

Alfred Cismaru

FRANCOISE SAGAN'S THEORY OF COMPLICITY

ON JUNE 21, 1965, FRANCOISE SAGAN fêted her thirtieth birthday, and in an article written not very long ago for *Vogue* ("The Woman Of Thirty", July 1963), she wrote that she was looking forward to the beginning of the fourth decade of her existence. She seemed to foresee in that era of maturity an escape from the "summer of life which is the period between twenty and thirty." She anticipated with pleasure the abandoning of that need to burn, to commit excesses, and she waited for the "charming spring of the thirties when one doesn't get married any more except for precise reasons, when love is also and above all a pleasure, and when one discovers ways of living—material and moral—that are much less tiring." Such considerations are not merely intended to soothe the fears of sophisticated aging readers of women's magazines. They point to true credos on the part of Sagan, a writer for whom the many literary successes have perhaps not offset her innumerable personal conflicts. Her amorous involvements need not be cited here; it is sufficient to point to the frame in which she views her future relationship with the opposite sex: "First of all, men will find it much harder to make me suffer and this is not unimportant and they know it. From burning enemies too much loved during our twenties, they become tender accomplices (vaguely dangerous just the same, one must say), of our thirties." And engaging in a bit of advice, no doubt expected by the audience addressed, she closes her article with a cunning suggestion: "We will give them [men] the delicious confession of our weakness—I am no longer twenty, you know—Yes, I have loved X a great deal, I was very young. Then men will become tender, they will sink gently into our past, moved, thoughtful, without noticing that in our present life we are triumphantly carefree."

Françoise Sagan's personal ideal is perhaps best synthesized by the "triumphantly carefree" existence she anticipates. But her particular hopes and aspirations would be entirely meaningless to the literary historian were it not

that they are so completely reflected in so many of her characters and indeed in countless young people of the generation to which she belongs. For she would not have found the vast audience she did, or have been so successful, had she not captured the widespread mood of her time which aims to bandage our disquietudes with the illusory dressing of amorality.

Sagan's continued reputation as a novelist, and more recently as a playwright too, therefore merits further consideration on the part of critics, particularly since her fame is already thirteen years old (she wrote *Bonjour tristesse* at the age of seventeen) and does not yet show any diminished lustre. For outside of parenthetical comments incorporated in larger works and in anthologies, only two studies deal exclusively with the French authoress.¹ Sagan's proficiency in the 1960s makes an up-to-date investigation timely and, without meaning to make even a restricted survey exhaustive (it would be quite impossible within the limited space of an article), the present essay will deal only with her more recent works.

Viewing life as a mountain of boredom replete with solitary caves, Françoise Sagan searches desperately for facile answers. She realizes that, in his blind, painful and stubborn climb, man can find solace and comfort only in the contemplation of the equally calamitous destiny of others. For there is no solution outside of man: God is silent, impassible; He is Supreme only because He is supremely carefree, that is to say unconcerned, aloof, stolid. Man's loneliness, then, cannot be vanquished; but it can be reduced, temporarily, through the scheme of complicity referred to above. Men and women need not fall in love; that complicates things, points to immaturity. The truly adult, the woman in her thirties, for example, fatigued with her past but modestly excited by the unknown that lies ahead, will simply seek to create a gentle music, double bass and flute, while waiting for the grand violins of a hypothetical passion. For passion can exist without love, just as man remains alive without God. The only requirement is that passion be entered into calculatingly and that it never become divorced from complicity.

An early example of such an arrangement is *A Certain Smile* (1956). Dominique, the heroine, an avid reader of the "admirable book of Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Age of Reason*", is a typically modern Sorbonne student: intelligent, vaguely existentialist, and modestly bored with her first lover, Bertrand, a boy who lacks the imagination and the *savoir-faire* she dreams of in an ideal man. This ideal she soon finds in the person of Bertrand's uncle, Luc, a married quadragenarian, a modern imitation of Don Juan whose taste for bikinis and Scotch-and-soda opens up a whole new world for the eighteen-year-old

