

**WINTER 2022**

ENG 417 Special Topics in American Literature  
Sex, Power, and #MeToo



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# COLLOQUIUM SERIES

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# Colloquium Series at a Glance

**41**

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**8**

INTERNATIONAL GUEST SPEAKERS

**4**

FACULTY AND GRADUATE STUDENT  
PARTICIPANTS

**1**

TEACHING ASSISTANT



**It was my pleasure to visit [ENG417]. Please let your students know I really appreciated their compelling questions.**

Susan Choi,  
Yale University and author of *Trust Exercise*

25 January 2022

# Literary Predators and Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier*

Irene Gammel, Katie Hall,  
Natalie Ilesley, Jason Wang

## The Sexualized Body as an Anchor for Power: A Foucauldian Approach

IRENE GAMMEL

In the *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that sex is being constructed through power relations, with the body working as a locus for control. Even more than Foucault, Dreiser focusses on the materiality of both sex and power, presenting the body as material and corporeal as seen in Dreiser's insistent references to concrete, materialist images such as magnetism or chemistry. Since hierarchical power relations are also inscribed through material fashion and clothing, I perform a semiotic analysis of Aileen Butler's clothing (e.g. pp. 136-37), and the inscription of power on her body, whereby Dreiser also creates the discursive rhetoric of the predator, sexualizing the "thrill[...] of mastery" (137).

## The Sexual Predator as Narcissist: A Psychoanalytic Reading

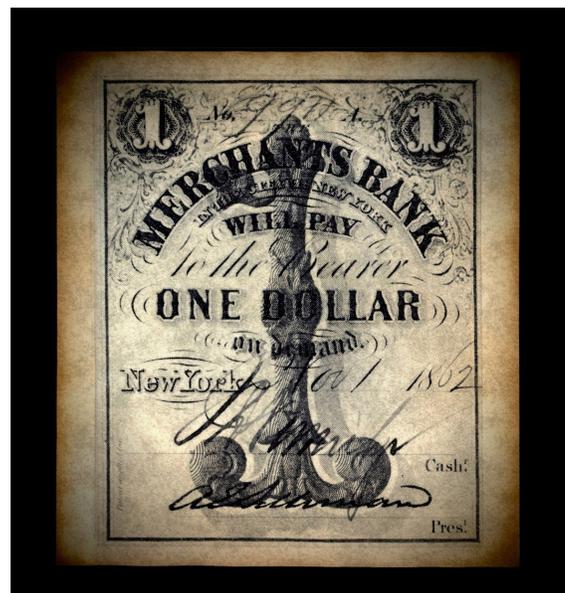
KATIE HALL

The Narcissist in literature – and how he is presented in Dreiser's *The Financier* – offers an early blueprint of the male predator who often features in the narratives of the #MeToo movement. To frame the concept of narcissism, I provide a brief genealogy of psychoanalytic literary criticism including key theorists and critiques, such as Sigmund Freud, and neo-Freudian feminist theory by Julia Kristeva. I examine how the narrative voice creates a (sympathetic) narcissistic tone; and how the character development of Frank Cowperwood signifies narcissistic behaviours. Throughout, I link this narcissism with concerns of the #MeToo narratives and in particular the feminist reframing of The Narcissist from Hero to Villain.

## Domesticity and the Invisible Woman: A Feminist Approach

NATALIE ILSLEY

In performing a close reading of Dreiser's *The Financier*, pages 114-15, I document how Aileen Butler (Frank Cowperwood's mistress) is reduced to the aesthetics of the domestic. Without them, she would not exist. Using Sara



PENGUIN CLASSICS

THEODORE DREISER

*The Financier*

Introduction by LARZER ZIFF

Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), I trace the power structures in the domestic. Linking it to the context of the #MeToo movement, I look at the possibilities of the domestic setting as a site of resistance and regression; and I critically engage with the language of the domestic to articulate feminist practice, such as Ahmed's use of metaphors of "home" – of bricks, of houses, and of dwellings. Ultimately, I argue that the dynamic between power and sex throughout the novel renders Aileen invisible, just as the victims of the #MeToo movement often feel invisible before writing their own lives.

## Modern Entrepreneurship and Male Predation in Dreiser's *The Financier*

JASON WANG

Reading Dreiser's *Trilogy of Desire*, including *The Financier* (1912), is essential in navigating power, politics, morality, ethics, and personhood in the modern business world. *The Financier* depicts the emerging industrial modernity of entrepreneurship by validating aggression and competition. The impactful childhood story of the lobster devouring the squid is an exemplar of Social Darwinism that serves as the guiding principle in Cowperwood's personal life and business career; it offers an antithesis to the conventional Victorian literary narratives of financial success underpinned by morality, ethics, and virtue. My presentation focusses on the intersection of modern economic power and male predation which I argue creates an American trajectory from Cowperwood to Donald Trump and Harvey Weinstein.

