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LISI CORI

THE  
LITTLE GIRL  
AND THE  
NAUGHTY  
GENTLEMAN

On Gabriel Matzneff and *Consent*

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*Aux esprits libres.*



*Without the freedom to blame,  
there can be no flattering  
praise.*

Figaro, in *The Marriage of  
Figaro* by Beaumarchais.

*Spare the rod and spoil the  
child.*

(Old proverb.)



# I

## THE CLOVEN-FOOTED ARCHANGEL

Gabriel Matzneff is no saint: just open a few tons of his personal diary - his aptly named *Carnets noirs* - and you'll be *instantly* convinced. On countless pages, he portrays himself as an odious, cruel, fickle, simulative, unbearable man, egotistical to the extreme, who constantly lies to his countless lovers and demands fidelity from them that he is incapable of offering? And I'm not talking about the many paragraphs he devotes to what he nicely calls) his *merce- nary loves* and the pleasure he finds in */u/ining* (par- give the euphemism) boys and girls on the other side of the planet! In fact, Matzneff seems so lucid about his own per-

that he treats himself more than once as a *sa-laud*... Isn't that revealing?

However, three thousand years of literature prove that great writers are rarely little saints.

#### UNDER SIXTEEN

Gabriel Matzneff is all about his work. That's fortunate: no one else could have written the books he has, and the very fact that they exist makes the world a little different, a little changed. A little better? To say so would be highly adventurous. But a little richer, certainly, since they have added a few nuances and a little music that will remain long after the author of *Carnets noirs* has stopped breathing.

I'm astonished that she's *been* criticized for being *under sixteen*: where others think she's a

In my opinion, "*an apology for paedophilia*" is first and foremost a moving *confession* - and you can't defend a writer in his books,



to *give themselves up*, body and soul, for better or for worse. Is it any coincidence that *Les Moins de seize ans*, in 1974, was published by Julliard in the famous "Idée Fixe" collection directed by Jacques Chancel? As each volume read: "The 'Idée Fixe' collection gives writers the opportunity to state forthrightly the secret they have hitherto slyly nurtured in their lives" - and Matzneff illustrated this ambition more brilliantly than anyone else!

Nevertheless, some would like to see *Les Moins de seize ans* banned... And here again, I'm astonished: since adult love for very young people exists, why refuse to allow a writer driven by this *passion*<sup>1</sup> to describe, analyze and justify it? Isn't that precisely his role and *vocation*? And isn't this book all the more precious for its *absolute sincerity*, from the first to *the* last line? You don't have to read it

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Let's not forget that the word *passion* comes from a Latin for *suffering*.

those who are disturbed or disgusted by this fixed idea, a *fortiori* if they feel so insecure that they are afraid of succumbing to it dangerously; as for those who are fascinated by fundamental otherness or singularity, they'll love it.

#### THE DIARY

Does Matzneff make things up in his diary? Does he distort reality to his own façon (and advantage)? Does he use it as a weapon against one or other of his ex-lovers and other people who displease him? It seems hard to doubt.

But isn't the point of keeping a diary precisely to reveal *one's* point of view and *one's* truth? Isn't every diary a form of self-justification, not only to the world, but first and foremost to oneself?

In Matzneff's case, his diary is explicitly written with publication in mind.

which is obviously not without consequences for what he says - and what he doesn't say.

#### IV

#### DE LICATESSE

In a recent volume of his diary, Matzneff notes that he almost never publishes or notes - out of a sense of delicacy - the confidences made to him by his friends<sup>1</sup> : is it a pity that he doesn't show the same concern for the private lives of his lovers? It doesn't matter that he usually refers to them only by their first names: he often says enough about them for their relatives (or even clever Internet users) to be able to identify them. Does he imagine, then, the harm or damage that can be done to them by narrating their intimate relationships in detail? Of course, he could just as easily refer to them by an initial (en-) rather than by their real first names.

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Gabriel Matzneff, *L'Amante de l'Arsenal*, Gallimard, 2019, p. 90.

core that the alphabet would not suffice, given their multitude) or by false first names (as he did in an amusing essay entitled *De la rupture* - where he gives an anthology of break-up letters received by him from his lovers); but perhaps, in this little game of substitution, his diary would have lost some of its authenticity in his eyes?

Not surprisingly, on October 2, 2007, we wrote:

*Back in 1976, when I published the first volume of my diary, I wrote in the preface that my intention was to publish it in its entirety during my lifetime. All the young people who came into my love life after 1976 were therefore warned; they knew that when they entered my bed, they were simultaneously entering my black diaries. Don't come to me today and beg me to erase their names and traces. That's out of the question. From now on, they are incorporated into my work as a writer, they are consubstantial with it<sup>1</sup> .*

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Gabriel Matzneff, *Carnets noirs 2007-2008*, Léo Scheer, 2009, p. 139.

Is Matzneff acting in good faith? Without wishing to hurt his feelings, I'm afraid that *Cette ca- misole de flammes* (as the first volume of his diary was entitled) was not so *universally* successful that all the young people he flirted with (at the Deligny pool, on public transport, in the Jardin du Luxembourg and elsewhere) necessarily knew the preface by heart.

V

## VIOL

Love is a gift - a gift of oneself, of one's intimacy, of one's soul - that one gives to the person one loves: is exposing this gift *crudely* (and *exploiting it*), as Matzneff often does in his diary, the most beautiful and noble way to celebrate it?

If they did that to me, I'd *consider it rape*.

*(But I'm well aware that these are extra-literary consi- deations and that we can't re-*

*The same is true of Rousseau's Confessions and Hugo's diaries of his old age, published long after his death, although both of them freely confide in each other about the people in their lives; In other words, blaming Matzneff today for his diaries in no way implies that we'll blame him a hundred years from now - when the flesh-and-blood beings we see living and revolving in them will be nothing more than a pile of bones, ashes and dust.)*

That said, the fact that Matzneff decided to publish his diary while he was still alive - and while the people he writes about were still alive - gives them the opportunity to react if they feel they have been sullied or maligned, and to give their side of the story. Doesn't this indicate a certain courage, panache and *fearlessness* on his part - in every way worthy of the musketeers he so cherished? I'm sure he was bound to get his knickers in a twist sooner or later!

And so it came to pass, through the (resounding) voice of a certain Vanessa Springora.

VI

THE ONE WHO WAS CAUGHT IS THE  
ONE WHO WAS GOING TO BE CAUGHT

With *Le Consentement*<sup>1</sup>, Vanessa Springora is the very first ex-lover of Gabriel Matzneff to publish a critical account of the author of *Moins de seize ans*: given the success of her book (and the string of lovers Matzneff has collected over the decades), it's reasonable to imagine that this is just the first of many. Should we be delighted? Undoubtedly, if these publications shed light on the "Matzneff phenomenon" (the man and his work) and allow us to better understand the myriad of young women who populate his diary! Doesn't he himself confess, with regard to some (but not all) of them, his desire to have them write about him and their life together? He is well aware that his work would be enriched by this, and that his love affairs and his legend (which he fashions book after book) would be *authenticated*.

