

## Absurdism and Consumerism in the Morgan Library Manuscript of *The Little Prince*

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### Abstract

Saint-Exupéry's celebrated novella *The Little Prince* contrasts the irrationality and absurdity of adults with the imagination, creativity, and sense of wonder in children. Before leaving America in 1943, Saint-Exupéry gave the 30,000-word manuscript of his philosophical story to American journalist Silvia Hamilton, who sold it to the Morgan Library and Museum in New York in 1968. Saint-Exupéry removed many sentences and paragraphs before submitting his work to his American publishers, Reynal & Hitchcock. The published version is only half the size of the manuscript held at the Morgan Library. This paper examines Folio 94, a lesser-known manuscript folio, available on the Morgan Library website and in Cerisier and Lacroix (2013), where the Little Prince visits a store selling an absurd instrument that mimics the sound of a small earthquake; the merchant is surprised and upset when the prince says he is not interested and asks the young customer to go home and read a manual of slogans hoping to change his mind. The article argues that Folio 94 functions like an argumentative mini-play that criticizes consumerism, conformity, and the absurdities of capitalism; it portrays the Little Prince as a poetic figure of revolt and resistance, closely tied to Albert Camus's absurdist philosophy and Marxist literary criticism.

*Keywords:* *The Little Prince*, Morgan Library, absurdism, consumerism, Saint-Exupéry

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## Introduction

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944) first visited the US in 1938, again in 1939, and from December 31, 1940, to April 1943. The latter period was the most prolific in the French writer's life, culminating with the publication of *The Little Prince* in 1943. The novella was mostly written in New York, notably at his friend Silvia Hamilton's apartment and in Saint-Exupéry's Bevin House in Asharoken (Long Island). In April 1943, just before he left New York, Saint-Exupéry offered his manuscript of *The Little Prince* to Silvia Hamilton, who sold it to the Morgan Library in New York in 1968. According to the Morgan Library, Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944) wrote the manuscript between July and October 1942.<sup>1</sup> Montoneri (2024) focuses on the relationship between Silvia Hamilton and Saint-Exupéry when he was in New York. The paper shows that the author removed references to the Big Apple (“Manhattan”, “Rockefeller Center”; pp. 48–49), and to “Long Island” (p. 50). The present article focuses on another folio of the Morgan Library manuscript, Folio 94, which shares a clear affinity with various literary and philosophical approaches, including absurdist philosophy, existentialism, consumerism, Marxist literary criticism, and critique of capitalism. Folio 94 was entirely removed before publication of the novella. There are two sources to read the French original of this folio: The Morgan Library website (Saint-Exupéry, 1942).<sup>2</sup> and Cerisier and Lacroix (2013, pp. LXXVII–LXXVIII).

The published version of *The Little Prince* (1943 in New York; 1946 in France) already contains a famous allusion to the obsession with ownership and wealth: the businessman clearly symbolizes materialism; he lives, like many of the characters in the novella, a cyclic and absurd life: he spends his days counting stars, believing that he owns them. While in the published version allusions to absurdist philosophy and existentialism appear to be more affinities and shared existential concerns than real influences and common themes, Folio 94 of the Morgan Library resonates strongly with Camus's and Sartre's thoughts. Namely, Camus's philosophy of absurdism and revolt, and Sartre's ontology of freedom and notion of “bad faith”. However, there seems to be no evidence that Saint-Exupéry met or contacted either Camus or Sartre, and it seems that he was not aware of their publications at the time. For instance, there is no evidence that Saint-Exupéry heard of Camus's essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (*Le mythe de Sisyphe*; October 1942; first English translation in 1955) when he was writing *The Little Prince*. Nonetheless, Folio 94 is remarkably close to absurdist and existentialist concerns detailed in Camus's 1942 essay. Such concerns are highlighted by Saint-Exupéry in a dialogue between the Little Prince and a merchant who sells an instrument that makes the sound of a small earthquake, pointing to the possibility for the audience to feel a deep unease with modern systems; particularly, by criticizing the marketing of meaningless pleasure and the suppression of desires, themes that align with the manuscript's broader critique of consumerism. The dialogue resonates with Albert Camus's critique of the human need for meaning in an “indifferent” universe (Camus, 1991). Further, the attitude of the merchant when the Little Prince rejects the instrument is a typical example of Sartre's notion of bad faith or the self-deception that is used by individuals to avoid taking responsibility for their lives. The dialogue