1 February 2022

## Narrative in Ronan Farrow's *Catch and Kill*

Allison Hannaford, Thea Gribilas,  
Abigail Moulard, Connor MacArthur

### Institutional Hurdles in Reporting Crime

ALLISON HANNAFORD

Opening with a 2-minute trailer for “Catch and Kill: The Podcast Tapes by HBO,” which introduces viewer to the witnesses themselves, I will discuss Ronan Farrow and Rich McHugh's experience when reporting the sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein. I argue that Farrow's representation of the institutional obstacles at his workplace, the media giant National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), compares with the Canadian Armed Forces who have a long history of making reporting on sex crimes difficult. In persevering against these obstacles, Ronan Farrow weaves a deeply affective story, his *New Yorker* article making women come forth with their narratives.

### The Law as a Red Herring

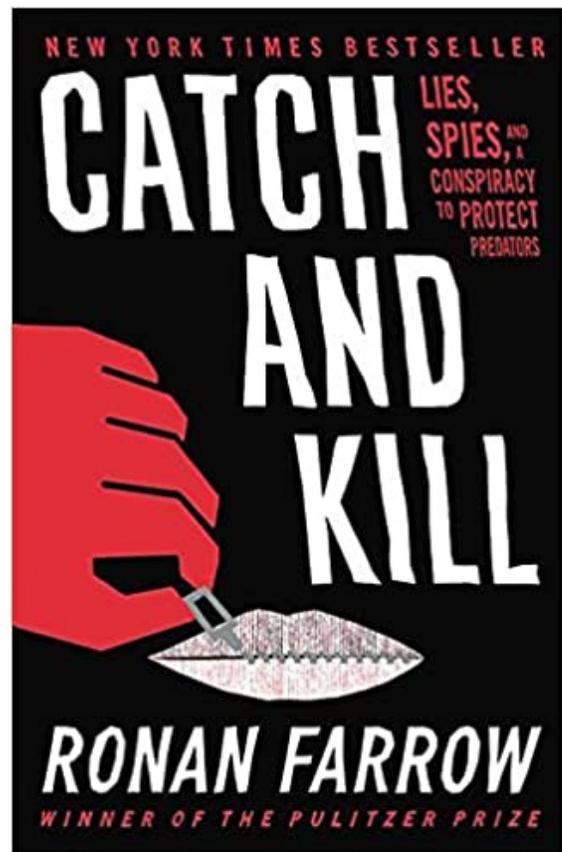
THEA GRIBILAS

The role of the law is to protect individual rights, including the rights of those who stand accused of crimes. This important legal principle underpins our civil society. By making the law a central part of his narrative, Farrow's suspenseful *Catch and Kill* doubles as a legal thriller. As Ronan Farrow's non-fiction book illustrates, in the hands of the very powerful, the twisting of the law can help shield a perpetrator's crimes over decades, as seen in Weinstein's pernicious non-disclosure contracts with which he kept his many victims quiet and isolated and his use of the law to intimidate NBC's lawyers, successfully threatening legal action when they are about to expose him.

### The Beginnings of the #MeToo movement in *Catch and Kill*

ABIGAIL MOULAND

In *Catch and Kill*, Farrow not only tells the story of the Weinstein case but also the story of how the modern #MeToo movement began. I will analyze *Catch and Kill*



by taking a feminist, survivor-based approach, exploring the powerful impact of author Ronan Farrow's inclusion of survivor stories. More than illustrating his role as a traditional reporter, I argue, Farrow's narration gains strength because he believed survivors. By engaging the women's stories from an empathic position, he was able to win their trust, leading to more predators being exposed and women being empowered around the world. Between the captivating stories of espionage and betrayal, the beginnings of the #MeToo movement can be found in this very narrative.

### Espionage, Security, and the Power of Money

CONNOR MACARTHUR

Farrow's *Catch and Kill* carries the evocative subtitle *Lies, Spies and Conspiracy to Protect Predators*. In this non-fiction narrative, with its focus on undercover espionage and surveillance, Farrow used the Harvey Weinstein case to show how money and power can give an individual consequential access to the seedy underworld of people for hire including private investigators, lawyers, security personnel, and spies posing as tabloid journalists. Consequently, besides being a legal thriller and an account of the beginning of the #MeToo movement, Farrow's non-fiction book is also a spy narrative, filled with shady characters, undercover operations, villains, and exotic locales.

