



New clothes for an old classic – book covers and illustrations of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*

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Abstract: In those cases where author and illustrator is the same person and where his work has reached the status of a classic in both levels, it is hard to imagine a completely new illustration for the classic. However, even the clearest classic of this kind like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* can and have been reillustrated. In different countries different picture has been chosen to the book cover and the colours might have been changed as well. Saint-Exupéry's book can be bought even with three different book covers from one country. The pop-up illustration is rather truthful for the original book, but the paper engineer has combined several pictures together to make the pop ups work. The most interesting reillustrations of *The Little Prince* are by N. G. Golts and Joann Sfar.

Keywords: *The Little Prince*, book covers, reillustration, Igor Kopytoff, biography of things.

Sometimes we take for granted that those classics written and illustrated by the one and same person look exactly the same in every country. However, this is not true even if we leave out typographical questions.

For me, the book cover of *The Little Prince* was for decades like this. In this Finnish book cover Little Prince is standing on a planet which goes closer to blue than actual violet.

One of the biggest differences between different book covers of *The Little Prince* is the colour of the planet. In this German book cover (2005) the planet is clearly violet. There are also differences in the number of stars and planets and also on their position.

On the Polish versions (2010) the planet has two colours. Poland belongs to those countries that has made different – and we could say also strange – versions of the book cover. Both of these books have been printed this year. As far as I know, this is the only glitter or bling bling version of *The Little Prince*. Luckily, there is no glitter glue inside of the book.

Italians have chosen two totally different pictures for the cover (2000 & 2008). Little Prince flying with the help of the birds from 2008 is actually a mirror image of one of the first drawings in the book.

Some cultures have produced even three different types of the book cover. In two of these Korean books we can also see the name in Latin letter. Both French and also English is used, which might sound funny, but we should bear in mind that this



French classic was actually printed first in English at USA in 1943 and in French three years later.

It seems that usually the background of the planet is white, but other alternatives occur also. The most personal choice is red used in the Korean book printed in a picture book format. Koreans have also chosen different picture for the book cover than most of the other nations.

An obvious choice for the background is blue, like in this French paperback (2000).

As *The Little Prince* is admired not only by young people but also by adults, it is not surprising that publishing houses have put more prestigious books on the market. This is a French slipcase with a cheerful cloth cover inside (1999).

And this is a “special de luxe edition of *The Little Prince*” as the British publisher describes the book (2005), which includes genuine cloth slipcase and satin ribbon bookmark.

A bit more modest version of Saint-Exupéry’s book can be found from Wordsworth Classics series (1995).

When we realize that *The Little Prince* has been translated into over 180 languages or dialects, it is quite clear that book covers you just saw, are just a top of an iceberg.

What does it mean, that around the world we have rather different looking books by the one and same author and illustrator?

To find out an answer to this question, I suggest that we turn away from literary studies and research of illustration. It might be an unorthodox approach, but still I suggest that we look these different looking books as objects or things, not just as works of art.

According to anthropologist Igor Kopytoff (1986/2005: 66-67) human biographies can be compared and adapted to biographies of things. His ideas are based on Margaret Meads notion that if we want to understand a culture, we should look what kind of biography is regarded as an embodiment of a succesful social career.



In other words, when we are discussing about the biography of things, we can ask the same questions as we would do, when we speak about people. According to Igor Kopytoff, we can ask at least the following questions:

Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?

My own point is, that the different book covers for *The Little Prince* you just saw, are hints of a shadow in a process where a widely known classic is just not enough for publishing houses and reading audience.

The career of *The Little Prince* is clearly changing. It is not just question of the book covers. There are also different kinds of adaptations of this book. And I am not talking about the numerous adaptations for little children, where Saint-Exupéry's pictures and plot has been chopped into smaller pieces. Also the artwork in itself has been reproduced in different ways in recent years. I will give you three examples.

First, there is the pop-up book published originally in 2009.

Even though it is mentioned in this Finnish pop-up that it is illustrated by the author, it would have been more truthful to say that illustration is based on the original pictures. For example the book cover is an adaptation of the original book. In the new book cover gold has been used and Little Prince is standing on a smooth grey planet even though lively water colours have been used in the original picture. For some reason, Little Prince's bowtie has been changed into a fluttering scarf.

There are different kind of changes in the pictures of the pop-up. The steam of the vulcano has been removed from the front of the Little Prince to back. Some of the original pictures have been united to make the pop-ups more impressive, for instance this picture showing Little Prince at the top of the mountain is based on two different pictures.

The biggest change is at the end of the book, where Little Prince is falling under the black sky into the black dunes. When reader turns this leaf, he sees only a black landscape with a golden star glimmering shortly in the sky. The end of this pop-up is beautiful and visual even though it differs from de Saint-Exupéry's work.



The second example comes from Russia where a reillustration of *The Little Prince* was made by N. G. Golts. Golts made the illustration of *The Little Prince* in 2005 for a Russian publishing company and the book came out in 2007. Even though it is a very skilful and personal illustration, it bears clear hints to the original illustration that de Saint-Exupéry made.

The third example is a French one. Joann Sfar's comic book from 2008 is not just a reillustrated Little Prince, it is also partly a retelling of the classic. Also in this comic novel there are numerous hints to the original illustration.

All these three last examples show, that even the clearest classic written and illustrated by one and same person can and have been reillustrated. And in the case of the comic book there are also changes in the story.

In the comic book storytelling is partly more intense and partly even more aphoristic than in the original novel. Partly this is due to chopping the storytelling stronger into visual and verbal narration.

In the original novel the narrator is underlined to be the illustrator as well, he tells that he is drawing the pictures. The pilot draws also in the comic novel, but he is not unambiguously artist who draws the whole book. Thus the reader of the comic book looks the story more and clearly outdoors than the reader of the novel.

It seems that an unchanged career is just not enough for the copyright holder of *The Little Prince*. An ideal career of a clear world classic is not stable even though we might think so. The recognized ages or periods in the life of *The Little Prince* are thus

1. ordinary and original *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
2. changes in the book covers to wake interest of new and old readers and bookbuyers
3. changes in the illustration
4. changes in the illustration and in the narration

All these four points are already part in the life of *The Little Prince*.

The last questions are, what kinds of changes are we going to see in the near future. Will the plot and illustration be totally changed? Will the story get a second novel, written by a contemporary author? And the last threatening question: will Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's book be disneyficated in one way or another? I hope not.



Bibliography

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