passion-starved Dominique. The two vacation at Cannes for two weeks, in palatial surroundings: the beach and water skiing during the day, sumptuous meals and discothèque in small, romantic restaurants in the evening, whisky and moonlight at night. This is not simply the relationship of two amoral beings who live by the senses alone; it is a deliberate arrangement, a complicity entered into after due thought and consideration. Dominique and Luc do not speak of love; they do not trick each other; their gestures are not accompanied by the fanciful clichés usually exchanged between sexual partners. They know that their liaison must be of short duration—it will last only so long as the two will be unable to bore each other: "It would only be a game", she thinks at first, "a little dangerous, but so exciting because they had this in common that they could not bore each other." Besides, "to live is nothing but to arrange it so that you be as content as possible", and the definition of happiness is, according to her, "the absence of boredom." Boredom, however, is an acute enemy; it is the sword of Damocles hanging over the head of contemporary young men and women, and not even the most calculated arrangement can long withstand its assault. The very illegality of the affair, that which most attracted Dominique in the beginning, wears out. Its nature must change in order for boredom not to set in. Dominique is trapped by the mirages of the world through which Luc travels; he is no longer a vehicle, he becomes a destination: "Luc, it is no longer possible. You cannot abandon me. I can't live without you. You must stay with me. I'm alone, I'm alone and it's unbearable." The pact is thus broken and the arrangement is doomed: Luc is too old and experienced to fall into the trap into which Dominique has stumbled. He leaves for the United States. At his return he retains no recollection of the affair, no tenderness for what was: he is ready for another partner, a new complicity. Dominique suffers, of course, but not passionately. She is conscious that love must be defeated, that she has learned a great lesson, that the next time around she will possess all the expertness Luc had shown. For love, when it ceases to be an efficient means of eliminating boredom, becomes pure pain; she will therefore "wring its neck out until it is dead", with "a certain smile" of indifference, trying to stay clear of deep emotions in the future, taking things as they come, becoming involved at times, but always from a distance, detached, calm, reserved. She will not cry, or laugh, at anything, and the purest beauty, that of Mozart's music, will only evoke "a certain smile".

Dominique's cynicism cannot be dismissed with a pharisaical libel. Boredom is, among other things, the modern malady of material progress, and

it is here to stay and be coped with. The weariness and dullness of terrestrial existence is also the logical consequence of a Godless universe, of the solitude of man who has no hell to fear, no Paradise to hope for. Dominique knows that only the lucid are aware of this consequence, and she is modestly proud of her acute perception. One is bored, then, because one sees clearly, and because an honest look cannot be long blinded by the mirages of even an ideal or felicitous episode in one's life; for at the core of things and emotions there is no reason, only chance, no permanence, only temporality. One loves without justification, one suffers without cause, while time and the ability to forget nullify both pleasure and pain. The acquiescence in these facts is the ransom one pays for lucidity. Dominique never forgets that opposed to bored beings are the *others*, the amusing, the strong, the free, those who have outwitted the long trickery that life is. Luc is one such individual, the Great Teacher who happened in her solitude, whom she will no doubt forget, but whose patterns will remain deeply implanted in her most inner fibres.

Obviously Dominique is not evil. "For her and for countless young men and women of her generation Christ is dead, of course, but we know that they are not lost so long as there is still in them the sparkle of life."² We know, too, that we all become like Dominique when our own hopes leave us and there is nothing left but fear and uncertainty. That that is so is proved, I think, by the fact that *A Certain Smile* sold the 600,000 copies of its first edition and the 250,000 of its second printing in less than three months. Its translation to date in twenty-three languages points also to the universality of the heroine and her problems. Moreover, Dominique possesses within her a spiritual penchant. One perceives in her what Charles du Bos, writing about conscience, called "this older brother, a little more serious, more grave, who keeps walking always a few steps in front of us." Dominique has none of the animalistic instincts that Cécile, her predecessor in *Bonjour tristesse*, had possessed. She knows that when she had left Bertrand she had also abandoned an inexorably tranquil life, that guilt is a permanent burden on one's shoulders in spite of the absence of a system of punishment and reward: her frequent feelings of remorse for the suffering caused Bertrand and Luc's wife testify to that. Finally, her embodiment of our worst moments of depression, our own all-too-often-felt loneliness and attempted cures of it, point to *A Certain Smile* as the "work which like no other recent novel expresses best the vision of a world abandoned on an extra-terrestrial planet, that of boredom and isolation."³