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<sup>1</sup> “This preliminary draft contract for *The Little Prince* was drawn up in November 1942, just after Saint-Exupéry had finished writing the story, and went through several revisions before it was finalized in January 1943.” (Nelson, 2021, online). Morgan Library & Museum (2025, online): “1942 ca. July-Oct.” “Saint-Exupéry finished *Le Petit Prince* in October 1942” (Johnson, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> The original French and an English translation of Folio 94 are accessible at this address: <https://www.themorgan.org/collection/little-prince/118>. The present article uses the French transcription by Cerisier and Lacroix (2013) and proposes a personal English translation. See footnote 4 about the case of “making the moon rise.”

in Folio 94 is also a criticism of consumerism; it resonates with Marxist literary criticism, whereby *The Little Prince* reflects contemporary societal structures as well as a critique of capitalism. Such a critique includes a satirical depiction of pervasive commodification, including the production of a simile of potentially catastrophic events, and ideological manipulation that presents such commodification as desirable. Further, the Little Prince becomes, in the eyes of the merchant, disruptive and revolutionary because of his wish to have an instrument that would make the moon rise.

### General Presentation and Analysis of Folio 94

Folio 94 is part of the 140-folio-long manuscript purchased by the Morgan Library in 1968. This folio is titled “At the store”; it is a sharp satirical dialogue between the Little Prince and a merchant. In the published version, chapter 23 contains only one short dialogue between the Little Prince and a merchant who sells pills to “quench thirst”; experts calculated that these pills can save “fifty-three minutes in every week” (Saint-Exupéry, 1943, p. 50; this dialogue can be found in folio 95 of the Morgan Library manuscript; Cerisier & Lacroix, 2013, p. LXXVIII). It sounds absurd, too, and the Little Prince points out that he would prefer to spend 35 minutes walking slowly toward a spring than to save time. The author decided to keep this dialogue instead of the very sharp satire contained in Folio 94.

### The Original French Dialogue and a Proposed Translation

Below is the French original transcription quoted from Cerisier and Lacroix (2013) and a personal English translation of the first part of the folio:

Feuillet 94 [*chap. XXIII*]

Chez le marchand

- Tiens un client!
- Bonjour. Qu’est-ce que c’est que ça?
- Ça c’est des instruments très chers. Quand on tourne la manivelle ça forme un [*bruit qui retentit à un tr<sup>3</sup> biffé*] [bruit de *add.*] petit tremblement de terre...
- À quoi ça sert?
- À faire plaisir à ceux qui aiment les tremblements de terre
- Je n’aime pas ça (Cerisier and Lacroix, 2013, p. LXXVII)

Translation of the author: Folio 94 [*chapter XXIII*]

At the Merchant’s Stall

- Ah, a customer!
- Good morning. What is that?
- These are very expensive instruments. When you turn the crank, it produces a [*noise that resonates with a qu crossed out*] [noise of a: *added*] small earthquake...
- And what is it for?
- It is meant to delight those who enjoy earthquakes
- I do not enjoy that

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<sup>3</sup> Here, “tr” are the first two letters of *tremblement* (therefore, the English translation will note “qu”, the two first letters of *quake*). Note that the writer did not always add the punctuation, like in the two last sentences.

Folio 94 begins with “Ah, a customer!”, which sounds a little theatrical. The scene feels like a very early version of the Theater of the Absurd (Ionesco’s *The Bald Soprano*, 1950). The second sentence is a colloquial and childlike question (“What is that?”) uttered by the Little Prince while he is looking at very unusual instruments on display. The merchant answers that they are instruments designed to imitate the sound of a small earthquake for people’s enjoyment. “À faire plaisir” is translated idiomatically (“It is meant to delight”), but with a tone of detached irony, suggesting the absurdity of commodifying the sound of an earthquake for amusement. Why would anybody enjoy the sound of earthquakes? The Little Prince quietly and simply answers that he does “not enjoy that”. The scene is a rejection of passive consumerism and technological novelty. The merchant seems to be surprised, embarrassed, and annoyed by the client’s refusal in the second part of Folio 94 quoted from Cerisier and Lacroix (2013):

