



Shulamit Almog* and Ruth Amar

Resting her Case: “MeToo à la française” – Springora and Others

<https://doi.org/10.1515/pol-2024-2012>

Abstract: In January 2020, Vanessa Springora published *Consent*, an unusual memoir that discloses the elaborated version of a personal story. Springora was 14 years old when she met the 50-year-old Gabriel Matzneff, a well-known French writer. Thirty years later, she decided to take back the agency that she claims was taken from her, with the artilleries of literature. While closely following Springora’s narrative, the paper focuses on the emergence of a new “memoir genre”, which besides presenting a platform for personal redemption, instigated an important shift within the French public opinion regarding the nature of consent, and ignited significant legal reform in this regard. As will be elaborated, *Consent* and other works in similar spirit appositely demonstrate the power of law to stimulate certain narrative patterns, and the power of stories to influence cultural atmosphere which leads to legal changes.

Keywords: literature alongside law; consent; memoir; #MeToo

Vanessa Springora, daughter of a press secretary in the publishing industry, was 14 years old when she met the 50-year-old French writer Gabriel Matzneff (referred to as “G” in the book). In January 2020, Springora, then director of *Les Editions Julliard*, published *Consent*, an unusual memoir that discloses her version of the relationship that evolved between herself and “G”. Here is the beginning, as Springora relates it in the book: “I met Gabriel at the age of 13. We fell in love when I was fourteen.”¹

According to her book, after meeting Matzneff, Springora was subjected to his power over the next two years. Thirty years later, she decided to take back the agency that was taken from her, with the artilleries of literature. The preamble of the book may serve as a key to the motivation that the book emblems:

1 Vanessa Springora, *Consent* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021), 111.

***Corresponding author: Shulamit Almog**, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel,
E-mail: salmog@law.haifa.ac.il

Ruth Amar, Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel,
E-mail: ramar@research.haifa.ac.il

For so many years I have been going round and round in my cage, my dreams replete with murder and revenge, to this day the solution is finally revealed to my eyes as clear as sun: catch the hunter in his own trap, imprison him in the book.²

Here are several reflections that this declaration evokes. Does a book written by a victim, create an adequate closure? Can a literary work serve the function of effectively punishing an offender? And specifically, what was the cultural and social atmosphere in France at that time that enabled such an alarming relationship (in contemporary view) as the book describes? Focusing on these questions, another issue comes to mind, which is the nature of the intricate relationship between cultural representations and legal changes. As we put forward, the literary narratives of Springora and others, demonstrate how, in Daniela Carpi's apt phrasing: "cultural concerns shape the law and, vice versa, [...] the law influences cultural schemas embedded in institutions".³ As will be expounded here, *Consent* and other works in similar spirit are a pertinent example of both: the power of law to ignite certain narrative patterns, and the power of stories to influence cultural atmosphere which leads to legal action and legal changes.

1 The Tolerance of Cultural Environment

At the opening of her story, Springora raises the possibility that she fell victim not only to Matzneff, but also to her cultural environment. At a dinner party where she accompanied her mother, she meets G., a writer who enjoys literary and cultural reputation. From the first glance, she is caught by the charisma of this fifty-year-old man, and flattered with the attention he pays her. Later, she receives a letter in which he declares his "imperious" need to see her again. The passionate G. reassures her: he loves her and will do her no harm. When she has just turned 14, young Springora devotes herself to him body and soul. Soon, Springora realizes that G. has always practiced sexual affairs with adolescent girls, as well as sex tourism in countries where minors are vulnerable. She describes her situation as an adolescent facing a powerful adult, lacking the tools or capacities to shield or protect herself:

I found myself cruelly lacking the vocabulary. I wasn't familiar with the terms "narcissistic pervert" and "sexual predator". I didn't know there was such a thing as a person for whom the Other does not exist. I still believed that violence was only ever physical. And G. manipulated language like others manipulates swords. With the simplest expression he could deal me a fatal blow that would destroy me. It was impossible to do battle with him on equal terms.⁴

2 Ibid., VIII.

3 Daniela Carpi, "Focus: Law, Literature and (Popular) Culture" *Pólemos*, vol. 8, no. 1, (2014): 1–9, 1.

4 Ibid., 116.

Springora describes how she realized that behind the appearances of the man of letters, hides a predator. She tries to tear herself away from his hold again and again. Finally, she manages to break away, but after the breakup, the ordeal continues; G. carries on reactivating Springora's suffering with publications and harassment.