The themes of ennui, of solitude, and of calculated passion are reborn

in Françoise Sagan's next novel, *Dans un an, dans un mois* (1957). This semi-successful book has appeared in this country under the unfelicitous title of *Those Without Shadows*. The translator's choice detracts from the French original whose significance is that time, which unfolds within the present, is indeed part of a concealed past, and instead places the emphasis on the faceless characters: Bernard, Josée, and Nicole, a vague triangle of sketchy individuals whose emotions and beds are equally mixed-up and inextricably confusing. Between Bernard and the two women in his life the game has ended before it had actually begun. The characters move according to pre-determined calculations. The new situations and new milieus entered seem antique and derisory because they have all been visited beforehand. The liquored reveries and robot-like seductions evoke a curious, unreal world. But the book is not simply a "journey into nothingness" by an author who "appears to be down to her last few drops of gas", one who simply "has the ability to put one little word after another."⁴ Such harsh criticism fails to observe the underlying theme of the novel: the impossibility of looking forward to a probable, let alone bright future, because we have become so blasé, materially and morally, that the unknown is knowable in advance, depriving one of all but the most fugitive interest. Insecurity, too, demands that our most minute shifts be anticipated, weighed, and resolved before they occur, not only by us but also by those we come in contact with, in a complicity that assassinates the future more assuredly than physical death. And yet the safety of complicity is so badly needed in our war-torn world that for it we give up the etherealized aura of the unknown, those magnificent and dark vistas which are still devoid of the light, colour, and boredom of the present. Bernard, like Dominique and the woman of thirty envisioned by Sagan, experience the minutiae and the totality of the future only through the medium of extra-legal partnerships and with the help of tender accomplices. The profound sadness of such a passage through life is at the core of *Dans un an, dans un mois*; and even if the authoress fails to propose a remedy or to admit the possibility of an alternative, the reader is nevertheless struck by the urgency of the problem and his own involvement with it. While Françoise Sagan's third novel does not have the reputation of her first two, it is difficult to accept the recalcitrant domestic reception it has suffered: "If you really enjoy a brief expedition into nothingness, this is just the book for you. But for the price, I'd prefer a visit to any zoo with all the peanuts I could eat. It would be better value."⁵ *Dans un an, dans un mois* did not awaken either the sympathy or the pity evoked by *Bonjour tristesse* or *A Certain Smile*; but it does, when viewed within the entire framework of

Sagan's work, provoke the identification of readers with personages who share their want of assurance and who cannot perceive more efficient means of combatting it. "I'm lost", declared Françoise Sagan at the end of another article she wrote for *Vogue* ("Follow the Fashion Or Leave the Country," March, 1963). The reason? "From eighteen to twenty-five I lived in a sweater and skirt. I am no longer of an age for these simplicities. Worse: I no longer want them. It came slowly, insidiously, but the harm is done: fashion amuses me." These tongue-in-cheek affirmations conceal a gravity perhaps unsuspected by the readers addressed: namely that from fashion to passion, all is but a source of amusement.

