

## **Praise for *Transgression***

Letter from Jacqueline Gouirand.  
Grimaud, France, June 19, 2023

Dear Ben,

Good news, excellent news at last! Critical acclaim and the Silver Award for *Transgression*. I am so glad! I hope the readers will belong to different classes (by classes I am referring to age of course) despite the title. André Gide, as you know, did not expect many readers. He declared that two generations would be necessary to reveal his creations to his readers. The list of his published books was almost ridiculous, compared to contemporary writers. As a writer, your destiny will be different. My faith in *Transgression* is absolute.

In my « reception » of your book I said how much I liked the title! I was sixteen when I discovered Gide's *Les Nourritures terrestres (Fruits of the Earth)*, a little older than your character. At the time I probably did not know I was transgressing something. It was a total *choc*; in many ways, more or less consciously, *Les Nourritures* helped me to *desire* life, to *face* it, to see the beauty of nature and to enjoy it. *Il ne me suffit pas de savoir que le sable des plages est doux mais il faut que mon pied nu le sente (For me it's not enough to know that the sand on the beaches is soft; I must feel it with my bare feet)*. Knowledge versus touch. I became obsessed by the word "ferveur" (*fervor*), perhaps more ambiguous in English than in French. As a matter of fact, the book became the BIBLE, and remained on my bedside table. Later I adopted the phrase « *Il ne faut pas que la ferveur retombe* » (« *Fervor must not lapse* »). This phrase has been my guide ever since and still is.

I was particularly interested (and delighted) by the questions and the answers of the interview. Your approach to "doxa" and "dogma," when you explain that the boy comes to understand what is possible and what is not, what is moral and what is not. Belonging to the age of innocence, he is invited to taste experience a little too soon. The mixture of innocence and experience prevails in his education; the narrator's presence in the world is striking. Being led by Mirka in the universe of sex is, from the start, so natural that he experiences the emotions and feelings from fondness, love, and desire to lust as easily as he breathes. Fundamentally, he is a nature boy, which doesn't prevent him from acquiring the knowledge lavished by his masters.

In your interview, the relation to your reader is interesting. It is obvious that what is expected from readers is that they should react, come into the characters' heads and hearts, share their emotions, penetrate their imaginary worlds. Remember what Paul Ricoeur said: "*Le lecteur achève l'oeuvre*" ("The reader completes the book").

There is a problem we did not approach concerning novels in general, the first sentence. Let us first quote Lawrence's first sentence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It refers to the war. "Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically;" or Proust, in *À la recherche du*

*temps perdu (In Search of Time Past)*-- the extraordinary beginning: "*Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure*" ("For a long time I went to bed early"). Another striking beginning: "*It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.*" This first sentence holds the totality of Jane Austen's fictions. Your evocation of *Sofia* at the start is perfect.

I am one of your happy readers and I celebrate fiction, *car la fiction apprivoise le réel en ce qu'il a d'inévitable* (because fiction tames what in reality is inevitable).

Jacqueline

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