## Resisting a Shaming Society: Chanel Miller's *Know My Name*

Rose Abdullahi, Mengxiao Chen,  
Jessica Di Nardo, Mandy Dang,  
Zachary Mahfouz

### Finding a Voice through Storytelling

ROSE ABDULLAHI

In *Know My Name: A Memoir*, Chanel Miller links her name to the rape victim previously hidden behind the pseudonym “Emily Doe” in the People v. Turner case. By bearing witness, she creates a powerful #MeToo narrative which allows readers to acquire a new perspective on a highly publicized sex crime that occurred on January 17th, 2015, at a fraternity party of Stanford University students. Refusing to be voiceless, Miller finds resilience in telling her story and shaping it as a powerful #MeToo narrative, raising awareness about the brutal nature of rape culture.

### Performing the Gendered Body

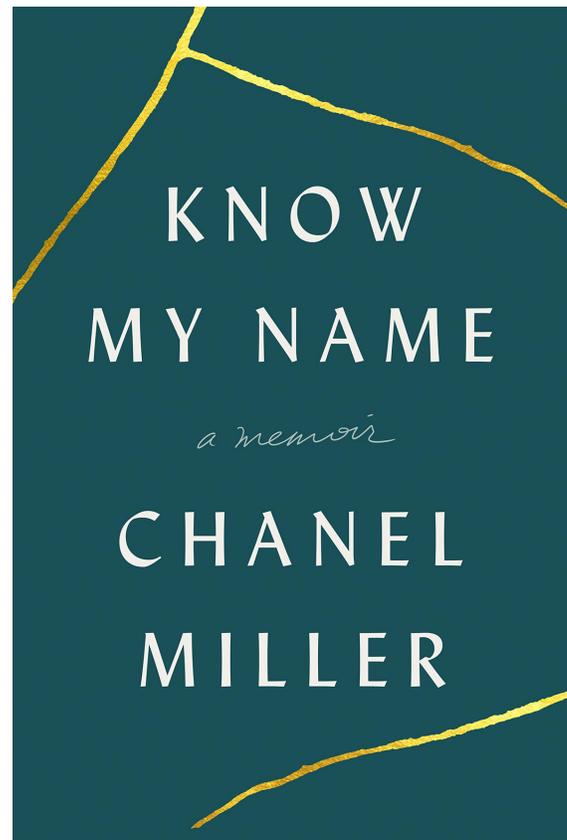
MENGXIAO CHEN

Chanel Miller's memoir illustrates Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity in *Gender Trouble*, according to which the gendered body is repeatedly performed until it becomes the thing that fits into dominant social categories. Miller's memoir tracks key moments revealing her struggle in textually performing her body. I will argue that Miller's representation—or textual performance—of her body and identity are complicated through her struggle of coming to terms with being a victim of rape.

### The Legal Response to Sexual Assault

JESSICA DI NARDO

In her book *Putting Trials on Trial: Sexual Assault and The Failure of the Legal Profession* (2021), Elaine Craig rejects the prevailing ideology among legal professionals that Canadian sexual assault trials are structured in favour of the victim as opposed to the perpetrator (27-28). Despite the jurisdictional differences between Canada and the US, I note parallels between Craig's approach and Chanel Miller's account of the rape trial against the accused Stanford University student and athlete Brock Turner. I argue that Miller exposes a pervasive truth about the legal system and how it handles sexual assault.



### Accountability and the Perpetrator

MANDY DANG

Miller's *Know My Name* demonstrates the need for accountability from not only the perpetrator, but also from the enablers that are associated with the perpetrator. In this memoir, the perpetrator is enabled by his family, peers, as well as by Stanford University. Through examining various enablers and the idea of a “college party culture,” I argue that the idea of accountability goes beyond the individual; those that enable the perpetrator should also be held to a higher standard, as they also play a role in silencing victims from speaking out and telling their truth.

### Forgiveness and Its Impact on #MeToo

ZACHARY MAHFOUZ

In her memoir *Know My Name*, Chanel Miller bravely tells the story of her sexual assault, from the aftermath of the horrific event to the court case that followed. While Miller is attempting to heal from the traumatic experience, the concept of forgiveness is used against her by the probation officer to get Brock Turner a lenient sentencing. The idea that a victim's forgiveness leads to a more lenient sentencing is a problematic and dangerous one. Using Miller's definition of forgiveness, I argue that while forgiveness is a necessary tool for a victim to heal, it should not be used as an excuse for the offender.