A much more successful novel was Françoise Sagan's next publication, *Do You Love Brahms* (1959). The principal characters here are adult: the thirty-nine year old Paule, a professional interior decorator; Roger, her middle-aged lover, a rich businessman whose virility makes Paule forget the onrush of wrinkles on her face; finally, Simon, a twenty-five-year-old playboy, the male counterpart of Dominique, a romantic and beguiling youngster who longs for vain and untouchable domains. The relationship between Paule and Roger is based strictly on complicity: she has, without using them, all the freedoms of an unattached woman; he, much like Luc, returns to the security of Paule's arms after each fling with younger, more seductive girls. The two need each other not only for their sporadic moments of calculated passion, but also for the assurance that at the end of a busy day, when work ends in routine and cocktails fail to break the monotony, another human being, a friend, is there to listen, to nod, to prove the existence of the other. But of such a partnership Simon also dreams. His reveries resemble those of Dominique, with the only difference that his end up in love before he manages to conquer Paule. The older woman, beset by still one other infidelity on the part of Roger, inadvertently meets Simon, who invites her to a concert at the Salle Pleyel. His question, "Do you love Brahms . . .", seemed "suddenly to reveal an enormous forgetfulness, all that she had forgotten, all the questions she had deliberately refrained from asking herself." Simon's need of her does more than give Paule the illusion of youth; it rejuvenates her spiritually. And so, without love, but with immoderate tenderness and personal satisfaction she gives herself to the younger man, whose own disenchantment finds temporary relief. However, this new complicity is doomed beforehand because Simon's love is not simply that of an adolescent for the savoir-faire and experience of an older woman. It is a sincere and profound affection, much like the affection that Dominique had developed for Luc. Only Paule, a Dominique grown up

and imbued with all the lessons taught by the Lucs in her life, knows the impossibility of permanence in a relationship that lacks the security of pre-determined and reasoned episodes. Also, Simon's restoration of Paule's youth becomes a burden, for it points to a dependency she is too old to acquire. Roger, on the other hand, has nothing further to reveal to her. He is simply an accomplice, and the two have nothing to fear from each other. Their vulnerability is equal, as is their profound and derisory reciprocal need. For in the midst of an empty and boring existence, the only possible certitude is that of having nothing worse to fear than the limiting confines of a personally constructed prison. Infidelities no longer torment Paule because she is now above the need to change Roger. And so, the cell in which she moves is there, and it is real and reassuring against the void of loneliness that life is outside, with its unchecked emotions, unending struggles, and uncertain future.

Do You Love Brahms reveals, then, the same basic tenets that Miss Sagan's books have accustomed us to. The only difference lies in the mastery of treatment: this is no longer the work of a disenchanting young girl for an equally morose and still youthful generation. It is the creation of a mature writer who, although chronologically young, is perfectly at home with the feelings and apprehensions of older women. It is also a much better written novel because the clarity and economy of expression that she had always evidenced is here increasingly appealing. The work has enjoyed considerable success in Europe and especially in the U.S.A., as is proved by the fact that it has been adapted for the screen and that an abridged version has been published in a general magazine (*Cosmopolitan*, March, 1960). As a matter of fact, this last, perhaps dubious honour (certainly rarely given to a foreign publication) points to the wide public reception that Sagan's novels enjoy. This is not generally the case with critical opinion: "That a person so young can make a fortune with books of less than two hundred pages is an injustice",⁹ constitutes a typical comment used to belittle her works. But in spite of such arguments, in spite of her amorality and the complete absence of permanent solutions to today's problems, Miss Sagan manages to capture our attention and to hold it steadfastly in her delicate and cogent hands.

A year after *Do You Love Brahms*, Françoise Sagan turned to the theatre. It was as if her apprenticeship had been done and she was now ready for a tighter, therefore more complex form. *A Castle in Sweden* (1960), her first play, proved to be no less than her novels a successful undertaking. It ran at the Atelier for three consecutive years, even though the best the critics found to say about it was that it was based "on the elegant formula of fantasy,