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<sup>1</sup> Vanessa Springora, *Le Consentement*, Grasset, 2020.

*an extraordinary man. As he said in 2017*

*Reality is never objective. Everyone sees it through their own eyes. My love affair with H el ene inspired Les L evres menteuses. If one day H el ene were to write a novel about what we experienced together, the story she would tell would be very different from mine. The facts are the same, but the perspective is not<sup>1</sup> .*

But in the case of Vanessa Springora, are the facts exactly the same? For their respective versions, strangely enough, disagree *on certain points of detail...* And the devil - as everyone knows - is often in the details.

## VII

### LYNCHAGE

Having read and reread *Le Consentement*, I find nothing in it about the character and manners

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*L'Amante de l'Arsenal*, p. 166 (as of May 21, 2017).



of Matzneff that the attentive readers of *Calamity Gab*<sup>1</sup> , *La Prunelle de mes yeux*, *Les De- moiselles du Taranne*<sup>3</sup> and *La Jeune Moe- bite*<sup>4</sup> don't know (or have guessed) - to name but a few of the volumes of his diary in which Vanessa Springora is much in evidence. The anti-Matzneff media lynch mob that followed the publication of this book - and especially the *immediate* repudiation of Matzneff by literary circles and his various editors - is therefore astonishing: had they been publishing his works, had they been reporting on them (with great praise) for decades without reading them? It's a fine line between cowardice and cowardice. Why the cowardice? Why this cowardice? Could it be for fear of being accused of the slightest connivance with

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<sup>1</sup> Volume of his diary covering the period January 1985-April 1986 (Gallimard, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Volume of his diary covering the period May 1986-December 1987 (Gallimard, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Diary volume covering 1988 (Gallimard, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Volume of his diary covering the period September 2013-August 2016 (Gallimard, 2017).

the author of *Les Moins de seize ans* - and thereby be held as an accomplice to his actions?

However, *Le Consentement* contains a curious revelation about Matzneff that should have moved charitable souls to the infinite understanding they profess for any victim: namely, that young Gabriel, when he was thirteen, was "initiated" (and it's not impossible to understand: *sexually abused*) by a man close to his family. Is this confession, made to young Vanessa in a moment of sad tenderness (and in the twilight of their love affair), true? If so, shouldn't we also - and perhaps even *primarily* - *pity* Matzneff, rather than pigeonholing him?

VIII

FLOU

I doubt that one can truly appreciate *Le Consentement* without having within reach

hand Gabriel Matzneff's *Carnets noirs*. There's one main reason for this: Vanessa Springora's narrative is bathed in a temporal *vagueness* that constantly makes you wonder whether it's unintentional or deliberate.

For example: how long did their love affair last? A few months? A year? More? We'd be hard-pressed to answer if she didn't mention, in the course of a sentence, that their break-up occurred while she was renewing her acquaintance with "a handful of faithful friends from whom [she] [had] nevertheless been estranged for more than two years" (which suggests that their love affair lasted about two years - we'll see what's going on below). She also notes that she was thirteen when she met him (at a dinner party), fourteen when they became lovers (it was shortly after her fourteenth birthday that she began to respond to his flood of letters) and fifteen when she broke up with him. She adds that one evening, less than a year after this break-up, when she was not yet sixteen, she ran into Matzneff again in a Parisian brasserie, and he was there with a

young woman and had "the caddishness to greet [her] with a triumphant smile". Were there other encounters afterwards? She doesn't say. As for the story of their love affairs, it's punctuated by vague chronological terms ("at the beginning", "sometimes", "one evening", "afterwards", "for a few weeks"), "In other words, it's not possible to get an accurate sense of the passage of time, or to measure the evolution of their relationship *in real time*.

Is this vagueness part of a (conscious or unconscious) desire to muddy the waters? Is it the result of a memory lapse? Is it intended to give the story a false air of a children's tale (since Vanessa Springora begins her book by evoking the tales she read as a child)? No matter: it is enough to make Matz-neff's diary *indispensable*, and to make us regret that her publishers, less than a week after the publication of *Consentement*, thought it necessary to withdraw from sale the fifteen volumes that had appeared up to that point.<sup>1</sup>

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The years 1989 to 2006 remain unpublished, so than the period after August 12, 2018.

- as if *only one version* of their late love affair (Vanessa Springora's story) were to survive after the other (Matzneff's) had reigned unchallenged for three decades...

Clearly, this is a gap that needs to be filled.

## IX

### MEET VANESSA

According to *Calamity Gab*, Gabriel Matzneff met Vanessa Springora on the evening of Wednesday November 6, 1985. As he noted the following day:

*The girl is thirteen and her name is X<sup>1</sup> . I gave her fourteen or fifteen, but she told me her exact age by explaining with her pretty smile that the first words of Nous n'irons plus au Luxembourg ("This Thursday, March 16, 1972...") indicated the day*

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<sup>1</sup> This mysterious letter obviously refers to the young Vanessa Springora.

*de sa/ssance*<sup>1</sup> She told me much more amusingly, and adorably, than I can express here. The beauty, the esprit, the EiUSSi gravity of this thirteen-year-old X. disturb me to the utmost. I long to see her again, come what may, and with God's grace [...]

Then he photocopies his 1972 diary on the March 16th page and sends it not only to young Vanessa, but also to her mother (he didn't dare send it to the teenager alone because she's only thirteen - "it would have been too *clear*", he says); that he and she live "in the same neighborhood, a few minutes' walk from each other".

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<sup>1</sup> Matzneff's formulation might lead one to believe that the young Vanessa Springora had already read *Nous n'irons plus au Luxembourg* (Matzneff's second novel, published in 1972) that evening when they met: she claims in *Le Consentement* that this is not the case, a claim that Matzneff (who declared in a 1993 interview with *Lire* magazine that she only knew him by reputation and had never read anything by him when they first met) would doubt.

*Calamity Gab*, pp. 222-223.

seems to be "a good omen" ' "It proves that Venus is with us", he concludes. But the days go by without any response to his letter - and he's all the more disappointed because he dreamt of her on the night of the 11th. November 12

*I kissed her, I caressed her, she returned my kisses, my caresses, I re-saw her beautiful eyes whose gaze I tried to catch the other evening every time she lifted her face from the book - a Balzac, not a Matzneff! - where she was abimaded, full of a regal indifference, souverain, fascinating, for all those around her (except for me, I imagined at the time, no doubt presumptuously...)<sup>1</sup> .*

After which he adds (which has the merit of clarity):

*X. is thirteen years old and I have the feeling that she is, like Francesca and Marie-Élisabeth were in their time, a brilliant teenager. Thirteen, brilliant and beautiful*

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<sup>1</sup> Calamity Gab, p. 230.