The book reveals, the reality in which Matzneff was protected by part of the Parisian intelligentsia. As Sophie Joubert mentions, the seduction of minors by the Gallic elite is not a novelty. For instance, in 1905 *Black Masses Lord Lyllian*⁵ reveals "the close-knit nature of the Gallic elite, the complicity between political, media, and publishing spheres".⁶ For centuries the prestigious status of the intelligentsia was such that their thoughts were sought after and taken seriously. Examples, mostly male, include Hugo, Voltaire, Zola, Gide, Sartre and later, in the seventies, Foucault. A substantial number of examples illustrate the cultural atmosphere that prevailed in France just a few decades ago. Pierre Verdrager, in his book on paedophilia *L'enfant interdit* (2013), confirms that in the 1970s and 1980s: "The identification of the potentially sexual nature of the relationship between adults and children was one of the ways of going against the bourgeois order".

One case in point concerns de Beauvoir and Sartre. Grave misgivings have been growing in recent years regarding their sexual conduct, reflected in the writings of Beauvoir. By today's standards, the actions of Beauvoir-Sartre would apparently, make both of them suspects of sexual harassment. Louis Menand describes how the two used to, in a serial manner, "adopt" a young girl, usually their student, and seduce her intellectually and financially.⁷ Choderlo De Lacló's book *Dangerous Liaisons*,⁸ comes to mind, writes Bianca Bienenfeld, one of those young women whom would be named today "victims." In this spirit, In *Becoming Beauvoir: a Life*, Kate Kirkpatrick states:

There is no doubt de Beauvoir's behavior was deceptive [...] and problematic [...] Madame Bienenfeld, [the victim's mother] accused Beauvoir of being an 'old maid with unusual moral' and after Beauvoir introduced the young Bianca to Sartre, Bianca writes in her memoir: "Just as a waiter plays the role of a waiter, Sartre played to perfection the role of a man in love."⁸

After the volatile period of civil unrest of May 68 the slogan: "Il est interdit d'interdire" was spurred in France. A letter was published in *Le Monde* in 1977, entitled "Lettre ouverte à la Commission de révision du code pénal pour la révision de

5 *Black Masses-Lord Lyllian* is Fersen Jacques d'Adelsward's book of the eccentric Baron Fersen's decadent gay novel. Originally published in 1905, it was one of the first novels written about Oscar Wilde after his demise, and fondly narrated addiction to opium and adolescent boys.

6 *Ibid.*, 7.

7 Louis Menand, "Stand by your Man – The Strange Liaison of Sartre and Beauvoir" *The New Yorker*, September 19, (2005): 12.

8 Kate Kirkpatrick, *Becoming Beauvoir: A Life*. London. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 155.

certaines textes régissant les rapports entre adultes et mineurs”,⁹ advocating non-discrimination due to sex between adults and minors. Eminent intellectuals, writers and philosophers (like Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, and Louis Aragon) including Matzneff, signed it. The letter was written against the prosecution of three men for having sex with minors aged 10. What emerges from *Consent* is the tolerance of the environment and the social norm, at least among the intellectual elite. For instance, in 1979, another petition was published in *Liberation*, signed by well-known literary figures, which supported a man accused of living with little girls aged six to twelve.¹⁰ Springora reviews the slogans of those days, representing calls for the freedom of moral and sexual revolution. Muriel Salmona, a French psychiatrist and president of “Mémoire Traumatique et Victimologie” (the Traumatic Memory and Victimology association) states in an interview that what these intellectuals didn’t know was that they had been colonized ‘by the discourse of paedocriminals’. She said it is a ‘legal horror’ that France did not have an age of consent at the time, and that the 1970s and ‘80s in France was an ‘atrocious’ era for children.¹¹ Thirty years, Springora notes were required for the media in which the petitions were published, to apologize: “the newspapers that had printed these exceedingly dubious opinion pieces went on to publish their mea culpa, arguing that in any period of history, the media merely reflects the ideas of the time.”¹²