sin, crime, and characterization that it so smoothly, brilliantly encompasses.⁷⁷ A complicated intrigue is here masterfully handled: Hugo, a bigamist, staged the death and burial of his first wife, Ophélie, in order to marry Eléonore; to this *ménage à trois* is added the presence of Frédéric, a distant cousin with whom Eléonore enters a sexual complicity designed to dispel, temporarily, her boring existence in a castle far from Stockholm, surrounded by snow, a castle in which all the inhabitants, including her incestuous brother, Sébastien, dress in Louis XV costumes to order to please the eccentric Agathe, sister of Hugo and owner of the premises. Frédéric, however, commits the error of falling in love with Eléonore. To escape the complication of sincere sentiments, she will proceed to scare her lover into thinking that Hugo will kill him if their liaison is discovered. To re-enforce the scheme another murder is staged, that of an old servant at the hands of Hugo. In the meantime, parallel to the triangle of Eléonore, Frédéric, and Hugo, moves the couple Ophélie and Sébastien. Their affair has been prompted by his desire to escape the weight of his incestuous feelings for Eléonore, and by Ophélie's nymphomania, although in many of Sagan's heroines it is impossible to distinguish between morbid and uncontrollable sexual desire and ordinary promiscuity. When Ophélie becomes pregnant, Hugo's jealousy is awakened. From the object she had become after her *death*, she reassumes her position as Hugo's first possession. Seemingly enraged, he will proceed to lock her and her lover up in a closet in which there is enough oxygen only for a few hours. To escape what seems to be a lunatic asylum, and to liberate Eléonore, Frédéric, in spite of the snowstorm, leaves for Stockholm, whence he intends to fetch the police. Whereupon the servant reappears as alive as before, and Ophélie and Sébastien are freed. A moment later arrives the news of the discovery of Frédéric's frozen body. Calm acquiescence more than surprise is the general attitude of the quaint characters. And amidst debate on selection of a name for Ophélie's child, a telegram is brought in, announcing the impending visit of another distant relative. Like Frédéric and, as we now learn, like the others before him, the newcomer will undoubtedly meet with the same violent death.

In *A Castle in Sweden* the characters have found more than a casual and temporary escape from the monotonous and boring existence of a group of old-fashioned aristocrats encircled by a remote and uncanny abode. Their complicity is so perfectly set up—from their Louis XV type of attire to their staged and real crimes—that the spectator is often taken completely by surprise and is unable to distinguish between the level of reality and that of the fantastic. Hugo, in spite of his bigamy and Eléonore, with all her infidelities,

have a tacit understanding that is, for them, more reassuring and salutary than the usual emotional feelings between husband and wife. Theirs is a perfect pact, for they have nothing to fear from each other or from the minor characters who help and serve their complicity. The world is no longer menacing—they have even bought the police in the area—and, in their own togetherness, they are self-sufficient. Almost, that is, for an outsider is periodically needed to add fuel, as it were, to their personal contingency and freedom.

It would seem, then, that to the illicit sexual associations of her past works, Sagan adds partnership in crime as the extra ingredient that could ensure a more stable, more lasting escape from solitude and ennui. But obviously the author does not suggest criminal activity as either a good or a possible solution. For she and we do not live in remote Swedish castles or dress in Louis XV costumes. And while moral deterrents are non-existent for her and for many in our century, it is not always workable to escape civil castigation by means of bribing the authorities. Françoise Sagan knows it, and so do the spectators who, after viewing the play, realize more deeply than ever the impossibility of permanent solutions. In effect, then, *A Castle in Sweden* remands us from complicity in violent action to the lesser offence of sexual misdemeanour as the more acceptable if not so effective remedy for boredom and insecurity.

Her next play, *Sometimes With Violins* (1962), evoking the sentimental waltzes occasionally played outdoors by small-town bands, is a simple melodrama whose pivotal character is Charlotte, an aging prostitute. She has been kept in the stuffy mansion of a local notable, together with her gigolo lover, under the very eyes of the old man's sister, an avaricious gossip-monger who puts up with the situation in the hope of inheriting her brother's fortune. But when the old fox dies, the soiled trio's hopes are crushed: the entire estate has been left to a distant relative, a young man with a low I.Q., little respect for money, and a great deal of naïve generosity. Charlotte's immediate step is to enter into a well-planned complicity with the youth, to whom she will teach "the ways of the world". Her next undertaking, entirely unplanned and, as it turns out, quite deadly, is to fall in love with him. The young man, however, is completely incapable of comprehending this highly stylized type of affection. He is accommodating, to be sure, for he will even marry her in order to regularize their liaison, but he cannot understand what is expected or required of him. As in the case of Dostoevski's idiot, however, his innocence and kindness make his lack of *savoir-faire* and intelligence bearably ludicrous—to all but to Charlotte, of course, for she has betrayed the basic requirement

of complicity, that is to say the safe distance of loveless passion. The lesson of love she teaches him in the last act of the play, in the extraordinary long speech she delivers on the devouring, cannibalistic quality of passion, fails to impress the young man who listens, his mouth wide-open, smiling emptily from time to time, as if some fantastic fairy-tale story were being narrated. And so, once more a partnership hampered by love will end in catastrophe: for Charlotte is not immune to suicide; indeed she is familiar with it, as her gigolo coarsely reminds her. Did she not waltz an evening away in his arms while some young man, desperately waiting for a word from her, killed himself in the long silence?