- Hum ! Hum ! Si tu n’aimes pas les tremblements de terre je ne vendrai pas mon instrument. L’industrie et le commerce seront paralysés. Voilà un livre de publicité. Quand tu l’auras bien étudié, tu aimeras les tremblements de terre et tu achèteras un instrument très vite. C’est plein de slogans faciles à retenir.
- Mais si j’ai envie d’un instrument à faire [lire le livre]?<sup>4</sup>
- Il n’y en a point. C’est du désordre. Tu es un révolutionnaire. Il faut aimer un instrument. Si tu n’aimes pas ce qu’on t’offre tu ne seras jamais heureux. Si tu aimes ce qu’on t’offre tu seras heureux. De plus tu seras un citoyen libre.
- Comment ça?
- Tu ne seras libre d’acheter que quand tu auras envie de ce qui t’ai offert. [*Car biffé*] Sans ça tu crées le désordre. Va lire ta leçon de publicité (Cerisier and Lacroix, 2013, p. LXXVIII).

Translation of the author:

- Ahem! Ahem! If you do not enjoy earthquakes, I won’t sell my instrument. Industry and commerce will grind to a halt. Here is a book of marketing. Once you have studied it carefully, you will love earthquakes, and you will very quickly buy an instrument. It’s full of easy-to-remember slogans.
- But what if I want an instrument to make [read the book]?
- There is no such thing. That’s chaos. You are a revolutionary. One must like an instrument. If you do not love what is offered to you, you will never be happy. If you love what is offered to you, you will be happy. Moreover, you will be a free citizen.
- How so?
- You will be free to buy only when you desire what is being offered. [*Because crossed out*] Otherwise, you are creating disorder. Now go study your marketing lesson.

In the second part of the dialogue, the merchant’s voice evolves from that of a welcoming salesman into an agent of the system. To be free, according to the merchant, means to love what is on display in the shop. The little prince’s desire for an instrument that is not sold in the shop is considered “revolutionary”. The merchant’s final command (“Go study your marketing lesson”) parodies indoctrination, collapsing the distinction between learning and conditioning.

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<sup>4</sup> The transcription made by the Morgan Library is very different here: “Mais si j’ai envie d’un instrument à faire lever la lune?” (the website’s translation: “But what if I want an instrument that will make the moon rise?”). “Make the moon rise” seems to be the correct transcription. See <https://www.themorgan.org/collection/little-prince/118>.

It also echoes religious or political dogma: belief is not developed through reflection, but imposed by the repetition of “slogans easy to remember”.

### Chapter 23 Versus Folio 94

Chapter 23 and Folio 94 are parables of consumerism, technology, and desire. In the published version of the novella, grown-ups seem to value efficiency more than human experience. The last sentence of this dialogue says it all: to walk slowly toward a fountain, “Ça ne rapporte rien dit le marchand” (Cerisier & Lacroix, 2013, p. LXXVIII; translation of the author: “There is nothing to be gained says the merchant”, that is, no money to make). Folio 94 is more explicit in showing that desire is engineered. The market system is not based on need, but on manipulated preferences. One possible explanation concerning the removal of Folio 94 might be that Saint-Exupéry did not want his tale to be confrontational: there are other examples in the Morgan Library manuscript of confrontational dialogues the author chose not to publish, such as the “encounter between the Little Prince and a couple” who complains that he is rude (Folio 135; Cerisier & Lacroix, 2013, CI; Montoneri, 2025). The author preferred to remove dialogues that sounded more aggressive and cynical, too dense, and therefore less accessible to children. Moreover, the earthquake metaphor is associated with violence and disruption, too far away from the main motifs of *The Little Prince*, notably thirst and water. Chapter 23 is an important transition because the dangerous desert might soon transform into a place of learning, experience, and happiness.<sup>5</sup>

### Theoretical Frameworks

In Folio 94, the Little Prince is portrayed as a poetic rebel against the absurdity of consumer ideology. Read through the lenses of both Camus’s Absurdism and Marx’s critique of capitalism, this unpublished dialogue highlights the existential stakes beneath the Little Prince’s poetic and calm resistance.

#### Absurdist Philosophy and Existentialism

While in the published version of *The Little Prince*, there are more affinities and shared existential concerns than real influences and common themes, Folio 94 of the Morgan Library resonates strongly with absurdism and existentialism. To Camus, the universe is meaningless; there is a tension between what people desire and the indifferent reality that confronts them.