# Rewriting the Narrative: Chanel Miller's *Know My Name*

Andrea Llorens, Ewurabena  
Wilberforce, Stephanie Davoli,  
Julia D'Andrea, Zoë Gavin

## The Second Assault: Media Portrayals of Victimhood

ANDREA LLORENS

According to feminist media scholars, “[h]istorically, the news media have engaged in high rates of victim blaming in their reporting of sexual assault” (Northcutt Bohmert et al. 873), a point illustrated in Miller’s memoir *Know my Name*, which critically addresses the systemic way in which media including print media shape the public’s perception of victimhood. I argue that Miller’s critical account reveals a grueling battle that is ultimately a deterrent for other victims to confront the perpetrator in court.

## The Role of Memory in *Know My Name*

EWURABENA WILBERFORCE

The first-person autobiographical narrator of *Know My Name* goes through a painful journey of self-discovery at the centre of which is the role of her fragmented memory. Since she was unconscious while she was being assaulted, she must rely on information from others—including the media—to reconstruct her memory of that fateful night. Using psychological understandings of memory deficit among sexual abuse survivors (e.g., Jacobs-Kayam and Lev-Wiesel), I examine this complex process through which Chanel reconstructs her memory and narrative of what happened.

## The Victim Impact Statement: From Courtroom to Internet

STEPHANIE DAVOLI

I focus on Chanel Miller’s decision to publish her Victim Impact Statement on *Buzzfeed*, after she had read this statement in court during the sentencing of her perpetrator, Brock Turner. The contrast of the rhetorical impact of this statement is stunning: whereas Miller’s words had little effect in the courtroom, they developed enormous power once she released them outside of the courtroom, fueling the #MeToo movement. By comparing these profoundly different effects, I will document the discursive power of #MeToo on the internet reflecting on what media scholar Paromita Pain calls “an unrecognized feature of women’s activism online” (Pain 3139).



## The Survivor’s Memoir and Its Impact on Mental Well-Being

JULIA D’ANDREA

“Writing is the way I process the world” (315), Miller writes in her memoir *Know My Name*, focusing on the process of surviving a sexual assault as well as the after-effects of it. She uses the memoir genre to explore the mental health issues following her victimization. By using life-writing studies and medical humanities scholarship (e.g. Longhurst 2019), I show Miller’s deft use of narrative strategies in successfully navigating specific mental issues (e.g., confusion, depression) in the ordeal’s aftermath.

## Forgiveness and Its Impact on #MeToo

ZOË GAVIN

Chanel Miller’s *Know My Name* is the story of sexual assault, the aftermath of assault, and of trauma. But it is also an exploration of healing, of finding oneself after feeling as if the self has been stolen. “I was going to succeed,” she writes when starting her comedy act, explaining: “for the first time in nine months, anxiety did not cause me to shrivel up and shut down” (132). By focusing on creativity, including Miller’s comedy performance and art-making, I will explore Miller’s healing process through art, focusing on how art and writing are connective tissues of healing, how creativity assists in the reclamation of Miller’s self.

1 March 2022

## The Hermeneutics of Power in Kate Elizabeth Russell's *My Dark Vanessa*

Isabelle Anastacio,  
Maxwell Hedington, Erica Armata,  
Lucas Topolewski, Julia Alvarez

### The Lolita Lens

ISABELLE ANASTACIO

Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita* is considered a controversial masterpiece of American literature. It is the tale of a predatory sexual relationship between a 12-year-old girl named Dolores Haze and her 36-year-old stepfather, Humbert Humbert, who calls her a "nymphette" and "Lolita." By exploring *Lolita* as a reference point in key scenes of the novel, I argue that the novel becomes a key tool in English teacher Jacob Strane's predatory seduction of 14-year-old Vanessa Wye. Thus, Russell's *My Dark Vanessa* draws critical attention to the hermeneutics of power.