*enchantress. I must conquer her. Yes, I must.*

No mention of the teenager for several months, then he saw her again at the Salon du Livre on Thursday March 20, 1986, four days after her fourteenth birthday, and wrote her a "tender letter"; he received one from her a few days later, which he considered equally "tender" and "promising" - and promptly replied with another letter in which he made no secret of his feelings for her. "The future will tell if I'm deluding myself or if I can seriously hope to hold this divine woman in my arms for fourteen years", he writes in his diary.

But young Vanessa did not respond to In this letter, she makes no protest whatsoever, and Matzneff notes on April 13 that he will fly to the Philip-pines with *no regrets*.





X

### TRAILER

And now it's time to open *La Prunelle de mes yeux*, the fabulous tome of Matzneff's diary that records his tumultuous love story, from his very first rendezvous to his final night of voluptuousness. Yes, *fabulous*: because these three hundred and thirty-nine pages printed in very small type (one of his best livres) read like *a novel*. Can you believe it? Of course you do! *From beginning to end!*

And what extraordinary adventures! So many twists and turns! So many pitfalls! A thousand and one dangers threaten our two lovers... And we can't help thinking: "Bloody society! Bloody moral order! Bloody laws that forbid a fourteen-year-old girl to freely love an adult so concerned to make her happy! Because he only wants the best for her, it's obvious: he loves her with a love that's so strong! so abso- lu! so *all-consuming!* And what a lucky girl she is,

really, this teenager named Vanessa: such a knight in shining armor, at fourteen, for initiator, guide and lover! - What an admirable couple! And what an exceptional man, Gabriel Matzneff! And how beautiful is love, the passion of love, when they succeed in transforming an abominable midnight runner (played by Gabriel Matzneff) into an irreproachable, devoted lover, stubbornly faithful to his beautiful, celestial lover (played by young Vanessa)! *La Prunelle de mes yeux* opens with a prologue that I can't resist quoting, and which, like a movie trailer, admirably sets the tone.

*This book could have been entitled La Conversion de Don Juan. In it, we witness the metamorphosis of a man. We see a libertine renounce his dissolute, sinful life and, thanks to the love of a young girl, transform himself into what he thought he could never be again: a faithful, irreproachable lover.*

*Like the young girl - a fa- tale beauty with blue eyes and blond hair*

*- is only fourteen years old, and our lovers are pursued by a pack of virtuous citizens, an anonymous informer and the juvenile police, they must brave many perils in order to love each other.*

*Once they've overcome these perils - including the physical suffering that strikes them in turn - our two lovers could peacefully savor their triumph, and their bon-  
heur,' but a blindness of the soul, a leprosy that gnaws at her from within and destroys her, will prevent the teenager from enjoying it for long.*

*These perils, this ardent, all-consuming passion, this blind self-destruction, this is  
The apple of my eye.*

And it's worth noting, of course, that if their love didn't last, it was the teenager's fault.

## XI

### THE APPLE OF MY EYE

Gabriel Matzneff and Vanessa Springora seem to agree on this point: their loves, fortified by the perils that led them to their-

ççaient, étaient belles et passionnées jusqu'à ce que Matzneff sorti de l'hôpital (où on le traitait pour de troubles oculaires graves) au début du printemps 1987 - et c'est à ce moment qu'elles commencent à péricliter. So, all in all, since their first kiss (in June 1986), we're talking about ten months of - supposed - happiness. Why doesn't Vanessa Springora dwell on the - supposedly - delightful moments of this period? Not a word about their two-week vacation in Corsica (late 1986) or their stay in Tunisia (February 1987). Could her subsequent disappointments have erased them from her memory?

Nevertheless, I note this interesting observation by Matzneff, a few hours after his release from hospital, his doctor having explained to him that it is unwise to make love when one's retina threatens to detach itself: "If *that* is taken away from us," asks the writer, "what's left for us?" (But what were their loves made of - if they could have died out in one fell swoop, *for lack of sexual intercourse*? Perhaps Matzneff should have remembered what he wrote in 1977, in the

chapter V (entitled *L'Enfant*) of *Passions Schismatiques*: "The desire of bodies is not necessarily love, and there are occasions when the refusal of the sexual act is a greater proof of love than would be a kiss<sup>1</sup> .")

#### FIRST PERIOD OF THEIR LOVEMAKING

But here, in an attempt to clear up the temporal vagueness of *Consentement*, are a few of the *key* stages (chronologically speaking) in the first period of their love affair, as recounted in *La Prunelle de mes yeux* :

- Thursday May 15 1986, back from the Philippines: Matzneff finds a letter from Vanessa<sup>2</sup> in his mail.

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Matzneff, *Les Passions schismatiques*, Stock, 1977, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> In *La Prunelle de mes yeux*, Gabriel Matzneff signs his young lover by her only first name: we'll follow his example.

- Friday May 16, 1986, early in the morning (at 7.30 a.m.): he goes to the corner of the street where the teenager lives in order to meet her, but to no avail (he points out that he had already been on the lookout for her once, six months earlier, again without success); on May 20, the mousetrap works: she seems happy to see him; in the afternoon, he writes her a letter in which he expresses his feelings in no uncertain terms.
- Friday May 30, 1986: Vanessa's written reply. "Do you want to make me suffer, or do you just want to make me happy? Do you just want to enjoy me without worrying about what happens next? She adds that she "accepts all [his] many kisses" - and that she, too, *was dying for* him to kiss her during their May 20 meeting.
- Phone calls, an interview in a café, then a first afternoon (and first kisses, first caresses) at Matzneff's on Saturday 7

June 1986 - Vanessa Springora recounts this episode a little differently in *Le Consentement*. If they put you in prison," she tells him, "I'll write to the newspapers, I'll go and see Mitterrand<sup>1</sup>" (then President of France).

- Tuesday June 10, 1986: in case she wanted to leave her mother, he suggested she move in with him. "I'd love to," she replies in a sigh.
- Evening from Wednesday 11 June 1986 long conversation between Vanessa and her mother - who no longer objects to the teenager's association with Matzneff. "You're making the biggest mistake of your life," her mother tells her, "but then you won't come crying to me!" *(Perhaps it's useful to compare this line with the one Vanessa Springora writes she made to her mother - after her break-up with Matzneff - when she accused her of "making a big mistake").*

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<sup>1</sup> *La Prunelle de mes yeux*, p. 42-44.

*of unconsciousness, indifference and laxity).*

- Thursday June 12, 1986: from 5 to 7 p.m., at Matzneff's, two hours of kisses and caresses. A prayer he'd made to the Virgin Mary having been answered, he decides to break with all his mistresses (of which there are a dozen) to devote himself solely to Vanessa: "I, who had sworn never again to put my destiny in the hands of a single woman, to escape suffering by multiplying my relationships, have decided to be rigorously faithful to Vanessa for as long as she loves me and is in my life. The answer to my prayer to the Virgin Mary, whether a truly divine act or a mere coincidence, is, in any case, a sign that I have no right, short of despising myself, not to take note of and respect. In exactly two months' time (June 12-August 12), I'll be fifty. This meeting with



Vanessa is the hand that Christ is holding out to me to pull me away from all that is dead and evil in me."

