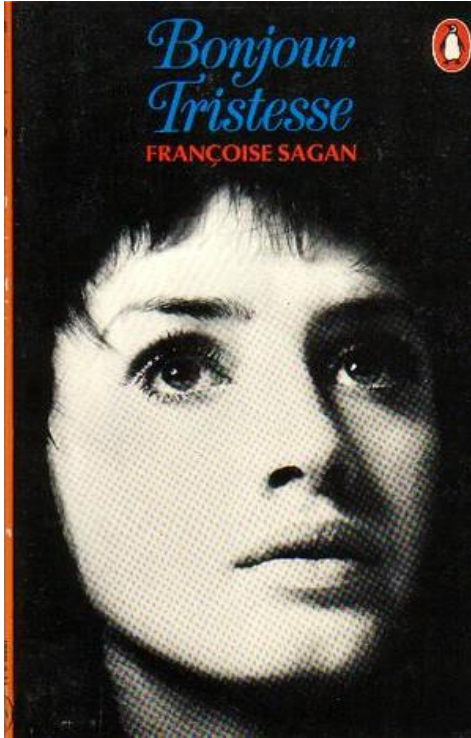


**BOOK GROUP 2**  
**APRIL 2023**

**BONJOUR TRISTESSE – FRANCOISE SAGAN**



This book was written by a remarkably mature and accomplished teenage French writer (18 years old) in the late 1950s. It explores inter-age relationships, multiple manifestations of love, morality and lack of inhibition within the privileged, monied society of post-war France. After the French publication, England's John Murray agreed on a translated version - though with many signs of a "blue pencil" due to the erotic nature of the book. This also shows the contrast of semi-erotic literature by an 18 year old French girl versus the eventual publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H.Lawrence in 1960 after much argument and publicity. (Apparently one of the prosecution counsel appealing to the jury said "Is it a book you would wish your wife or servants to read!") If you read the French uncensored version, the eroticism is much more evident due to the French attitude being much more relaxed.

The book is written in the first person and details the intimate thoughts of a teenager who typically thinks only of herself. Cecile has only recently arrived to spend time with her handsome, socialite father and his lovers who are always beautiful young women who enjoy the wealthy glamorous life he provides for them. She accepts the lovers as necessary for her father's pleasure but they do not affect her own enjoyment of life. She revels in the relaxed, pleasurable, unstructured lifestyle on the Cote d'Azur. She has her first sexual encounter with Cyril, a student of similar age, whom she meets on the beach one day and with whom she continues to spend time. Life is one long pleasurable holiday.

One day her father announces that his philandering days are over and he is to marry Anne, an old friend of many years who knows Cecile. Although Cecile likes Anne, she is not happy when Anne tries to prevent her from continuing her leisurely lifestyle in order for her to complete her studies. Anne's arrival and her assumption of a maternal role threatens to thwart Cecile's hedonistic lifestyle. Anne forbids her to see Cyril so she can spend time studying for her degree. Knowing her father's weaknesses, Cecile hatches a plan that achieves her goal but which ends in tragedy. However, both father and daughter resume their self-centred lifestyle:

"Life took up again along its old lines as it was bound to"

### **Comments from some members of the group and obituary**

"I had mixed feelings about this book. I enjoyed the fresh, lively writing and the authentic sense of teenage self-obsession; I did though find the final twist a teenage melodrama too far. Overall, I was glad to have read the book (as a modern classic that, to be honest, I probably would never have read otherwise) but was also glad that it was a concise novella that was over quickly (much like Cecile's carefree youth)."

"Rereading the book now I think the point of the story that comes across is about how a clever young person can knowingly develop power to manipulate, seduce and control older friends and family and seemingly take an evil thrill in the consequences and even after a horrific ending episode, with minimal reflection, move on with life"

"She doesn't believe other people can have emotions as strong as hers and she is "the most important person"

"Her deep analysis of being in love , and as an observer of other people's feelings is very French"

"This is a short story about how a 17-year-old French girl Celeste seeks revenge when her life is upset after her wealthy, widowed father announces he is going to marry Anne, one of his many lovers. I thought the relationship between Cecile and her father unrealistic"

**N.B. Sagan wrote her own obituary for the *Dictionary of Authors* compiled by Jérôme Garcin: "Appeared in 1954 with a slender novel, *Bonjour Tristesse*, which created a scandal worldwide. Her death, after a life and a body of work that were equally pleasant and botched, was a scandal only for herself."**