Through her personal story, Springora illustrates how a privileged elite that openly opposes legal norms, managed to evade paying legal prices. As put by Onishi in the *New-York Times*:

The support of Mr. Matzneff reflected an enduring French contradiction: a nation that is deeply egalitarian yet with an elite that often distinguishes itself from ordinary people through a different code of morality, a different set of rules, or at least believing it necessary to defend those who did.¹³

Worse than that, the elite deepened the damage by forcing a toll of disgrace upon the victim. Thus, years after she finally manages to break away from Matzneff, Springora

9 *Le Monde*, Archives. Un appel pour la révision du code pénal à propos des relations mineurs-adultes. *Le Monde*, May 23, 1977 at 00h00, (Accessed May 23, 1977). Our free translation: “Open letter to the Penal Code Revision Commission for the revision of certain texts governing relations between adults and minors”.

10 Vanessa Springora, *Consent* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021), 50.

11 in *The Atlantic* in 2018.

12 *Ibid.*, 51.

13 Norimitsu Onishi, “A Pedophile Writer Is on Trial. So Are the French Elites” *The New York Times*, February 11, 2020, (Accessed February 12 2020). <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/11/world/europe/gabriel-matzneff-pedophilia-france.html>.

writes that she is still tattooed with stigma: “In an attempt to reintegrate, to live a normal life, I put on a mask, hide, dig.”¹⁴

In the nineties, a shift in the cultural habitat has started. In 1990, during one episode of Bernard Pivot’s prominent program *Apostrophes*, where Matzneff was a frequent guest, the Quebecoise journalist Denise Bombardier confronted him on the T.V. set:

We know very well that little girls can be crazy about a monsieur who has a certain literary aura. Just as old men attract little children with bonbons, Mr Matzneff attracts them with his reputation [...] How do they come out of this, these little girls? I think they wither, and that most of them are withered for the rest of their lives.¹⁵

The ageing (now retired) presenter Bernard Pivot apologized, saying he regrets “not having said what I should have” at the time. Yet in 2013, Matzneff was bestowed with a new honor: the prestigious Prix Renaudot in the essay category for *Séraphin, c’est la fin!*, a work that details the author’s penchant for sex with children. As Springora describes, the anemic polemic regarding the award initiated her book.¹⁶

Matzneff raised in this controversy defensive claims that reflect an alleged old French ethos of placing literature above morality: according to this alleged ethos; the value of a book should be separated from claims of “immorality”. Springora relates the event:

There was a disappointingly low-key controversy when the prize was awarded. A few journalists (young for the most part, of neither his generation nor mine) spoke out against him being awarded this honorary distinction [...] “To judge a book, a painting, a sculpture, or a film, not for its beauty, or power of its expression, but for its morality, or supposed morality, is a spectacularly stupid thing to do [...] but on top of that signing a petition as a way of expressing outrage at the positive reception [...] is simply despicable” he protested in a newspaper.¹⁷

Obviously, people were offended by the prize being awarded to such an opus, but Matzneff was well-connected in Parisian circles, and renowned figures like Josyane

¹⁴ Ibid., 163.

¹⁵ Bombardier, Denise. *Apostrophes*. T.V. Program by Bernard Pivot, 1990, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjZmJkLdwN8>. Our free translation from French: « On sait bien que les petites filles peuvent être folles d’un monsieur qui a une certaine aura littéraire. D’ailleurs, on sait que les vieux monsieurs attirent les petits enfants avec des bonbons. Mr Matzneff lui, les attire avec sa réputation [...] Comment s’en sortent-elles ces petites filles ? Moi je crois qu’elles sont flétries et la plupart, pour le restant de leur jours ».

