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Anne Berest , Heather Lloyd (Translation)

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Before Françoise Sagan the literary icon there was Françoise Quoirez, an eighteen-year-old Parisian girl, who wrote a novel.

This intimate narrative charts the months in 1954 leading up to the publication of the legendary *Bonjour Tristesse*. We encounter Françoise, her family and friends close-up, in a post-war world that is changing radically; and Mlle Quoirez, in her new guise of Françoise Sagan, will be at the heart of that social change.

Anne Berest was writing her third novel when Sagan's son, Denis Westhoff, asked her to write a book to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the publication of *Bonjour Tristesse*.

Sagan, Paris 1954 Details

Date : Published September 15th 2015 by Gallic Books (first published April 30th 2014)

ISBN : 9781908313898

Author : Anne Berest , Heather Lloyd (Translation)

Format : Paperback 160 pages

Genre : Cultural, France, Biography, Nonfiction

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From Reader Review Sagan, Paris 1954 for online ebook

Hélène Wilkinson says

Ce livre, qui se lit comme une nouvelle, est une description de Françoise Sagan et de son milieu, juste avant la publication du premier roman de Sagan, *Bonjour Tristesse*. On connaît le succès tonitruant qui a suivi la parution de cette œuvre d'une jeune fille de 19 ans, sans aucun bagage littéraire. Mais avant cela, il y a simplement eu un auteur débutant et un éditeur chevronné.

Ce serait forcer le trait que de dire que j'ai pris autant de plaisir à lire Sagan 1954 que *Bonjour Tristesse*, mais je dois dire que ce livre fait partie de mes lectures non romanesques préférées du moment. J'ai aimé «Paris, 1954. Sagan bouscule le monde de l'édition». J'ai aimé les éléments purement biographiques sur Sagan, j'ai appris des choses que je ne savais pas, mais je n'ai pas non plus été assommée par une biographie complète et hyper analytique. J'ai aimé la description de l'espèce d'affolement qui a suivi le succès phénoménal de *Bonjour Tristesse*. Et j'ai aimé avoir une excellente excuse pour relire ce qui est pour moi le roman d'adolescence par excellence, tout comme l'est *Catcher In The Rye* outre-Atlantique.

Et après m'être demandé si cela était vraiment utile, j'ai fini par aimer les incursions autobiographiques dans la narration, avec les interludes introspectifs de l'auteur sur son histoire d'amour qui finit mal. Ces intermèdes ne servent pas à grand chose, ce serait dommage de s'en priver quand même, tout cela est à la fois pertinent et pas, vrai et faux, sincère et affecté ; l'auteur devient ainsi au fil des pages un vrai personnage de Sagan...

Teresa says

2.5

Beyond knowing her name, I knew almost nothing about Françoise Sagan before starting this book. I still don't feel I know much. The book had its impetus in the stated title; but it's not really about Sagan in Paris in 1954, though those elements run through it.

A given nowadays about creative nonfiction is that you may write of things not strictly true if they are in the spirit of truth, but you need to be clear about what you're doing. From the beginning Berest is crystal-clear she's "appropriating [Sagan] for myself, just as a portrait painter imposes his own profile on the portrait of the sitter." (I had issues with several of Berest's metaphors.) As to including herself in the story, Berest says if this wasn't wanted, she shouldn't have been asked. (Here, she sounds defiant; later, her tone will be more apologetic.)

Sometimes her prose seemed simplistic (translation choices?) and sometimes repetitive for such a short book. Berest describes how her own life has gotten in the way of the assignment she accepted at the behest of Sagan's son—he wants his mother not to be forgotten sixty years after the publication of her first book. Due to Berest's life struggles (she's going through a divorce), she'll say that instead of writing one thing about Sagan (for example, her love life), she'll write about another: insight into an author's (capricious) choices.

Berest says Sagan inhabited her and credits that for the growth she achieves by the time she finishes writing the book. Two (superfluous) letters Berest wrote to two men--the first (rather condescending) on how she's

different from when she was in her 20s and the other on why she's written the book the way she has--appear at the end. The second letter contains too much explanation of what her book is, something she's already made clear, and that should've been left to the reader's intelligence anyway.

Perhaps this book is more for those that already love Sagan, as I'm not left with a desire to read her. And I know her son didn't want that.