- Monday June 16, 1986: four and a half hours together, in Matz- nell's lit; on June 17 and 18, more meetings at his place (always chaste: kisses, caresses).
- Evening of June 18, 1986: Vanessa reads *Les Moins de seize ans* at home (although she claims, in *Le Con- sentement*, not to have read this book until many years after her break-up with Matzneff).
- On June 20, 1986, Matzneff notes: "Yesterday, for the first time, she had ventured to suck me, and it had upset me. Today, she wanted me to cum in her mouth and she drank it all in, passionately."
- Sunday June 22, 1986: Matzneff sodomizes her for the first time.
- Thursday June 26, 1986: thinking of marrying Vanessa (who is obviously underage),

Matzneff wrote to François Mitterrand (whom he knew well) to see if he could grant him a dispensation.

- Saturday June 28, 1986, letter from Vanessa: "This hostility that surrounds us, all these people who seek to separate us, we will overcome them and succeed in persuading them that we are the happiest couple on earth." Then: "If you left me, I think I'd let myself die on the spot, or else I'd go mad [...]". Then: "If you left me, I think I'd let myself die on the spot, or go mad [...]."
- From Sunday July 6, 1986 until an uncertain date (Thursday July 17 at the latest), Vanessa was hospitalized at the Hôpital Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, where Matzneff - who visited her there every day - spent long hours at her bedside. On July 9, he notes: "Vanessa [...] spoke to me again about the deplorable impression she had made of certain sentences in *Un galop d'enfer* (read at the H. de B. home after the Salon du Livre), in particular the expression

- "fresh ass," and which decided her not to reply to my letter of the 26th."
- Wednesday July 23, 1986: after the police received an anonymous letter, Matzneff was summoned to the Brigade des mineurs.
  - Monday, July 28, 1986: Matzneff devirginizes Vanessa; that same evening she writes him a "wonderful letter<sup>1</sup> (And let's face it: this letter is *superbe*).
  - Friday September 5, 1986: new summons to the Minors' Brigade following receipt of an anonymous letter dated July 30.
  - Saturday, December 20, 1986: "One of Vanessa's classmates, Martin, told the whole class that he'd seen me on the bus with a girl, that Vanessa was *co-cue (sic)* and other niceties. All because I didn't want to, in

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*The apple of my eye*, p. 100.

breaking off lovingly [with his dozen mistresses], lowering the iron curtain of friendship." (Matzneff does not, however, think it worth noting that Vanessa's classmate saw him *kissing* the girl in question, something Vanessa Springora makes clear in *Le Consentement...* But perhaps it goes without saying, for Matzneff, who readily claims his Russian ancestry, that one should kiss one's friends on the mouth).

- Saturday December 20, 1986 to Sunday January 4, 1987: Matzneff and Vanessa spent the holidays together in Corsica.
- Sunday January 11, 1987: Vanessa takes "by force" *Un galop d'enfer*, which she's been wanting to read from cover to cover for years.
- Sunday, February 22 to Sunday, March 1, 1987: Matzneff and Vanessa stay in Tunisia.
- Monday, March 16, 1987: Vanessa turns fifteen. On the same day, Matzneff

is hospitalized at Hôtel-Dieu (a mysterious fungus is attacking his left kidney and threatening to blind him); at first it is feared that he has AIDS, but he is not seropositive. He remains in hospital until March 29, and Vanessa visits him every day until the 27th. On March 16, she wrote him a sublime letter, which he reproduced in chapter XXII of *Harrison Plaza*.

- Friday April 3, 1987: Matzneff shines on Bernard Pivot's *Apostrophes* program, where he talks about *Le Taureau de Phalaris* (his just-published philosophical dictionary). Vanessa thought he was *brilliant*.

## SECOND PERIOD OF THEIR LOVEMAKING

The second period of leurs amours begins: Vanessa begins to make scenes with Matzneff, who in turn accuses her of being jealous and possessive.

and sickly obsessed with her Donjuanesque past:

- April 14, 1987, Vanessa: "To say that the thought of your exes trying to see you again, chasing after you, provokes my jealousy is an understatement! It puts me in a pathological state.
- April 24, 1987, Vanessa: "The very thought of the girls you held in your arms before me makes me lose my temper.

Matzneff then seems much less concerned about remaining faithful to her, and uses a series of little phrases to justify any infidelities by the fierce, pathological jealousy of his young lover.

- May 24, 1987: "By inventing reasons to be jealous, she'll end up creating real ones. A faithful lover may want to stop being so, as soon as, although he is constant, his mistress persecutes him as if he weren't."

- June 16, 1987: "If I put up with Francesca for so long, if I put up with Vanessa, it's because of her very young age, her great beauty and the pleasure she gave me, which she gives me now. But Francesca has dug the grave of our love, and Vanessa is going down the same path. She knows it: I've told her over and over again. Yet she persists, right up to the final catastrophe."
- June 28, 1987: "I've *decided to break up.*"

Summer vacations arrive: Matzneff sees old lovers again, meets young female readers. In July, at least twice<sup>1</sup>, Vanessa is about to throw herself out the window (and Matzneff just about catches her). After which .

- August 15, 1987: "What's the point of being faithful to Vanessa, since, fi-

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<sup>1</sup> *The apple of my eye*, p. 288 and p. 290

dèle or infidel, am I entitled to the same insults?"

- September 5, 1987: "Why be constant, since, constant or not constant, I'm entitled to scenes of jealous inquisition? The innocent end up saying to themselves that it's silly to die innocent and that, persecuted for persecuted's sake, at least enjoy the pleasures of guilt. [...] My decisions of spring 86, the metamorphosis of the archangel with forked feet, what a failure! Out of masochism and unconsciousness, Vanessa, since last April, has been working to return me to my demons."
- On September 21, 1987, she told him over the phone: "It's all over between us."
- September 29, 1987, "hysterical scenes" at the end of which she gives him back his ring and declares<sup>1</sup> : "I'm breaking up." - The next day he notes: "I'll never understand what

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<sup>1</sup> *The apple of my eye*, p. 314-315.



could, in the space of a few months, metamorphose the most enchanting of teenagers, the most vociferous of lovers, into an execrable fury, an unbearable virago."