¹⁶ Vanessa Springora, *Consent* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021), 175.

¹⁷ Ibid., 173–174.

Savigneau, the former editor of *Le Monde's* book review section, and Philippe Sollers, novelist, editor and critic, brushed aside these objections as emanating out of touch with contemporary literary and sexual ethics:

Savigneau offered some lame defense of Matzneff as a writer, and the normally voluble Sollers made no comment. The Renaudot made a serious blunder in 2013, and the initial reaction of an intellectual elite, coupled with its inaction in 2020, did little to enhance the reputation of the contemporary public intellectual.¹⁸

The question that obviously comes to mind is how did all the defenses that were supposed to protect the minor Springora collapse? How did so many cultural luminaries disregard the damage caused to her? Springora offers a number of answers in her text. In a heartbreaking paragraph, she points to the lack of love as a factor that led her toward a depreciation of herself:

The lack, that lack of love, like a thirst that makes a man drink down to the last drop, the thirst of a junkie who doesn't check the quality of what he's scored, who injects himself with a lethal dose with the conviction that it will make him feel better.¹⁹

Hence the short cut to self-blame, a well-known phenomenon among victims of sexual offenses. Springora expresses the nature of the vulnerability of the victim, which proves the concept of consent so problematic:

Vulnerability is precisely that infinitesimal space into which people with the psychological profile of G. can insinuate themselves. It's the element that makes the notion of consent so beside the point. Very often, in the case of sexual abuse or abuse of the vulnerable, one comes across the same denial of reality, the same refusal to consider oneself a victim. And indeed, how is it possible to acknowledge having been abused when it's impossible to deny having consented, having felt desire for the very adult who was so eager to take advantage of you?²⁰

The legal concept known as "consent" thus becomes a device that protects the sexual predator. Springora did not enjoy any parental defense wall either. While her parents were separated (her father is described as being hardly present in her life) her mother and friends knew about the relationship, and referred to it as an "open secret to all". The protective wall that law enforcement agencies were supposed to erect proved to be of no practical value. The police, who momentarily appeared on the scene, did not investigate in depth. Springora writes about this failure as follows:

¹⁸ William Cloonan, "Parisian Intellectuals and their Plague", *France-Amérique*, 2021, <https://france-amerique.com/parisian-intellectuals-and-their-plague/> https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1977/05/23/un-appel-pour-la-revision-du-code-penal-a-propos-des-relations-mineurs-adultes_2873736_1819218.html.

¹⁹ Vanessa Springora, *Consent* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021), 74.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

Why did neither of the police officers pay any attention to me? I was a teenage girl. The letters ... Admittedly I was actually 14, and perhaps I looked a little older.

“All the same, it’s astounding that it didn’t even occur to them.”²¹

The result, for Springora, was disastrous: no one around her was alerted by the situation. No one felt the urge or the need to intervene. Against this background, years of psychoanalytic treatment were needed to dispel the ambivalence and persuade Springora that she had fallen victim, with no fault of her own, to a sex offender.

2 The Function of the Literary Text as Igniting Legal Change

Let us move now toward another issue – what is the function of the literary text in such circumstances? Could a narrative put forward by a victim serve as an effective tool for punishing an offender? Springora tells her readers how writing the book and publicly presenting her story benefited her. Beyond personal gain, this book, along with a growing wave of stories of women who were victims of sexual offenses, led to legal consequences and invoked an essential impact in France. After the release of the book, numerous letters of support were sent to Springora. In a few of them, 12 women and two men, who had had relations with Matzneff thank her for having broken the silence: “I found it absolutely overwhelming,” she says. To all, she advised to contact the police who are investigating what has become “the Matzneff affair.”²²

Springora, now the director of Julliard publishers, has succeeded to blow apart the unperturbed world of contemporary French literature. She describes why she was not able to write the book for so many years, and when she finally transcended her fears:

First there was the fear of the consequences such as a detailed account of this episode would have on my family and my career, which are always difficult to evaluate.