Emma says

VERDICT: Unusual novel, written at the occasion of *Bonjour Tristesse*'s 60th anniversary. It focuses on the last months that led Françoise Sagan to her resounding success, and offers interesting snippets in the life of an eighteen year old writer.

see my full review:

<http://wordsandpeace.com/2015/09/27/b...>

Fondantsurprise says

An odd biography in that it tells us much about the author, too. But I enjoyed it.

RK says

Lovely read. Novel way to write a biography.

Marita says

3rd January, 2019

1954. WWII is over, but not forgotten. This is the year* in which a precocious eighteen-year-old becomes a literary sensation on the publication of her first novel. That novel is **Bonjour Tristesse**, and the author is of course **Françoise Sagan** (born Françoise Quoirez, 1935-2004). The novel won the prestigious Prix des Critiques and sold very many copies. Approached by Sagan's son Denis Westhoff to write about his mother, author Anne Berest examines this red letter year in the life of Françoise Sagan.

?

Ms. Berest presents a rather strange stew of autobiography, biography and biographical fiction. *"It is to be neither a biography, nor a journal, nor a novel. Let's just call it a story."*** She talks about her own circumstances and why she is writing about Françoise Sagan, she provides biographical details of Sagan complete with notes of her sources, and she muses and speculates. She interviews people who knew Françoise, including the latter's great friend Florence Malreaux (daughter of French author André Malreaux), she visits places where Françoise had been, and she imagines editor René Julliard as he lies in bed reading

the manuscript of *Bonjour Tristesse* after attending a dinner party. She imagines his surprise that an eighteen-year-old girl could write a novel of that calibre, and Ms Berest also imagines the young Françoise's reaction to being published and receiving a prestigious book prize. Ms Berest explains how Françoise arrives at the name Sagan through her love of the works of Marcel Proust.

The details of Françoise Sagan's year of stepping into the limelight as a famous author are interesting enough, but I find Ms Berest's autobiographical interspersions intrusive and of less interest. More Sagan please...

There are some charming photographs in the book. I also enjoyed the snippets of Parisian life at that time.

*As eighteen-year-old Françoise sets off to find a publisher, another boy in another country is also getting ready for an appointment with fame: *"At that very moment, on that fourth of January 1954, a boy of the same age – eighteen, to be precise – is recording two songs. It costs him four dollars, which he pays for out of his own pocket, and he records them in a small studio specialising in the black soul music of Memphis."* That boy was Elvis Presley.

**Which is why it appears on both my 'fiction' and 'nonfiction' shelves.

Poppy says

This book is extraordinary and so much more than a run-of-the-mill biography; rather than striving to detail events accurately and maintain an element of objective detachment, I love how Berest admits to 'slip into the mindset of Françoise Sagan... inhabit her life in order to forget [her] own.' The outcome is both a rich account of the months leading up to the publication of *Bonjour Tristesse* but also an insight into the power of literature through Berest's own heartfelt story of her own journey while researching and writing Sagan's.

Highly recommend, full review to follow in April.

Catherine says

50 ans après, Anne Berest s'attache à nous raconter 1954, année immortelle, s'il en est, pour être celle de la naissance d'une écrivaine hors norme, Madame Françoise Sagan, avec la parution de *Bonjour tristesse*. C'est magnifique ! ce n'est pas tout à fait une biographie, ni tout à fait une autofiction. C'est un moment magnifique à passer en compagnie d'Anne Berest qui nous invite à l'écouter. Elle nous offre en partage les réflexions qui lui viennent sur sa propre vie et ses choix à la lumière de ceux de Françoise Sagan. Elle s'y est plongée à la demande du fils de Sagan pour la rédaction d'un livre dont le principal objet serait l'année 54. Une oeuvre toute à fait originale qui donne envie de lire encore et toujours plus Sagan, Berest et tant d'autre. Rarement je termine un livre avec l'envie de relire tous les livres dont elle parle et qui ont croisés mon chemin, mais plus encore l'envie de lire tous ceux que j'ai ratés ! Alors c'est un livre à lire absolument si l'on aime Sagan si l'on aime Berest, mais surtout si l'on veut sourire en fermant la dernière page, tout à la satisfaction d'avoir passé le plus délicieux des moments en merveilleuse compagnie. Merci Madame Berest pour ce moment d'insoupçonné plaisir.