- 1<sup>er</sup> October 1987, words from Cioran to Matzneff: "You have to break up, but don't do anything abruptly. You have to be a diplomat, a Talleyrand! Otherwise, she'll either commit suicide or assassinate you.
- October 4, 1987: Vanessa reads a passage from Matzneff's notebook and realizes that he is deceiving her (the passage Matzneff claims she has read differs from the one Vanessa Springora quotes in her book, and which one would look for in vain in *La Prunelle de mes yeux*); Matzneff lies to her, claiming that it is a passage from the novel he is preparing (it is surprising that he doesn't say much about this episode).
- November 5, 1987: "Leaving her? I don't know. What I do know is that

her neurotic nature distances me from her, puts an end to my fantasies of the couple that in June 86 I had the desire, the will, to create with her."

- November 6, 1987: "If one day I detach myself from Vanessa and wish to live something important either with an ex [...] or with a new young person [...], Vanessa won't have the right to complain, won't be able to accuse me of stabbing her in the heart, because it was she who put the dagger in my hand [...]."
- November 27, 1987: "She doesn't understand that each of our sangleant arguments takes me away from her, makes me want to go back to my life as a free man, my harem of gentilles and gay mistresses, the sybaritic existence that was mine before we met and my Road to Damascus in the spring of '86."
- December 12, 1987: "If you're going to get into hysterical disputes, you might as well do it for something. If you're going to be condemned, you might as well be cou-

pable! H el ene P. and H el ene L. (not to mention Marie- Elisabeth, Diane and the other exes) have high hopes of having something important and lasting with me. I'd be a fool to turn them away.

- December 21, 1987: Matzneff flies to the Philippines without Vanessa (whose mother has finally forbidden her to go).

And just as it began with a prologue, *La Prunelle de mes yeux* ends with this epilogue:

*When I returned to Paris in 1988, a letter from Vanessa was waiting for me at Taranne<sup>1</sup>. A break-up letter. In it, Vanessa explained that she loved me madly, and that, precisely because this mad love was driving her crazy, she had resolved to leave me. I repeatedly tried to convince her that, on the contrary, it would only be by persisting in this absurd de-*

<sup>1</sup> Name of the hotel where Matzneff stayed on his release of the H otel-Dieu.

*cision to break up, in this suicidal assassinat, that she would go mad, ma/s unsuccessfully. A few weeks later, Harrison Plaza hit the bookstores. This novel should have been the crowning glory of our love. It was its mausoleum.*

And his readers feel sorry for him, for her, and shed a few tears.

#### XIV

### INFIDELITIE S

Gabriel Matzneff had sworn to be faithful to young Vanessa, *except to despise himself*. Did he keep his promise? Opening *Les Demoiselles du Taranne* (his 1988 diary) provides the answer, as it states, on January 8 :

*Until December, my love affairs with the girls I'd met last summer (Hélène, Amélie) were impossible. Since June 1986 my only desire has been to be faithful to*

*Vanessa, and, compared to the extreme disorder of the galop d'enfer era, I've pretty much respected this wish," but Vanessa having decided to get out of my life, I'm going to live with these candidates who were trampling on what they aspire to behind the scenes. From now on, they have free rein.*

If Matzneff has *not* respected his vow, this means that // he hasn't *respected it*," so he's perjured himself. Does this make him a perjurer?

In fact, the fact that he met several young "readers" from July 1987 onwards (including a certain Hélène who came from a distant provincial city to see him) raises questions about his *real* desire to remain faithful to young Vanessa.... And when we examine his diary as published, we are led to believe that certain *gaps in time* (i.e., periods of a few days to two weeks - during which he takes no notes - they abound in the second half of 1987) are not fortuitous.

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' *Les Demoiselles du Taranne*, p. 29

I'm the scribe of memory," he claims, "I write down everything and forget nothing. That's my only bulwark against death, and my victory<sup>1</sup>": but Matzneff, who claims to forget very quickly what he doesn't write down, is well aware that there are facts that it's better not to consider - in order to erase them better.

Is it by chance that on the first page of *Les Demoiselles du Taranne*, we learn that he left for the Philip- pines on December 21, 1987, *with one of his former lovers*, named Diane? Why doesn't this piquant "detail" appear in *La Prunelle de mes yeux*? Would it have spoiled Vanessa Springora's too-perfect "fiction"? And why doesn't Matzneff mention that, by this time, the aforementioned Diane had become his mistress again, as we learn from a message he wrote to her on September 11, 2009, which he reproduces in *Les Émiles de Gab la Rafale*<sup>2</sup> ?

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Gabriel Matzneff, *Boulevard Saint-Germain*, La Table Ronde, 2015, p. 9.

"And I wasn't writing cards to 'a thousand mistresses', I was writing a novel, and besides I didn't have outside

There's no denying that Matzneff is a *master* in the art of keeping (and publishing) his diary. One can admire the artist, and enjoy his tricks to the full, without being completely fooled by them.

XV

THE RESEARCHER'S  
FANTASY

In 2007, in his preface to *Les Demoiselles du Taranne*, Matzneff asserts that his published diary is almost identical to the handwritten text in his black notebooks, the differences being "rare", "of the order of detail", such as "a spelling or syntax error", "a heavy repetition",

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I'd loved her, I'd been faithful to her, but for several months nothing had been going on between us, our story had come to an end, and when you and I returned from the Philippines, arriving at the Hotel Taranne where I was staying, her farewell letter was waiting for me." (Gabriel Matzneff, *Les Émiles de Gab la Rafale*, Léo Scheer, 2010, p. 322-323.)

It's not just a matter of "a passage cut out because it's already appeared in a novel or essay", et *cetera*. This is undoubtedly true of certain volumes of his diary: but is it true of all of them? Is this particularly true of *La Prunelle de mes yeux*? Matzneff adds that researchers, "if they have the curiosity", will be able to verify this near-similarity by comparing his handwritten text with the im-primed one: are we to understand that they will have access to *all* Matzneff's black notebooks? I'm afraid that's not going to be easy, since we see him, in recent volumes of his jour- nal, removing some of these notebooks from a bank safe (where they are kept) in order to sell them - or donate them - to admi- rators!

Ah, how I'd love to consult all Matzneff's black notebooks, especially those from his adolescence and his greatest loves (with his wife Tatiana, the imperious Francesca and the young Vanessa)! Happy is he who has this privilege - in this world or any other.



XVI

PROPHECIES

In Montherlant's last play, *La Guerre civile*, a character evokes Ceron falsifying his correspondence for future generations: "False copies, imaginary letters, letters written and not sent: in short, all the tricks and tru- quage for posterity<sup>1</sup> ." I don't know whether Matzneff would indulge in this kind of "tru- quage" (which, after all, would be a literary game like any other, and a very tempting prank if it were to enhance his work and *magnify* his legend), but *I* can't help smiling when I read in *La Passion Francesca*, his diary for the years 1974-1976, that on October 28, 1976, a clairvoyant, Yaguel Didier, foretold him that one day he would meet "a very young and very beautiful blonde woman", and that this meeting would take place "between September and December" (remember that the young Vanessa was blonde, and that their meeting took place on November 6).

