of my heart for being my wife... If I am killed, I have someone to wait for in eternity."

Saint-Exupéry, who had joined the French resistance forces from exile in the US, disappeared shortly after setting off on a reconnaissance flight from Corsica in July 1944. No evidence of the crash was discovered until 1998 when a Marseilles fisherman pulled up a silver identity bracelet. It bore both their names.

Saint-Exupéry's aristocratic family were never keen on Consuelo and after his death all but airbrushed her out of his life story. "Marrying a foreigner was considered worse than marrying a Jew," one member of the family told biographer Paul Webster in the 1990s, giving a clear sense of the family's politics.

Consuelo took her revenge, in Webster's words, by handing her half of the royalty-rights to her gardener-chauffeur Jose Fructuoso Martinez when she died in 1979, along with a huge haul of the love letters.

Six months after France fell to the Germans in World War II, Saint-Exupéry sailed to New York. He arrived on the last day of 1940. Already a best-selling author, he met with a triumphant welcome. Within weeks he claimed the 1939 National Book Award for *Wind, Sand and Stars*, the lyrical account of his adventures over North Africa and South America. He had missed the ceremony by a year, having spent the winter flying near-suicidal reconnaissance missions with the French Air Force. He believed he would be in America for a month. He stayed for over two years.

Excerpts taken from ***How a Beloved Children's Book Was Born of Despair***

By Stacy Schiff

April 6, 2018

Having narrowly survived a number of airplane crashes over the previous two decades, Saint-Exupéry was also in poor health, suffering from the high fevers he would lend to his cosmic urchin. He could be toppled in the middle of dinner. Teeth chattering, he woke with

chills in the night. [During World War II, he had moved from France to the United States.] He had little love for the United States, in large part because it seemed to him that a country capable of designing a state-of-the-art washing machine might already have applied itself to saving France. He spoke no English, a language he made minimal effort to learn. When asked why, he would growl: "I haven't finished learning French yet."

Out of his despair came *The Little Prince*, proposed as a kind of therapy. Saint-Exupéry bought himself a set of children's watercolors in a local drugstore and begun to work. The plot emerged fully formed, though he obsessively refined the details. He did not immediately settle on the boa digesting the elephant that opens the tale, instead offering as proof of his artistic ineptitude the drawing of a boat, which a friend took for a potato.

He thought better of assigning his hero a full garden, of radishes, tomatoes, and beans. The pages offered much of the solace he was to know in America.

*The Little Prince's* adventures seem exotic: He leaves his asteroid because of a misunderstanding with a troublesome rose. He makes a speedy survey of adult logic in six visits to neighboring asteroids, each populated by a man more ridiculous than the last. He lands in the Sahara, where he meets the aviator who serves as the book's narrator, and where he learns a few crucial lessons from a fox, before disappearing into thin air.

How much did Saint-Exupéry resemble his hero? "You are an extraterrestrial," a New York friend informed him several years before the book's conception. "Yes, yes, it is true, I sometimes go for walks among the stars," admitted Saint-Exupéry, laughing. Attempting in 1939 to describe him, his publisher allowed that he was basically "a lonely, but an infinitely friendly soul, sophisticated and yet child-like." His charm too consisted of equal parts diffidence and imperiousness. The tone of the book is entirely that of a pilot who had once reassured a woman who shuddered at the idea of boarding an airplane: "It is without precedent, Madame, that an airplane has gone up and not come down."



The hulking, balding aviator—he looked, as one reporter had it, like “a slightly battered teddy bear”—and the dapper extraterrestrial with the mop of golden curls all the same made for an odd couple. Where the Little Prince, a disciplinarian of the first rank, religiously tends his planet, his creator was a champion procrastinator. The child-hero is a determined walker. The toast of every Parisian cab driver, Saint-Exupéry was allergic to exercise. The Little Prince demonstrates a firm grasp of a calendar. Six years into his marriage, Saint-Exupéry was unable to recall his wedding date. He had no use for nature. Yet the two remain tangled together, twin innocents who fell from the sky. Saint-Exupéry could not have guessed that he would somehow melt into the Little Prince....

In 1944, he disappeared.... Saint-Exupéry plunged into the Mediterranean at high speed. The aircraft was recovered only in 2004; the cause of the crash is unclear.