Mandy says

Francoise Sagan's son Denis Westhoff asked novelist Anne Berest to write a book marking the 60th anniversary of the publication of *Bonjour Tristesse*. What Berest came up with is this admittedly self-indulgent but ultimately quite enjoyable meditation on Sagan, the publication of the book and her own relation to writing. I found the story of the publication and the description of 1950s French literary life and the characters who moved within it very interesting indeed. There's an immediacy to Berest's writings at times that make the milieu come to life, and her descriptions of Sagan's introduction to the world of publishing is very atmospheric. I was bothered by the *mélange* of fact and fiction, however – although the writing seems authentic Berest herself admits she has let her imagination run wild at times and simply made up scenes. But at the end, I couldn't help wondering what the point of this book is. It appears to be more about Berest's own interior life rather than Sagan's – and Sagan's has been examined far more objectively elsewhere. So a cautious "yes" to this very French book, as it has left me with a vivid picture of Sagan doing the rounds in Paris when her fame was just beginning to blossom, and that at least was compelling.

Vivek Tejuja says

Some books have an age for it. You just cannot read *Catcher in the Rye* at 30. You will not get it. No matter how hard you try. The same goes for a beautiful well-known book called "*Bonjour Tristesse*" whose author Francoise Sagan was only eighteen when she wrote it.

I was eighteen when I read. That was the time I came out to my family and this book was one of those read that year, after I came out, that helped me see myself better and clearer for sure. There is no other way to put it and no better way to pay homage to it than read a book about how "*Bonjour Tristesse*" became what it did and that's what I did when I read "*Sagan, Paris 1954*" by Anne Berest and translated by Heather Lloyd from French.

"*Sagan, Paris 1954*" traces the life of Francoise Quoirez, before she became a literary sensation. It is of the months in 1954 that led to the publication of her legendary novel. Berest writes the book in the form of a paean – a poetic-prose meditation on the young author's life – the atmosphere in which she grew, her friends, her parents, her brother and her life in Paris. The book reads like a journal – a journal of Sagan (in some bits – some fabricated) as written by Berest. The reader sometimes doesn't know whose perspective or whose life is being talked about – I liked the intermingling. It worked for me for sure.

If you are looking for writing tips or how it is to be a writer at eighteen, then this book is not for you at all. This book is for lovers of literature who want to know more about Sagan and how she became what she did. Berest's writing will keep you turning the pages and leave you hungering for more. Lloyd's translation is precise and cuts clean through the book.

As a reader, I loved how Berest took me through the journey of a confident writer who knew that the only way she would be was in writing and getting a book published. She was never short on confidence. Sagan's life in these couple of months was nothing short of a rollercoaster ride which Berest intricately and with great brevity takes us through. I love this book – it is a great mix – a take on real life and life that is closely reimagined – taking some liberties but which could very well be true.

Elizabeth Barelli says

Beautifully written, every word well chosen, every paragraph its sense of poetry. Incredibly creative sense of narration mixing fiction, biography and auto-biography. Never read anything like that before.

miss.mesmerized mesmerized says

The last days before the unknown girl Françoise Quoirez turns into one of the most sought-after writer of her time, idol of her fellows and icon of her time. The year 1954 marked the turning point, when she offered her manuscript of “Bonjour tristesse” to three publishing houses and to her family’s astonishment was immediately accepted. A star in literature was born, in those days which also marked the beginning of Brigitte Bardot’s career as an actress and Paris was the centre of the global intellectual and cultural life. Françoise, now named Sagan, was suddenly catapulted into the middle of it.

Already for I long time I have admired Françoise Sagan’s writing, not just the best known “Bonjour tristesse”, but also “Aimez-vous Brahms” left me thinking for weeks after reading it. Anne Berest’s way of approaching the phenomenon is quite unique: she is not providing another biography with an accurate account of what happened exactly in this year. She uses print materials as well as interviews and memories of companions to create a partly invented and partly accurate description of the last days of Françoise Quoirez and the first days of Françoise Sagan. This is mixed with her own thoughts in the process of writing and the problems in the writing process itself. The result is an interesting book which is always entertaining to read and makes you feel like part of the process of approaching the phenomenon Françoise Sagan.

Apart from the protagonist, you also get a deep insight in the French culture and society of the 1950s, it is often just side remarks that reveal a lot about the time.

Ruth Brumby says

It was fascinating to read about the year in Sagan's life when Bonjour Tristesse was published. Anne Berest researched thoroughly and conveys the places, clothes, people and music so that they feel totally real and immediate. I enjoyed the presence Anne herself in the book because it contributed to this immediacy and because, especially at the beginning, the structure was elegant and the layering interesting. However Sagan herself did not quite emerge from the various views of her: those of friends, critics, press, photographs, biographer etc. To some extent this is part of the point - the past and especially certain characters/celebrities are impenetrable. But, for me, the book ended with just too much of the biographer and not enough of the subject.