I also had to overcome my fear of the tiny circle of friends who might still be prepared to protect G. this was not trivial. I was worried that if the book were published, I’d be subject to violent attacks not only by his fans but also by some *ex-soixante-huitards*, veterans of May ’68

²¹ Ibid., 88.

²² Dominique Perrin, « Prescription, déni, complaisance ... Matzneff, une affaire toujours en souffrance » *Le Monde*, June 26, 2020 at 01h56 (Accessed 26 juin 2020 à 19h51) https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2020/06/26/prescription-deni-complaisance-matzneff-une-affaire-ensouffrance_6044215_4500055.html.

revolution, who might feel they were being attacked for having signed the notorious open letter, and perhaps even a few women opposed to the new so-called neo-Puritan discourse on sexuality;²³

Shortly after the publication of her book, in spite of the statute of limitations (in French law, victims must report a crime no more than 30 years after they come of legal age), Paris public prosecutor's office opened an investigation and accused Matzneff of underage rape.²⁴ A conservative parliamentary deputy quoted *Consent* when she proposed a law redefining sex with any minor under the age of fifteen as rape. Gallimard, France's most prestigious publisher, which published Matzneff's diaries from 1990 until last year, were stormed by French police, who wanted to seize his works as possible evidence for his affairs with minors, and about his sexual tourism in southeast Asia. Springora still can't believe it: "I thought the book would have an echo in the small Parisian milieu, which still knew who he was, but not with young people, who did not know him. I used the initials GM to make it a universal character".²⁵

Springora identifies the law in France and the privilege it provides for some reason to artists and authors, as a tool serving the offenders:

I spent a long time thinking about this breach of confidentiality, particularly in a legal area that is otherwise strictly controlled, and I could only come up with one explanation [...] A sort of aristocrat in possession of exceptional privileges before whom we, in a state of blind stupefaction, suspend all judgement.²⁶

And here, probably the literature succeeds to break out this immunity. In a reverse paraphrase of Audrey Lord's well-known saying, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," Springora proves that in her case, the master's tools will actually dismantle the stronghold of his control.

Other works that could be tagged as related to the "memoir genre" followed. For instance, after the publication of *Consent*, Francesca Gee also decided to reveal her story. First heard by the police as part of the investigation opened for "rape of a minor under fifteen" targeting Gabriel Matzneff, Gee, a former journalist, now sixty-two, was interviewed by *The New York Times*, then by the website of the weekly

23 Vanessa Springora, *Consent* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021), 182–183.

24 Sophie Joubert, "Sexual Abuse: Literature Inspiring Change in French Society" *France-Amérique*, March 1, 2021, <https://france-amerique.com/en/sexual-abuse-literature-inspiring-change-in-french-society/>.

25 Dominique Perrin, « Prescription, déni, complaisance ... Matzneff, une affaire toujours en souffrance ». *Le monde*. (June 26, 2020 at 01h56 - Accessed 26 juin 2020 à 19h51). https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2020/06/26/prescription-deni-complaisance-matzneff-une-affaire-ensouffrance_6044215_4500055.html.

26 Vanessa Springora, *Consent* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021), 175.

Marianne. Gee then gradually realized that she had been a victim to a relationship that had not been “a love affair” but a “hostage taking,” as the policeman who questioned her said, in the context of the investigation.

The stark reversal of public opinion, that turned “free love” into sexual exploitation and rape is echoed in Christine Angot’s article in *Le Monde*:

Vanessa Springora has written a book. Do you realize that you were taking your wishes for reality? You don’t want to admit it. She was there without being there. She was in your bed without being there. She didn’t know where she was. She was 14 years old. She had just had her period. Had she mourned not being a little girl anymore? Have you asked yourself the question? You thought you were Prince Charming, but you woke her up the wrong way.²⁷