The Absurd can be defined as a metaphysical tension or opposition that results from the presence of human consciousness—with its ever-pressing demand for order and meaning in life—in an essentially meaningless and indifferent universe. (Simpson, 2025, online)

The absurdist tone of Folio 94 resonates with Ionesco’s Theatre of the Absurd,<sup>6</sup> where communication breaks down and language loses its grounding in reason. The idea of an

<sup>5</sup> “I hoisted the bucket slowly to the edge of the well and set it there—happy, tired as I was, over my achievement... This water was indeed a different thing from ordinary nourishment. Its sweetness was born of the walk under the stars, the song of the pulley, the effort of my arms. It was good for the heart, like a present” (Saint-Exupéry, 1943, chapter 25, p. 53).

<sup>6</sup> “Theatre of the Absurd” is an expression coined by Hungarian-born British scholar and critic Martin Esslin (Esslin, 1960); he notably quotes Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity” (Camus, 1991, p. 6).

instrument that imitates the sound of a small earthquake is a metaphor for empty spectacle; Ionesco's characters often perform repetitive and absurd rituals. The merchant's logic is circular (desire must match the offer), and freedom consists in submission. Absurdism depicts the emptiness of stereotypes: "It's full of easy-to-remember slogans" in Folio 94 is a very early version of Ionesco's famous quote: "And what is sometimes labeled the absurd is only the denunciation of the ridiculous nature of a language which is empty of substance, sterile, made up of clichés and slogans" (Esslin, 1960, p. 48). Martin Esslin wrote:

It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world... the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation. (Esslin, 1965, p. 23)

### **Camus Versus Saint-Exupéry**

Camus was born in Algeria in 1913; during World War II. He became an important player in the existentialist scene in Paris, a center for intellectual resistance during the German occupation. Camus rejected being an existentialist many times (Simpson, 2025). Saint-Exupéry, a writer and a pioneer of aviation, wasn't into politics and often criticized ideological movements, infamously refusing to support either the Vichy Regime or Charles de Gaulle's partisans. As a result, both sides ended up banning all of Saint-Exupéry's books (Montoneri, 2022). Saint-Exupéry lost his life on a reconnaissance mission just two weeks before the Provence Landing on August 15, 1944 (Opera Dragoon). It wasn't until 1946, after the ban on his works was lifted, that *The Little Prince* was finally published in France.

Existential themes, including isolation, death, loneliness, and absurdity, present in *The Little Prince*, were not directly influenced by Camus's philosophy of absurdism: Saint-Exupéry wrote most of his novella before the publication of *The Myth of Sisyphus* in October 1942, while *The Outsider* (*L'Étranger*; also translated as *The Stranger*) was published in June 1942. There is no direct evidence (letters, essays, diaries) showing that Saint-Exupéry wrote about, mentioned, or responded to Camus's philosophical ideas or literary works. Camus and Saint-Exupéry never met in person, even though they visited the same places and had several common acquaintances. For example, both Camus and Saint-Exupéry drew inspiration from North Africa, and they likely moved in overlapping intellectual and literary circles through intermediaries, such as Jean Grenier and Edmond Charlot. Saint-Exupéry lived at Hotel La Louisiane in Paris for a few months in 1919 (Wéry, 2024). During World War II, the hotel became the headquarters of the existentialists; it was notably frequented by Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre.

### **Folio 94 Versus Camus and Sartre**

While *The Little Prince* in its final form is more mystical and poetic, Folio 94 brings Saint-Exupéry surprisingly close to Camus's Absurdism. Camus opens *The Myth of Sisyphus*, published by Éditions Gallimard, by stating that the central question of philosophy is whether life is worth living in a meaningless universe. He ultimately rejects suicide, proposing revolt as the answer. *The Little Prince* asks the snake to help him die. His "departure" (a form of

assisted suicide) is gentle, spiritual, and bittersweet. Saint-Exupéry treats death not as a final negation, but as a return, possibly even a transcendence.<sup>7</sup>

Camus ends his essay with the image of Sisyphus, endlessly pushing a rock uphill. The absurd hero chooses not to give up (Allison, 2024). Camus calls this a form of revolt, embracing life without illusions. Life is absurd, but one lives it fully anyway. Saint-Exupéry doesn't confront the absurd directly; he believes that it arises from the folly of grown-ups, and that remembering innocence may restore meaning. In the published version of the novella, the Little Prince's critique of adult absurdities (obsession with numbers, power, vanity) is grounded in the wisdom of children, suggesting that meaning is lost not because of absurdity, but because grown-ups forget what is essential.