### Sexism and the Literary Double Standard

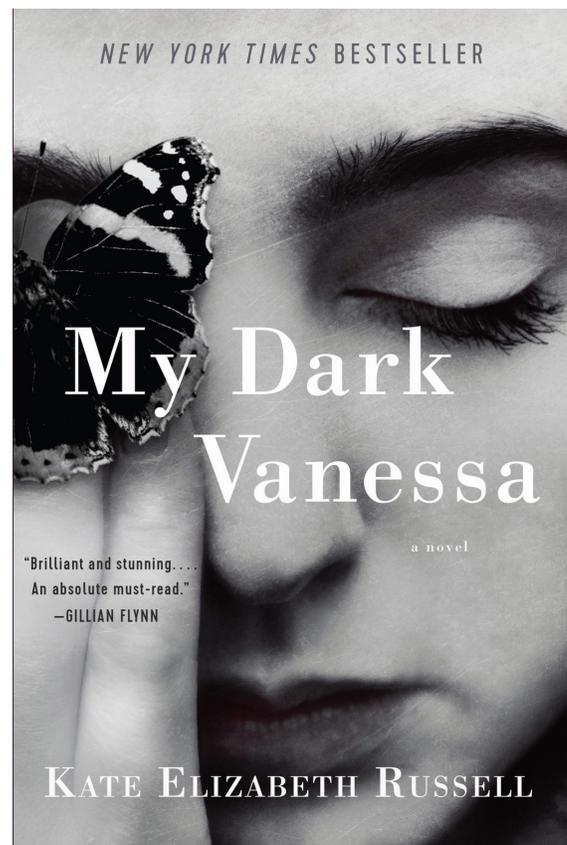
MAXWELL HEDINGTON

Kate Elizabeth Russell's *My Dark Vanessa* represents the struggle for reclamation of a woman's story and identity. As Marcia Lieberman explains in her essay "Sexism and the Double Standard in Literature," women in western literature tend to fall into the stereotypical mold of gender roles (such as the virgin/whore dichotomy) that has cemented a millennium of oppression. By depicting her protagonist's painful struggle to tell her story, author Kate Elizabeth Russell dramatizes these difficulties in wrestling with the literary tropes that keep girls and women confined in oppression.

### My Dark Vanessa as Autofiction

ERICA ARMATA

Russell's *My Dark Vanessa* was published as a novel, a work of fiction. It was not until the novel was called out in the media for its overt parallels to Wendy Ortiz's *Excavation* (2014), a personal memoir of sexual abuse, that Russell came forward and disclosed that *My Dark Vanessa* was based on her own experience. By using the lens of autofiction—a term coined by author Serge Doubrovsky in his 1977 novel *Fils*—I explore the way in which Russell's semi-autobiographical narrative and the deliberate play with autobiographical convention negotiates the power imbalance of sexual abuse stories.



### The Problematic of the Narrative of Consent

LUCAS TOPOLEWSKI

In her book *Rape and Resistance: Understanding the Complexities of Sexual Violation* (2018), as well as her essays, feminist philosopher Linda Martin Alcoff asks: "Are you allowed to change your mind on consent over time?" With the goal of not answering but rather exploring this question, I propose to analyze Russell's techniques and how consent can be challenging to define and how time can play a factor in defining it. Ultimately, I show how Russell was inspired by Alcoff's work as she herself affirms in an interview.

### Social Media and Power Imbalance

JULIA ALVAREZ

Vanessa Wye's story of abuse is paralleled by that Taylor Birch, who as a 14-year-old was sexually abused by the same English teacher Jacob Strane. Unlike Vanessa, Taylor fights to tell her truth and story online. Yet just like Vanessa, who is caught in literary tropes that silence her, as my colloquium colleagues have shown, Birch is threatened on social media, her story maligned by competing powerful narratives. Ultimately, as we argue collectively, powerful narratives help maintain silence regarding sexual abuse—even as survivors speak out.

# Institutional Betrayals in Kate Elizabeth Russell's *My Dark Vanessa*

Jacqueline Petsinis, Forrest Dawley,  
Anxhela Rusmali, Shahzim Naqqash

## The Boarding School Syndrome

JACQUELINE PETSINIS

In 2013, British scholar and psychologist Joy Schaverien coined the term “Boarding School Syndrome” to describe the trauma and sexual abuse resulting from the practice of sending kids to boarding schools for their education. This syndrome is a key part of Russell’s institutional critique in *My Dark Vanessa*, after the title character convinces her mother to be allowed to attend a prestigious boarding school and college prep school, Browick, located in the fictional town of Norumbega, in western Maine (12). Once there, Vanessa becomes increasingly isolated from her family, and secretive after becoming entangled in the school’s darker and secretive structures of corruption.

## Institutional Normalizing of Abuse

FORREST DAWLEY

Louis Althusser argued that “every social formation arises from a dominant mode of production,” meaning that social relationships result from dominating material structures. Secondary characters—Vanessa’s ex-friend Jenny Murphy at Browick, whose wealthy mother serves on the Board of the institution; and later Vanessa’s college professor and mentor Henry Plough at the community college she attends after graduating high school—continue to shape the primary institutional abuse she was exposed to at Browick (and discussed by my colleagues). Both institutions present systems that exploit students; they harbor governance structures that normalize the cultivation of abusive relationships with a vulnerable student. In each case, these minor figures hold material/economic or cultural/intellectual capital that are protected within the institution.