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<sup>1</sup> Act III, scene II.



## XVI

## PROPHECIES

In Montherlant's last play, *La Guerre civile*, a character evokes Ceron falsifying his correspondence for future generations: "False copies, imaginary letters, letters written and not sent: in short, all the tricks and trappings for posterity<sup>1</sup> ." I don't know whether Matzneff would indulge in this kind of "trappings" (which, after all, would be a literary game like any other, and a tempting prank if it were to enhance his work and *magnify* his legend), but I can't help smiling when I read in *La Passion Francesca*, his diary for the years 1974-1976, that on October 28, 1976, a clairvoyant, Yaguel Didier, predicted that one day he would meet "a very young and very beautiful blonde woman", and that this meeting would take place "between September and December" (remember that the young Vanessa was blonde, and that their meeting took place on November 6).

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<sup>1</sup> Act III, scene II.

1985). I'll never have seen her before," Matzneff continues, "but I'll know *it's her*. My life will be transformed. Another prophecy: "Yaguel also predicted that I would live to be very old, without aging: at fifty, sixty, I would have almost the same face I have now<sup>1</sup> . I can't help smiling, I say, because *La Passion Francesca* was published in March 1998, long after he had met the young Vanessa, and when Matzneff was sixty-one! What's more, he writes somewhere in his notebooks that he sometimes leaves blank pages in order to complete his notes later: so it's not hard to imagine that he might have, here and there, given in to the temptation to... But hush! I don't want to be a wise guy (and maybe I'm wrong not to believe in fortune-tellers).

I would add that *La Passion Francesca*, like *La Prunelle de mes yeux*, is one of Matzneff's best books - and it too reads *like a novel*.

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*La Passion Francesca*, Gallimard, 1998, p. 318

XVII

BREAK-OFF LETTER

To prove that their love affair was both beautiful and passionate, Gabriel Matzneff invokes the superb break-up letter written by the young Vanessa; however moving and luminous this letter may be (from which I'd like to quote a few fragments )<sup>1</sup>

*The greater the love, the more power it has to make us suffer. And I love you, passionately, madly. . . But I've also suffered a lot, too much!*

*You are and will remain my first love until I die, and I'll never forget everything we've been through and how much we've loved each other. All the happiness, the pleasure, the crazy love,*

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<sup>1</sup> Matzneff reproduces this letter in *De la rupture*, Payot, 1997, pp. 166-168. (He has just changed the pre-names and cut out two words, "tes livres", in the enumeration of the antepenultimate paragraph).

*this perfect communion of our hearts and bodies that united us so strongly, nothing and no one can ever take away from me, this is my treasure... and my cross, for eternity.*

. and so grateful that the young woman shows up for her lover :

*You're a wonderful man with a body of work still to do.*

*You're my first lover, my tender initiator, the one who made sure I'll always have fond memories of my discovery of love. You opened my eyes, I was born in your arms.*

*Your love, Gabriel, is a sun that will shine on me forever. Never in my life will I regret knowing and loving you, I swear to God.*

. these lines were perhaps in the end<sup>1</sup> , for her, only a way of persuading herself that their loves had been

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And at the end of the *tale*?

beautiful, very beautiful, commensurate with the hopes she had placed in them at their dawn. In *Le Consentement*, Vanessa Springora explains that she had come to realize that the man she loved was duping her; and it's always painful to realize that one is a dupe, especially in love - which presupposes and implies a *total* and *absolute* gift of self. What had Matzneff done with this gift, given by young Vanessa? Was he worthy of it? To answer *no*, at the moment of breaking up, would have meant admitting, for the teenager, that she had been no more than an object in the hands of her lover, a mere thing he had used to satisfy his fantasies and impulses; in short, it would have meant, for her, irreparably *degrading* herself "in her own eyes.

One never really gets over the feeling of having been *something in* spite of oneself, especially when it comes to sexual matters: at fifteen, could young Vanessa admit this to herself without *immediately* destroying herself? And perhaps, by not admitting it to herself, she *slowly* destroyed herself...

Matzneff could do the same to himself, since he presents himself as a connoisseur of the psychology of young women. So why doesn't he?

## XVIII

### A TASTE OF HOME?

From *Consentement* alone, one might think that they saw each other only once after their break-up, on the famous evening when Matzneff greeted her with a "triumphant smile" in a Parisian brasserie while he was there with another young woman. Now, *Les Demoiselles du Taranne* tells us that they met again and wrote to each other several times in 1988, and that their exchanges were sometimes tender and friendly, sometimes stormy. In April, young Vanessa came to see him at the Salon du Livre stand, where he was signing *Harrison Plaza*, the novel inspired by their love affair (and published just three months after their break-up).

was also present at the Parisian bookshop L'Arbre à lettres, on November 18, 1988, for a "Matzneff evening" during which actors read the final - and deeply moving - pages of Harrison Plaza.

Did she seek to see Matzneff again after their break-up? If so, why doesn't Vanessa Springora mention it in her book?

And perhaps Matzneff was being somewhat mischievous when he wrote in his notebooks on July 16, 2007:

*Yesterday, I typed pages describing a Vanessa re-tour de flammes that I'd forgotten about, that I had no memory of; in March 90, she came to my place, we gave each other tongue-darting kisses, caressed... .*

At the risk of repeating myself: I doubt that you can really *appreciate* (in every sense of the word) *Le Consentement* without having

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Matzneff, *Carnets noirs 2007-2008*, Léo Scheer, 2009.



Matz- neff's *Carnets noirs* at your fingertips.

XIX

### DISCORDANCES

But there are at least two major discrepancies between their respective versions that need to be clarified.

When did Vanessa Springora first read *Les Moins de seize ans*? Many years after their separation, as she claims in *Le Consentement*? On June 18, 1986 (a few days after their first kiss), as Matzneff asserts in *La Prunelle de mes yeux*? Wouldn't it be surprising if, during their lovemaking, she hadn't tried at all to read this book, which concerned her directly (since she was under sixteen) and would have given her a better understanding of her lover's taste for very young people? This abstention is all the more surprising as she recounts having read from

Matzneff, while he was away for two weeks in Switzerland (and had left her the keys to his home), "the forbidden books" - in other words, the ones he had forbidden her to read (but which ones? it would be instructive to know the titles) - and that it was from these readings that she *instantly* developed the nauseating feeling of being complicit in pedophile monstrosities. "I'd like to focus on one paragraph in particular," she explains, "where, on a trip to Manila, G. goes in search of 'fresh asses'. "The little eleven- or twelve-year-old boys I put here in my lit are a rare spice," he writes a little further loin<sup>1</sup> ."