The dialogue's almost indifferent tone in the face of absurdity also echoes Meursault's detachment in *The Outsider*, particularly the merchant's unbothered presentation of destruction as a pleasurable commodity. The customer's final line ("I do not care for that") can be read as a Camusian refusal, that is, a rejection of the absurd when it is destructive and inauthentic. The Little Prince's disinterest and resistance resonate with Camus's notion of revolt against a meaningless world. The earthquake device might also symbolize the random violence of existence, a core concept in Camus's philosophy, where the universe offers no comfort or justice, only the possibility of human ethical choice. Folio 94 is arguably the most Camusian moment in *The Little Prince's* drafts. While Camus's absurdism leads to lucid revolt, Saint-Exupéry's satire suggests a poetic resistance: to yearn for the moon (in the Morgan Library transcription; see footnote 4 of this article) is a form of innocence and rebellion.

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism also offers a relevant contrast. Sartre (1905–1980) is a philosopher, novelist, and playwright; he notably published *La Nausée* (1938; *Nausea*), *L'Être et le Néant* (1943; *Being and Nothingness*), *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946; *Existentialism Is a Humanism*), and many other essays, plays, novels, and short stories. He declined the Nobel Prize in Literature that he was awarded in 1964. Saint-Exupéry and Sartre never met in person; there is no evidence of correspondence or collaboration between them, which is not surprising given their differing networks and focuses.

Sartre's concept of "bad faith" ("mauvaise foi" defined as inauthenticity and self-deception by which individuals deny their own freedom and responsibility; internalizing imposed meaning to avoid existential anxiety; Santoni, 1995), refers to the human tendency to flee from freedom by internalizing external roles or ideologies (Sartre, 1943). The merchant denies that people can freely decide what they want. Instead, he insists they must want what is being sold. He redefines freedom as conformity, that is, not choosing authentically, but embracing desires manufactured by external forces (advertising, commerce). In contrast, the Little Prince remains free because he continues to desire authentically, despite the absurdity of his environment. The merchant brands him a "revolutionary" for resisting: authenticity threatens systems built on "bad faith". Instead of confronting the responsibility of authentic choice, some people take refuge in self-deception and believe that external systems dictate meaning and necessity (Sartre, 1992, pp. 86–116). When read through this existentialist framework, the unpublished Folio 94 of *The Little Prince* provides an illustration of how consumer culture cultivates "bad faith".

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<sup>7</sup> "I cannot carry this body with me. It is too heavy... But it will be like an old abandoned shell. There is nothing sad about old shells" (Saint-Exupéry, 1943, 60).

Folio 94 reads as a short existential allegory. Commerce in the dialogue is portrayed by Saint-Exupéry as creating artificial needs. The Little Prince favors authenticity and resists self-deception. Saint-Exupéry's decision to omit Folio 94 before publication may be in part due to its polemical sharpness. Its critique of consumer manipulation and its cynical tone stand in contrast to the gentler allegories found in the published version of *The Little Prince*. Folio 94 also offers a sharp criticism of industrialism and is overtly anti-capitalist, which might be another reason why Saint-Exupéry removed it before publication.

### **Critique of Capitalism and Marxist Literary Criticism**

Chapter 23 of the published version of *The Little Prince* offers a subtle criticism of industrialism. Folio 94 is more anti-capitalist and anti-propaganda. It suggests that commerce lives on because desire is engineered. "If you don't like earthquakes, I won't be able to sell" is a critique of a market system based on manipulated preferences. Folio 94 also prefigures Guy Debord's critique of the "Society of the Spectacle," where consumption replaces authentic experience. The "instrument" is a spectacle (a mechanized simulation of the sound of an earthquake), and the marketing book is its sacred text. Debord (1931–1994) was a French Marxist theorist and philosopher ("Debord's theories cannot be properly grasped unless they are first properly located within Marxist thought in general"; Jappe, 1999, p. 2); he notably developed Karl Marx's ideas of "reification" (where subjects become objects and vice versa, rendering people passive) and "commodity fetishism" (commodities are depersonalized; Marx, 1977):