Sometimes With Violins was only a modestly successful play. Its setting, the provincial centre of Poitiers, as well as its crass personages, have given it a bourgeois quality that did not quite please the highly sophisticated Parisian audiences. Charlotte's spiritual evaluation but also her *sinking* into the troubled waters of sincere love, lend the play a touching though temporary excellence: for Sagan never forgets that human misery abides in uncalculated emotions, and that, to fill the heart with contentment (which is the most man can do) Cupid, the most evil of gods, must be destroyed.

Perhaps the author's message is beginning to wear out, and the belabouring of the themes of solitude, ennui, and complicity has reached a point of diminishing returns. Perhaps, too, in the 1960s she is working too fast to create works of lasting quality such as *A Certain Smile* and *Do You Love Brahms*, each of which has taken two years of effort. Miss Sagan seems to be caught in the success experienced in the 1950s and to be now producing literary compositions of average worth. *Sometimes With Violins* falls into this category, as does her next hurriedly-written novel, *The Wonderful Clouds* (1962). This long short story revolves around the struggle of a young woman, Josée, to free herself from a possessive and jealous husband to whom she is more an object than a human being. His cruelties are matched, however, by her frequent infidelities. A completely amoral individual, Josée is unable to understand that her husband's attitude is in fact the result of her own excessive promiscuity. Marriage for her is a platitude that cannot even begin to compare with the carefree tranquillity of illicit affairs. But she is not evil, and she does not provoke her husband openly. As a matter of fact, the precautions she takes are less designed to provide her own security than to spare him the pain of discovering the whole truth. A final break occurs nevertheless, and Josée becomes free of all traditional bonds.

The story has its poignant moments, but it is difficult to share Sagan's

seeming admiration for the *liberated* woman whose complicities will no longer be hampered by a loving and domineering husband. One wonders, too, for how long Josée will be able to enjoy her newly-acquired freedom. Will not love, the fierce enemy of contentment, make her fall, sooner or later, into the trap that Dominique, Simon, Frédéric, and Charlotte found unavoidable? But of course Miss Sagan is not concerned with permanent solutions, and Josée is quite willing to settle for the temporary peace and security of divorce.

It is interesting to note that very few of Françoise Sagan's characters still bathe in the calm waters of contentment when the story reaches its end. Most begin where Josée is left, and then, through miscalculation or weakness they suffer the degradation and servitude that love brings on. One other such character occurs in her smart commercial success of 1963, *Valentine's Purple Dress*. The heroine is a pathological liar and a nymphomaniac. But she is happily married because she can, when she wants to, take off on mysterious journeys⁸ with lovers in whom she has only a physical interest. Her complicities have but one drawback; they lead to the necessity of lying, to husband and to friends. Lying, however, is a talent that increases with practice, and Valentine finds it easier to prevaricate even when she does not have to, for the truth is always more difficult to get across. And so she begins to lie about everything to everyone. She might have got away with it, too, and for a long time, were it not that she has the misfortune of becoming emotionally involved with the young son of a cousin. Valentine's lie in saying that her newest love affair has been prompted by an infidelity of her husband reaches the husband's ears. Furious, he will force her to tell the truth to everyone, including her lover—who is left broken-hearted and unable to pursue his marriage plans to the *nice*, stupid girl who had been destined for him.