## Structural Trauma in the Schooling System

ANXHELA RUSMALI

In their study “Child Abuse and Neglect in Institutional Settings,” Brigitte Lueger-Schuster and her colleagues document that child maltreatment in foster care settings and institutional abuse “is known to have negative effects on adult survivor’s mental health.” This point is illustrated in



Kate Elizabeth Russell’s *My Dark Vanessa*, with the narrator’s voice oscillating between past and present, giving insight into the effects of structural neglect and trauma on Vanessa during a period of adolescent development and later, adulthood. The shaping of Vanessa’s victimhood and her reluctance to recognize her own victimhood are heightened by the school’s mishandling of Strane’s grooming. Through examining a study of child abuse in institutional settings that engages with cumulative lifetime traumatization, I will argue that Vanessa’s refusal to engage with her own experience is caused by institutional neglect during her formative years.

## Institutional Betrayals

SHAHZIM NAQQASH

In their 2014 article “Institutional Betrayal,” Carly P. Smith and Jennifer J. Freyd documented that when educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities tolerate and cover up transgressions and crimes such as abusive sexual behavior, instead of openly confronting it, this kind of “institutional betrayal” has a deeply negative impact on the survivor’s recovery. I will document the pernicious effects of institutional betrayal by comparing the responses of Browick, a prestigious school in Maine, with the response of Stanford University, an ivy-league university in Russell and Miller’s respective works. Applying Smith and Freyd’s paradigm of institutional betrayal, they “[act] in ways that visit harm upon those dependent on them for safety and well-being.”

# The Language of the Body/Mind in *My Dark Vanessa*

Arshi Hossain, Samantha Hung,  
Charles Simard, Anna Freeman,  
Arianna Guaragna, Natsumi Iwashita

## The Pajama as Fetish

ARSHI HOSSAIN

According to American fashion scholar Valerie Steele in her seminal book *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, and Power* (1996), fetishism denotes an erotic interest in specific objects such as clothing. After introducing Steele's theory, I will show how these dynamics are exemplified in *My Dark Vanessa*, by focusing on scenes involving abuser Jacob Strane's obsession with a pair of childlike pajamas he asks Vanessa to wear. Ultimately, I perform a fashion studies and psychological analysis revealing the pajama as a central fetish object and tool in sex abuse.

## Cognitive Dissonance

SAMANTHA HUNG

In his 1957 study *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957), psychologist Leon Festinger defined cognitive dissonance as a state of mental discomfort resulting from conflicting attitudes or convictions. In the novel, Vanessa Wye experiences cognitive dissonance about her relationship with Jacob Strane, whom she sees as both charismatic and admirable and old and duplicitous. The novel constantly alerts readers that to reduce the tension about these conflicting cognitions, Vanessa selectively interprets information, so it fits in with her distorted beliefs about Strane.

## Disrupted Social Lives

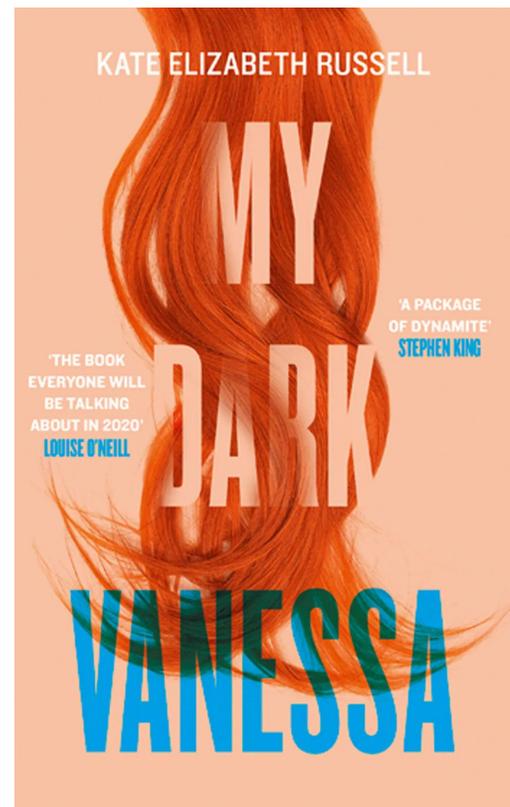
CHARLES SIMARD

Vanessa's dissociation from her trauma has created a social barrier which negatively impacts her ability to form meaningful relationships with others. My contribution focusses on Vanessa's disrupted relationship with her parents (especially her mother) and her friends (especially Jesse and Ira) but also on the novel's emphasis on small moments of connection.