Alas, there is no trace of this stay in Switzerland in *La Prunelle de mes yeux*, so it is impossible to date these readings<sup>2</sup> . It is

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Vanessa Springora, *Le Consentement*, Grasset, 2020, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> But Matzneff notes that she was in the Philippines from February 5 to 18, 1987: could it have been during this two-week absence that young Vanessa read the "forbidden books"? Vanessa Springora's story, both in its structure and in its telling, raises doubts.

on the other hand, one would be hard-pressed to find the sentence about little boys in *Un galop d'enfer* - which, at the time of their love affair, was the only volume of *Carnets noirs* in which Matzneff was seen flying to the Philip- pines. Even more disturbing is the fact that ' this quotation is in fact taken from *Mes amours décomposés*, his diary of the years 1983-1984, the first edition of which only appeared in 1990 - more than two years after their break-up! How on earth could the young Va- nessa have read a sentence in Matzneff's 1987 diary that was not yet there? I mentioned above a certain *temporal blur*: shouldn't we also be talking about *confusion*? In addition, Vanessa Springora quotes Matzneff imperfectly, writing on February 23, 1984

*Lovingly, what I experience in Asia is very much inferior to what I experience in France, even if the little eleven or twelve year old boys that I put iCi in my bed are very different.*

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Matzneff, *Un galop d'enfer*, La Table Ronde, 1985.

*a rare pepper. Yes, a pepper, but only a pepper: a spice, not the main course.*

*And then, I always come back to this, I like to conquer, seduce, charm, fascinate, and sleeping only thanks to my wallet is not enough for me<sup>1</sup> .*

Finally, as we saw in *La Prunelle de mes yeux*, Matzneff claims that his young lover was aware of passages in the same vein long before the beginning of leurs amours - and that she "forcibly" took *Un galop d'enfer* on January 11, 1987, well before leurs amours began to falter (and he noted eight days later: "She always laughs at me about my taste for little boys, but I'm convinced that this laughter - sincere, for she has a good heart of gaiety and mischief - conceals real anguish").

Hence the most natural question for anyone who reads them without bias: '*Where is the truth?*' To write his book, Va-

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Matzneff, *Mes amours décomposés*, Folio, Gallimard, 1992, p. 267-268.

Did nessa Springora rely solely on her memory (which is by no means infallible after three decades and years of psychoanalytic treatment by the parole<sup>1</sup> ) - or did she turn to the diary she kept during the period of her love affair with Matzneff? It would be interesting to consult the notes she took from day to day, if only to compare them with those of her writer-lover.

XX

CARICATU RE ?

I regret that Vanessa Springora, here and there, seems to reproach her former lover without much significance, as if it were mainly a question of denigrating him (or of railing him): does she not have enough grievances to put to him, to weaken her narrative in this way? It's surprising, for example, that she criticizes him for never having taken an interest in the

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*Consent*, p. 178.

diary she kept<sup>1</sup> , even as she blamed him a few lines earlier for wanting to do one of her actions for her, thus *dispossessing* her of herself. What would she say, on the contrary, if he had wanted to meddle in this intimate day! Wouldn't she be stigmatizing an even greater desire for *dispossession*?

The same is true when she explains that he had taken it into his head to control every aspect of her life as she approached her fifteenth birthday, and illustrates his point with the following (rather benign and not at all unwelcome) con- sections: that she should eat less choco- lat, watch her Jinx and stop smoking (because she smoked "like a trucker")<sup>2</sup> ! She adds that he read her the New Testament every night (which she was not unhappy about) and taught her the Hail Mary between *caresses* - asking her to recite it *in her head* before going to sleep... All things considered, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Consent*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Consent*, p. 119.

all things considered, doesn't this seem a little "light" for a man accused of wanting to control *every aspect* of a teenager's existence? We've known parents (and lovers) a thousand times more coercive! Is that all a tyrant is? Why doesn't she have twenty more telling anecdotes! It's almost a pity that he didn't force her to chant prayers five or six times a day at set times, prostrating herself before candles and icons (Matzneff is Orthodox), and to go to mass every Sunday! Incidentally, in *La Prunelle de mes yeux*, Matzneff states that he taught her the "Hail Mary" because she had asked him to teach her a prayer during her stay at the Hôtel-Dieu - and that they then recited it huddled together, vowing that he wouldn't get AIDS.

By the way, on the subject of AIDS: did he really spread the rumor that he had the disease, as she claims? That a Don Juan like him would have started such a rumor is surprising, *especially* if he'd had the disease.

with the idea of deceiving her! But anyone who's read him knows that Matzneff can be very overtaking - and we should always bear in mind what he wrote in *La Passion Francesca*:

"Sometimes it's fun to live theatrically: you become the director and spectator of your own life. Anyone with a taste for destiny is hard-pressed to escape this (innocent) temptation<sup>1</sup> .

And what's the point of pointing out his "real phobia of all forms of physical alteration" (which, incidentally, he confesses to in *La Prunelle de mes yeux*), or mocking - with a deadpan - the stays he regularly takes in Switzerland at a fitness center "where he eats almost exclusively salad and seeds, where alcohol and tobacco are banned, and from which he returns five years younger every time"? This coquetry doesn't fit with the image I have of a man of letters," she comments. And yet, it's this body that's so slender and supple, so blond and firm,

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<sup>1</sup> *La Passion Francesca*, p. 322, on the date of November 23. vember 1976.

As of November 13, 1986.



that I fell in love with it. But I would have preferred not to know the secrets of its preservation<sup>1</sup> ." All right, let's admit that this was her opinion at the age of fifteen. Still, how on earth could her lover's taste for dietetics (which he comically praises in the first book she's ever read by him, *Nous n'irons plus au Luxembourg*) have so upset the teenager in her?

Finally, what are we to make of what she writes about the famous petition published in January 1977 in *Le Monde*, "À propos d'un procès", concerning the three years of pre-trial detention suffered at the time by three adults accused of sexual abuse of minors: "We'll have to wait until 2013," she argues, "for him to reveal that he was the initiator (he was even the drafter) [...]" - the use of the syntagm

This "will have to wait" implies that Matzneff had some interest in concealing his role in the affair, or even showed *some cowardice*... However, there was no concealment on his part, since Matzneff, in the volume of his diary covering the years-

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<sup>1</sup> *Consent*, p. 118.

nées 1977-1978 (and which is none other than L/n *galop d'enfer*, published in 1985), drafted this petition with his friend the philosopher René Schérer and collected many signatures<sup>1</sup> !

And so, as we read and reread *Le Consentement*, we come to wonder, poignant as some of the pages are: What if Vanessa Springora was *exaggerating*? What if she was *caricaturing* her former lover? What if she was *deliberately* caricaturing him, using any wood she could, no matter how wet or rotten? What if her aim was above all to settle scores and take revenge *by any means possible*, the dishonest as well as the good? - At the beginning of the book, she says she wants to "catch the hunter in his own trap" and "lock him in a book": would she have used against him the same falsifying methods she accuses him of using against her?

At least Matzneff's portrait of his young lover (whether true or false) was more nuanced - and *made us love her*.