In January 2021, a year after the publication of *Consent* in French, Camille Kouchner’s *The Familia Grande* was published, where the dynamics of abuse, and the questions of guilt and disgrace surrounding it, are explored. The book generated an important discussion about incest, and the laws that have so often allowed powerful men to dodge consequences for their crime. Kouchner accuses her stepfather, renowned professor and political scientist Olivier Duhamel, of sexually abusing her twin brother, referred to as “Victor,” when he was 14. Similarly to the account of Springora, Kouchner also writes about the screen of silence that prevailed. She describes powerfully the sensation of guilt she felt for not talking: “And several times a day the guilt would boil over and sweeps aside my paralysis: by not pointing out what was going on, I had participated in the incest [...] My guilt was the guilt of consent”.²⁸ As a consequence of the publication, the public prosecutor’s office opened an investigation despite the statute of limitations. Duhamel has admitted the facts and stepped down from all public positions and roles.²⁹

Consent as well garnered legal actions. Matzneff was called to appear in Paris Court, and was accused of promoting pedophilia through his books, an accusation

27 Christine Angot, « Christine Angot à Gabriel Matzneff: Vous preniez vos désirs pour des réalités » *Le Monde* (2019) https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2019/12/31/christine-angot-gabriel-matzneff-vous-et-les-autres_6024437_3232.html. Our free translation from French: Vanessa Springora a écrit un livre. Vous vous rendez compte que vous preniez vos désirs pour des réalités. Vous ne voulez pas l’admettre. Elle était là sans être là. Elle était dans votre lit sans y être. Elle ne savait pas où elle était. Elle avait 14 ans. Elle venait tout juste d’avoir ses règles. Est-ce qu’elle avait fait le deuil de ne plus être une petite fille ? Vous vous êtes posé la question ? Vous vous êtes pris pour le prince charmant, mais vous l’avez réveillée de la mauvaise manière.

28 Camille Kouchner, *La Familia grande*. (Paris: Seuil, 2021), 135.

29 Sophie Joubert, “Sexual Abuse: Literature Inspiring Change in French Society”. *France-Amérique* (March 1, 2021) <https://france-amerique.com/en/sexual-abuse-literature-inspiring-change-in-french-society/>.

that could lead to five years in prison. As noted by Onishi, “the case is also an implicit indictment of an elite that furthered his career and swatted away isolated voices calling for his arrest.”³⁰

3 Summary: Literature Alongside Law

What is perhaps more important than the belated attempts to demand accountability from old attackers, is a new law that the literary works garnered. Put forward in November 2020, following two criminal cases in which the victims were 11-year-old girls, a bill for “improving the protection of underage victims of rape and sexual assault” was expanded and adopted at its first reading by the French Senate on January 21. The law criminalizes any sexual act between an adult and a minor under the age of 13, enhances the definition of rape, and applies more severe sanctions to incestuous sexual abuse.³¹

These cases have one thing in common, which is often mentioned by “MeToo à la française” campaigners.³² They concern children or very young adolescents. Vanessa Springora was 13, and “Victor” Kouchner 14. We can add to this grim list the case of the skater Sarah Abitbol who, in *Un si long silence*, recounts the repeated rapes of her trainer when she was 15 years old.³³

³⁰ Norimitsu Onishi, “A Pedophile Writer Is on Trial. So Are the French Elites” *The New York Times*. (Feb. 11, Accessed February 12 2020). <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/11/world/europe/gabriel-matzneff-pedophilia-france.html>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Laure Murat, « La sinistre exception culturelle du #MeToo à la française ». *Libération*. Accessed Jan 10, 2021. https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2021/01/10/la-sinistre-exception-culturelle-du-metoo-a-la-francaise_1810805/.