The play has had a long run at the Ambassadeurs, and it has incited favorable critical comment. Miss Sagan deals, as always, with the most elementary facets of private life, and she shocks, perhaps often involuntarily, even the most sophisticated theater-goer. Her Valentine, whose glittering short, straight, lavender evening gown provides the title of the play, is basically an attractive, delightful, and libidinous young woman who at once scandalizes and intrigues. Her energy and grace solicit our sympathy, and it is only after falling in love that she becomes a fallen, mediocre, and humiliated character. The author's ability—unlaudable as it might be from a Christian point of view—to render the ludicrous and the abnormal pleasing and almost worthy of imitation, points to an undoubtedly rare stylistic talent. This strong, if dubiously employed gift, also enables her to add to her *Valentine's Purple Dress*

boulevard touches that reveal an unexpected farcical sense, without which the play would have been a hopelessly banal melodrama.

This same gift for comedy aids her fourth and latest dramatic undertaking, *Bonheur, Impair et Passe* (1964). The production was staged at Théâtre Edouard VII, in a setting similar to that of *A Castle in Sweden*. The time is slightly earlier: 1880, the era which saw the moral and material ruination of the Russian nobility. Count Igor has made a profession of jealousy, and immediately challenges and kills anyone who dares glance at his wife. Prince Vladimir, a young Don Juan who longs for "a beautiful and heroic death", declares his passionate love for Igor's wife. The role of executioner, however, does not please the Count, and he challenges Vladimir to win his wife's affection first. Some critics were unfavourably impressed with the first two acts of the play, comparing the stagnant action to the run-of-the-mill Boulevard comedies of Porto-Riche. Françoise Sagan, who did her own directing, showed some inexperience in the staging of the first half of the production. But the second half was unanimously applauded. The ease, finesse, and restrained emotion of the dialogue revealed the complexity of the sentiments. The Count, who had looked forward to one more justifiable murder, has to settle for the more banal reconciliation with his wife. For she understands him now, and she knows that her future complicities will have to be more discreet if they are not to be prematurely ended by the *legal* killing of her lovers.

As a novelist and a playwright, then, Miss Sagan has unusually constant themes: the two inescapable maladies of solitude and boredom temporarily and partially cured by illegal or extra-legal complicities. In reading her books and in seeing her plays one is acutely aware of the fact that Françoise Sagan's work does not reveal any major aesthetic, philosophic, or even psychological truths. She is not *engagée*, nor does she pretend to teach us anything new on the movements of the heart, on jealousy, on ennui. Since they were born in the era between the two great wars, have lived through one of them, and have faced death and the fear of it to a greater extent than for any other generation, for her and for many of her a-Christian contemporaries, the major problem is to survive, to reach a plateau of security that only the most elaborate calculations can provide. On a domestic level, Miss Sagan does nothing more than to suggest all the precautions which organized nations take for their own survival and which are in the nature of compromises, pacts, and alliances—that is to say, complicities designed to maintain tranquillity and well-being, but not

necessarily a state of dogmatic legality or exalted bliss. To be sure, her aims are modest, and her characters amoral, but the little she has to say, the banal, is expressed with a remarkable economy of means and an unpretentiousness that is both touching and distinctive.

Situated at the border of literature and of myth, Miss Sagan's contributions are a docile barometer of our dreams and woes. Certain dreams, certain woes—for while others invent a world, she is content to express a sensitivity.

NOTES

1. Georges Hourdin, *Le Cas Françoise Sagan* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1958) and Gerard Mourgue, *Françoise Sagan* (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1958), neither of which is available in translation in this country.
2. The Rev. Charles Moeller, *Littérature du XXe siècle et Christianisme* (Paris: Maison Casterman, 1957), III, 446.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 446.
4. See Francis E. O'Gorman's review of *Those Without Shadows* in *Best Sellers*, XVII, No. 15 (November 1, 1957), 249.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
6. Bernard Pingaud, *Ecrivains d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Grasset, 1960), p. 437; translation is mine.
7. See Genêt's "Letter From Paris" in *The New Yorker* (January 6, 1962), 74.
8. Indicative here is a statement made by Sagan in her next article in *Vogue*, "I Adore Cars" (November 1, 1963), 120, where, in a different context, she declares: "The important thing is to change locale every evening."