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*Un galop d'enfer*, p. 22-24.

## THE NEGATES

Could it be a consequence of age, or of the growing solitude of the deceased seducer? One theme runs through Matzneff's latest livres to the point of obsession: the women he loved, who loved him, but no longer want to see him again. Thus he describes himself, in *La Jeune Moabite* (his diary from 2013-2016), trying at all costs to re-engage with Vanessa Springora: and as she *stubbornly* refuses to have the slightest contact with him, he vilifies her and makes her the prototype of the *renegade* / The definition he gives of this term in the next volume of his diary (dated February 5, 2017) merits reading: "I don't hate anyone; on the other hand, there are beings whom I despise with all my might, whom I regard as repugnant scum of humanity: they are the forgetful, the amnesiac, those who strive miserably to erase, to grat-

ter, to deny what they experienced with me in their adolescence and youth. They are the renegades<sup>1</sup> .

Is Matzneff growing bitter with age? Has he aged badly? The essayist-philosopher of *Passions schismatiques* (1977) seems loin! Or the novelist of *Harrison Plaza*, the short, beautiful novel born of his love affair with the young Vanessa! In it, Nil Kolytcheff, his paper double, replied to Rodin, an old pederast friend of his who asked him about "all those young maîtresses" "so fervent" and "so in love" who had "written him out of their lives" and "erased him from their memories", that he held no grudge against them. No doubt this denial was necessary," he added, "it was all they could think of not to suffer...".

Instead, thirty years later, every time Matzneff talks about them in his books, it's to complain about them, to agonize over them.

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*L'Amante de l'Arsenal*, p. 86.

*Harrison Plaza*, in Gabriel Matzneff, *Les Aventures de Nil Kolytcheff*, Jean-Claude Lattès-La Table Ronde, 1994, pp. 731-732.

of sarcasm, ignore their suffering - and think only of her own.

XXü

CENSORS  
HIP

Did Matzneff's fame really fade after the heyday of the Seventies and Eighties, as Vanessa Springora J asserts in her book? In any case, thanks to her, he is now more famous than ever - and no one has sold as many livres (or been as widely read) as he did in the weeks following the publication of *Consent*. We can only rejoice for the sake of literature - since, regardless of his morals, Matzneff is a writer, a *true* writer, if we adopt the definition (which fits him like a glove and which he seems to have forged for himself) he gave in *Les Passions schismatiques*: "What is a writer? he asked himself. It's a sensibility shaped by writing, a uni-

verse supported by a style<sup>1</sup>". He proved this as early as his first book, *Le Défi*, a collection of short essays published in 1965 - and we can only encourage sensitive and curious souls to immerse themselves in his philosophical dictionary, *Le Taureau de Phalaris* (1987), and in two of his most delightful novels, *Nous n'irons plus au Luxembourg* (1972) and *Les Lèvres menteuses* (1992), before wandering here and there, as they please, through his diaries or his poems, his collections of articles or his stories.... it being understood that you can read and love Matz- neff without being a potential paedophile, just as you can read and love Céline without being anti-Semitic, or Mauriac without being a stool pigeon.

However, to read Matzneff, you need to have access to his books! Yet a large part of his work is currently unavailable in bookshops, as his various publishers withdrew around twenty of his works from sale after the publication of *Consentement* (and it is to be feared that many librarians and publishers will continue to do so).

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<sup>1</sup> *Schismatic Passions*, p. 120.

caries imitating them as they spout his prose - quickly deemed immoral and repugnant - some bookshops refuse to sell or order those of his books that are still available - and on January 11, 2020, I discovered to my horror that they had all disappeared from the website of one of France's leading retailers of cultural products! In other words, it's impossible for Internet users to order a single book from Matzneff, even second-hand! And having visited a Matzneff store (one of the biggest book sellers in France) on the same day, I had to face the facts: it was impossible for Matzneff's employees to place orders.

Isn't there something in all this? censorship?

XXIII

COÏNCIDENCE

January 11, 2015, across France, millions of people marched in song.

their love of freedom, of the Republic and by saying "Charlie" ' and here we are, five years later to the day...

Chance has a strange way of doing things.

## XXIV

### THE MAN AND THE WORK

And nothing annoys me more than hearing Matzneff called a talentless writer, a mediocre stylist, a third-rate scribbler and so on, whose meagre reputation is due solely to the pre-tensely scandalous (or sulphurous) aspects of his livres: need I remind you that almost all of them were published by the most prestigious French publishers of our time (Gallimard, La Table Ronde, Julliard, Éditions du Sandre, etc.)? Would all these publishers have persisted in publishing him for six decades, given his rather low sales, if they had judged him to be as useless as some people today insist?



Vanessa Springora's reluctance to pass judgement on Matzneff's literary work is understandable, given the painful memories of her childhood. memory she retains of their love affairs (and the discomfort she feels every time he talks about her in his livres). Unfortunately, many people use the argument of *Consentement* to condemn the entire body of Matzneff's forty-odd works - as well as castigating the man who wrote them: and shouldn't this *double penalty* make her react and protest, as an editor (she is director of Julliard publishing house) and a lover of literature?

In January 2015, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his entry into literature, Matzneff published two books: a novel, *La Lettre au Capitaine Brunner*, and a tome of his diary, *Mais la musique soudain s'est tue* (which covers the years 2009 to 2013); on the television set of his *Grande Librairie*, journalist François Busnel welcomed him with these words: 'Les belles âmes ne vous aiment pas beaucoup, mon cher Gabriel Matzneff. The literary world, I'm told, considers you a bad su-

jet... That said (*and Busnel turned to the camera*), if we confused literature with the morality police, we wouldn't read much anymore!" Could he have said it better? And Busnel went on to say that he considered Matzneff's novels to be *superb pieces of literature*, to sum him up with a pretty formula (*the writer banished for bad morals and great style*) and to congratulate himself, as the program drew to a close, that he was continuing to produce his little music...

Will I be blamed if, *for the love of literature*, I also hope that he continues to play music for a long time to come?

## XXV

### LEGEND

To be remembered and captivated by posterity, there's nothing like having a legend - and being seen *as a monster*. So Gabriel Matzneff can die a peaceful death: thanks to Vanessa Springora and her *Consentement*, this legend (or perhaps myth) now exists.

He's *absolutely certain* to still be read five or ten centuries from now, provided that literature, freedom, the French language and the human race don't disappear altogether (which is not beyond doubt). What contemporary writer could say the same?

Is Matzneff aware of this from the depths of his exile? Does he realize how lucky he is - and how much he owes to his former lover? That he should persist in refusing to read *Le Consentement* (as he has loudly proclaimed) would sadden me all the more, as I'm inclined to believe that she wrote it first and foremost *for /oi*, and that the battered teenager she once was (and never really ceased to be) is thus, despite appearances, addressing him a final - and *bloody* - love song.