The spectacle does not need sophisticated arguments; all it needs is to be the only voice, and sure of no response whatsoever. Its first prerequisite, therefore, and at the same time its chief product, is the passivity of a contemplative attitude. Only an individual 'isolated' amidst 'atomized masses' ... could feel any need for the spectacle, and consequently, the spectacle must bend every effort to reinforce the individual's isolation. (Jappe, 1999, p. 7)

The dialogue's satirical portrait of the merchant exposes the mechanisms of capitalism, where the creation of desire is more important than the production of goods. In *Capital*, Marx describes how the social relations between people become disguised as relations between commodities; in such a system, objects are imbued with artificial value detached from their actual utility. The earthquake device is what Marx calls a fetishized commodity: pleasurable but useless. Marx defines "commodity fetishism" in *Capital, Volume I*:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. (Marx 1977, p. 165)

The earthquake machine is useless, but the merchant argues that it brings freedom and citizenship. In Marx's words: "It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx, 1977, p. 165). After the Little Prince says he is not interested in the machine, the merchant surprisingly does not praise the merits of his machine, but directs the conversation toward the notion of desire. He does not try to convince the customer of the value of his device. The Little Prince must learn to like the product because, according to the merchant, it is a civic

obligation to buy what is available. The statement “You won’t be free to buy until you want what’s available” aligns with Louis Althusser’s notion of ideological interpellation. The “book of slogans” given to the Little Prince echoes the logic of advertising, which conceals the fact that the earthquake machine is a product with no genuine use-value. Marx shows this dynamic when he writes:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves. (Marx, 1977, p. 164)

The merchant tells the Little Prince to read a book of slogans that are “easy to remember”; catchphrases and repetition, rather than critical thinking, are valued by the merchant. Here, Saint-Exupéry prefigures concerns later developed by German–American political theorist Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), who argued that advanced capitalist societies try to prevent people from imagining alternatives to what exists. But the Little Prince does not surrender; he neither accepts the product nor internalizes the logic of the market. He maintains his childlike longing. In Marxist terms (and in the merchant’s words), his refusal is “revolutionary”. While the fable appears playful, it feels more like a political allegory. The merchant is upset at the Little Prince’s lack of interest in his instrument; he attempts to change his desire, presenting a manual of marketing and slogans designed to teach him to want what is already available. This moment echoes Louis Althusser’s “Theory of ideological interpellation”, where individuals are “hailed” into subject positions that serve dominant systems (Althusser, 1971). The merchant tells him that his attitude is “revolutionary”. People who yearn for what cannot be sold are seen as enemies of economic and social order.

### **Conclusion**

Before he left America, Saint-Exupéry offered his 30,000-word manuscript of *The Little Prince* to Silvia Hamilton; it was acquired by the Morgan Library and Museum in 1968. Saint-Exupéry removed numerous sentences and paragraphs before publication. While some examples remain in the published version (like the businessman counting and owning stars), others were removed. In Folio 94, the Little Prince visits a store that sells all sorts of inventions, including a costly instrument that makes the sound of a small earthquake. The merchant is the voice of absurd authority; he offers ready-made pleasure and denies true desire. The Little Prince, in asking for an instrument to make the moon rise, becomes a rebel; he refuses to participate in absurd commerce and instead yearns for transcendent meaning.

From a Camusian perspective, the merchant embodies the denial of absurdity, covering meaninglessness with advertising and slogans, while the Little Prince represents revolt, the refusal to accept imposed illusions. From a Sartrean perspective, the merchant exemplifies “bad faith”, redefining freedom as submission to manufactured desire, while the Little Prince represents the insistence on authentic freedom. Saint-Exupéry’s unpublished passage stages a dialogue with both Sartre and Camus. The critique of consumer manipulation resonates with Sartre’s ontology of freedom and with Camus’s philosophy of revolt, offering a miniature allegory of the existential struggle to live authentically in a world that seeks to dictate what it means to be free and happy. Folio 94 is an argumentative and absurd play. While the pill in Chapter 23 is a metaphor for efficiency and time-saving culture, the instrument in Folio 94 is a metaphor for consumer capitalism’s absurdities. This dialogue operates as a dystopia, an allegory of the psychological mechanisms of consumer capitalism. It sounds playful at the beginning, until the Little Prince shows disinterest in the instrument. The merchant feels then

surprised and upset; he transforms from a salesman to a priest of ideology. The Little Prince in this scene represents human autonomy in a world where even desire and pleasure must be prescribed.

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