## Love-bombing

ANNA FREEMAN

In their 2016 article "Love-Bombing: A Narcissistic Approach to Relationship Formation," psychologist Claire Strutzenberg



and her colleagues define "love-bombing" as a narcissistic person showering a partner with affection causing them to develop emotional, physical, or financial dependence on them. By focusing on the role of beauty and physicality and by considering Vanessa and Little Cleopatra, a secondary yet key figure, I will analyze the dynamics of "love-bombing" and its critical representation in the novel.

## Gaslighting

ARIANNA GUARAGNA

In her article "11 Red Flags of Gaslighting in a Relationship," psychologist Stephanie Sarkis defines gaslighting as a manipulation tactic that undermines a person's sense of reality making them vulnerable to control. Applying Sarkis' theory, I will document that Jacob Strane uses classic gaslighting tactics to keep Vanessa in a state of volatility and in denial of her abuse. The line between reality as perceived by readers and the reality constructed by abuser is thin and fragile.

## Writing Sexual Trauma

NATSUMI IWASHITA

In his article "Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised understanding of Literary Trauma Theory," Joshua Pederson highlights the elements of amnesia, or the inability to speak about trauma. In both Russell's novel *My Dark Vanessa* and Miller's memoir *Know My Name* readers can see such traumatic amnesia at work. Using trauma theory, I discuss both works' literary strategies for depicting sexual trauma by highlighting the how pain is managed through amnesic haze.

## Identity, Performance, and Power in Susan Choi's *Trust Exercise*

Karen Li, Nadia Tonkovic,  
Tiffany Yeung, Jessie Szeto,  
Erica Weekes, Kinda Kakouni

### Foucault's Panopticon

KAREN LI

French philosopher Michel Foucault discusses the social application of the idea of the Panopticon, a guarded prison where the objective is to foster rituals of self-policing through internalized surveillance (504-507). By focussing on the chair as an acting technique of mirroring, I argue that Mr. Kingsley's acting class models the Panopticon, instilling internalized surveillance techniques, contrasting with Ms. Rozot's acting class allowing for individuality to manifest.

### Theatre Pedagogy and Performing Trust

NADIA TONKOVIC

Helen Nicholson's article "The Politics of Trust: Drama Education and the Ethic of Care" explores the concept of trust in drama education, arguing that "trust is dependent on context and is continually negotiated and re-negotiated in action, as a performative act" (81). By using Nicholson's understanding of trust and its place within the drama classroom, I will explore how in Susan Choi's *Trust Exercise*, the pedagogical approach of Mr. Kingsley includes exploiting the trust of the students, thereby creating an untrustworthy and unsafe environment.

### Performing an American Bildungsroman

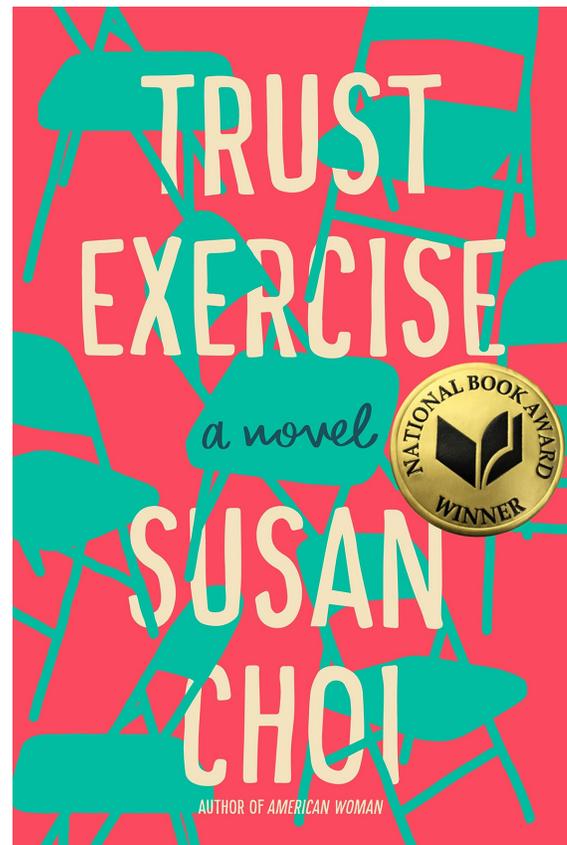
TIFFANY YEUNG

In her essay "The American Bildungsroman," included in her 2019 volume *A History of the Bildungsroman*, Sarah Graham explains that while the American Dream of success is enshrined in American culture, the modern American Bildungsroman characters express dissatisfaction with traditional American success (117). This emulating of the American values and simultaneous dissatisfaction is illustrated by the protagonist Sarah, whose punk outfit to some extent exemplifies her performative rebellion against traditional American success, even as she performs American expectations and striving toward success.