³³ Sarah Abitbol, *Un si long silence* (Paris : Plon, 2020). She writes : “Il aura fallu trente ans pour que ma colère cachée se transforme enfin en cri public. Vous avez détruit ma vie, monsieur O., pendant que vous meniez tranquillement la vôtre. Aujourd’hui, je veux balayer ma honte, la faire changer de camp. Mais je veux aussi dénoncer le monde sportif qui vous a protégé, et vous protège encore à l’heure où j’écris ces lignes. Quand j’ai voulu parler, à plusieurs reprises, je n’ai pas pu le faire. Aujourd’hui, avec ce livre, je sors de ce silence assassin. Et j’appelle toutes les victimes à en faire autant.” Our free translation: “It took thirty years for my hidden anger to finally turn into a public cry. You destroyed my life, Mr. O., while you quietly led yours. Today, I want to sweep away my shame, make it change sides. But I also want to denounce the sporting world which has protected you, and still protects you as I write these lines. When I wanted to speak, several times, I couldn’t. Today, with this book, I come out of this murderous silence. And I call on all victims to do the same.”

What intensely emerges from these cases is how a literary text, succeeds in motivating a real change within the legal regime. Until 2021, French law deemed sex between adults and children below fifteen possibly consensual.³⁴ Springora probably errs then, when she assumes that “he (Matzneff) has daily satisfied a desire which is strongly forbidden by the law.”³⁵ The protection from sexual assaults provided by French law at that time to French minors was too ethereal and insufficient to withstand the supremacy and influence of intellectual elite. The result was a system that has allowed predators to act with impunity. Yet, Springora’s book, together with other works of literature, were instrumental in finally erecting meaningful legal protection for children. A new law enacted in 2021 reformed the treatment of sex with minor: “Article 222-23-1 effectively established an age of consent at 15, below which all penetrative acts done by a major to a minor are considered rape.”³⁶

The new literary genre of which Springora and Kushner are distinct representatives – a genre in which the victim turns the spotlight on themselves, has succeeded in stimulating a perceptual revolution; in transforming the necessary protection from theoretical to real.

Hence, these writers present a powerful application of the *literature alongside law paradigm*³⁷ on its two levels – presenting law’s inherent letdowns, while offering ways of improving the law. One of them is the universal role of literature as a tool that produces ways of resisting and dealing effectively with the failures of the law.

Bionotes

Shulamit Almog

University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

salmog@law.haifa.ac.il

Shulamit Almog is a Full Professor of Law at the University of Haifa, Head of Gender Equity Unit and Co-Director of the Center of Law, Gender and Policy. Her research focuses on law and culture, law and literature, law and film, children’s rights and feminist legal studies. She has published numerous books and articles in US, Canadian, European and Israeli law reviews.

³⁴ Noah Percy, *The Age of Consent and Its Discontents: French Intellectuals and the Reform of Sexual Violence Law, 1968–1982*. Undergraduate History Thesis Department of History Columbia University 6 April 2022, 1.

³⁵ Noah Percy, *The Age of Consent and Its Discontents: French Intellectuals and the Reform of Sexual Violence Law, 1968–1982*. Undergraduate History Thesis Department of History Columbia University 6 April 2022.

³⁶ Shulamit Almog, *The Origins of The Law in Homer* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022).

³⁷ Shulamit Almog, *The Origins of The Law in Homer* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022).

Ruth Amar

Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel
ramar@research.haifa.ac.il

Ruth Amar is an associate professor in the department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature, at the University of Haifa. She has published a large number of articles on the contemporary French novel, including the work of Tahar Ben-John, J. M. G. Le Clézio, Michel Tournier, Andre Chédid, Jean Echenoz, Olivier Rollin, Sylvie Germain, Patrick Modiano, Michel Houellebecq. She is the author of *Les structures de la solitude dans l'œuvre de J.M.G. Le Clézio* (Publisud, 2004), Tahar Ben jelloun: *Les Stratégies narratives*, (Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), *Bonheur: Quête et représentation dans le roman français contemporain*, (Classiques Garnier, 2016). She is co-author of *Utopie: mémoire et imaginaire, actes du colloque*, (Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 2008), *Le monde d'Alain Bosquet*, (Publisud, 2009). She is editor of *L'Écriture du bonheur dans le roman contemporain*, (Cambridge, CSP, 2011) and *The Relationship between Center and Periphery in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge CSP, 2018).