Yves Gounin says

L'histoire est connue : en janvier 1954 François Quoirez envoie un manuscrit à quelques éditeurs parisiens.

Enthousiasmé, Julliard accepté aussitôt de la publier.

Problème : Françoise est mineure et n'a pas demandé l'autorisation de ses parents qui la lui donnent finalement, à condition de publier sous pseudonyme.

Françoise emprunte celui d'un personnage de Proust. Elle s'appellera Sagan et entamera, sitôt la publication de "Bonjour tristesse", une vie d'écriture, de succès et d'excès.

Anne Berest raconte cette année 1954 qui vit la jeune inconnue se transformer en phénomène de foire et Sagan percer sous Quoirez.

Elle le fait en entrelaçant la vie de cette adolescente surdouée avec sa vie à elle, femme de 30 ans en pleine séparation avec le père de sa fille.

Ce procédé, qui consiste pour l'écrivain à briser le tabou de la première personne pour parler de lui à l'occasion de l'écriture de son roman, est utilisé par quelques uns des romanciers français les plus stimulants: Annie Ernaux, Catherine Cusset, Emmanuel Carrère, Laurent Binet ...

Très novateur il y a dix ans, il a perdu de son originalité.

Mais le plus grave est qu'il fonctionne mal entre François Sagan et Anne Berest. On ne comprend pas l'écho que suscite chez cette trentenaire, mère de famille, en pleine crise sentimentale, l'histoire de ce "charmant petit monstre" (l'expression est de Mauriac) passée trop vite de l'enfance à l'âge adulte.

Autant on retrouve avec intérêt l'ambiance, très bien restituée et impeccablement documentée, de ces années 50 (l'atmosphère est la même que dans le film "Yves Saint Laurent"). Autant le livre perd tout intérêt lorsqu'il prend la tangente de l'auto-fiction.

Antonomasia says

A mélange of biography, recent-historical novel and *autofiction*: Anne Berest, a French novelist in her early thirties, going through a divorce, is approached to write about the beginning of Françoise Sagan's career. We hear snippets of Berest's life and her feelings about the project alongside chronological vignettes about Sagan - who, whilst she may have changed later, in the mid-fifties never had to take off her rose-tinted glasses: her teenage fantasies of writerly fame came true mere weeks after she handed her first manuscript to publishers.

It was quite interesting to learn about Sagan - and her glamorous world with *La Nouvelle Vague* happening on the doorstep - via this breezily readable novella, but I thought Berest missed a trick in saying nothing about a) how much harder it is to get published now, the exponential increase in competition and change in procedures or b) hunger for fame being more unusual in Sagan's day but if some sources are to be believed is near-universal among kids these days... Aside from a few mentions of websites and emails, this book could have been written twenty years ago. I'm not sure how different things are in the French literary world, what with their fortresses against Amazon and preservation of the equivalent of the Net Book Agreement, but French light fiction exists in a fairytale world of being published at the drop of a hat, and meeting famous authors on every street corner, which gets my cynical English back up. I'd far rather some biting humour about how it really is than these fluffy daydreams, and rainbows at the end of which are really only illusion or resentment.

I am rent by ambivalence towards the *autofiction* element. I felt inspired and invigorated by it. I like writing that way, I like feeling 'given' the freedom to interpolate myself into other material; therapy-speak is too much part of me not to have an affinity with it. Yet I also think that there might be too much memoir about

already, and can't we hear about *anything* now without the intrusion of tedious auto-omphalism? As compromise, I imagined a different structure: Berest's autobiographical paragraphs as an appendix or separate section following the rest. Though however it was organised, this example lacked the depth of insight and/or humour that can make me love memoir-ish writing without reserve: the sections about Sagan were more alive and engaging than about Berest. (My favourite scene was Françoise's process of choosing her ~~user-~~ pen-name whilst looking through Proust.)

Writing fiction about a historical figure whose status towers over one's own is an impertinent and often hubris-filled act: I respect Berest's attempt to produce a book that obliquely recognises this without being mired in self-doubt, but this was as easily consumed, as nutritious and forgettable as a reasonably nice small *pâtisserie*-cake.