### American Teens and the Car

JESSIE SZETO

In his 2018 book *Machines of Youth: America's Car Obsession*, cultural historian Gary S. Cross examines the



obsession with cars among American teens seducing them with promises of privacy, mobility, and independence. Choi's *Trust Exercise* opens with the image of the car and the driver's licence as signifiers for American adolescents achieving independence and reaching adulthood. By focussing on the representation of the car in key scenes I explore the possibilities and limits of performing of adulthood and independence through the car.

### Grey Sex and Consent

ERICA WEEKES

In her article "The Politics of Turning Rape into Non-consensual Sex," Breanna Fahs dives into the grey areas of sex, a problematic illustrated throughout *Trust Exercise*, with its focus on sexual situations which ultimately work to convey disjointed adolescent understandings of consent during the 1980s pre-#MeToo era. By referencing Fahs's discussions of rape and non-consensual sex, I will identify key scenes in which this problematic is powerfully revealed.

### Somatophobia and Volatile Bodies

KINDA KAKOUNI

In her influential 1994 book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz discusses somatophobia, or the fear of and even disgust with the body, arguing that traditional models of knowledge including science and philosophy have historically devalued the body, denigrating and oppressing the corporeality notably of the female body. As I will illustrate with focus on key passages, Choi's *Trust Exercise* explores somatophobia and the simultaneous objectifying fetishization of the female body.

# Narrating Trauma in Susan Choi's *Trust Exercise*

Erika Spitzig, Joshua Reynolds, Jade Maxam, Anton Lizunov, Marie Phillips

## Intersubjectivity and Unreliability

ERIKA SPITZIG

In her 1997 book *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*, psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin defines subjectivity as the interplay between different subjective worlds, detailing the potential conflict that can occur between them. Using Benjamin's insight on relational theories, I argue that Karen's anger towards Sarah exemplifies her struggle to accept intersubjectivity in relation to her memories of trauma and highlights her unreliability as a narrator despite her own assertion about having a "flawless memory" (Choi 181).

## Touch in *Trust Exercise*

JOSHUA REYNOLDS

In their 2020 article "Hands On/Hands Off: Pedagogical Touch in the #MeToo Era," arts educators Holly Thuma and Kathryn Miranda discuss the ways in which touch can be helpful in teaching, but also suggest the limits of touch within the context of the #MeToo Movement and the need to create a working environment in which boundaries are respected (213). Using Thuma and Miranda's concept of the pedagogical touch, I examine the role of touch in the pedagogical environment created by Mr. Kingsley and the narrative's emphasis of how touch—good and bad—changes relationships between teacher and student but also between students.

## Abuse and the Affective Turn

JADE MAXAM

In her 2007 book *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, sociologist Patricia T. Clough argues that "the affective turn is necessary to theorizing the social" (2), often leading through trauma studies and involving a rethinking of the ontology of bodily matter" (5). Using Clough's affect theory, I explore Karen's conflicted emotions about her abuser Martin, showing the evolution of her emotion over time as revealed especially in the latter part of the novel.



## Narrating Trauma

ANTON LIZUNOV

In her 2003 article "Conceptualizing the Harm Done by Rape: Applications of Trauma Theory to Experiences of Sexual Assault," psychologist Sharon M. Wasco highlights the complexity of trauma generated by sexual violence, pointing to the need "to expand notions of survivors' responses" (309). These complex responses are depicted in *Trust Exercise*, where characters "change" or "substitute" the memories of abuse; for example, transforming abusive heterosexual Mr. Kingsley into a gay teacher in the story in Part 1, when Karen's narrative in the latter parts of the novel hints that there was a sexual intimacy to their relationship. Through its multiple narratives and perspectives Choi's book reveals avoidance strategies.

## The Ending

MARIE PHILLIPS

In her 2007 book *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, literary scholar Barbara Herrnstein Smith distinguishes between merely stopping a work and concluding, arguing that a "sense of stable conclusiveness, finality, or 'clinch' which we experience at [the end of a structure] is what is referred to here as closure" (1-2). These insights can be applied to Choi's *Trust Exercise*, where the ending draws attention to itself: on one hand, toying with conventional closure via repetition of earlier motifs (disclosing for example Mr Kingsley's real name and allowing Claire to escape from him where others were unable to); and on the other hand, powerfully and purposefully frustrating this sense of "closure," denying the reader the conventional sense of cessation.

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Sex, Power, and #MeToo*

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Susan Choi, Yale University

Deborah J. Cohan, University of South Carolina Beaufort

Basuli Deb, Columbia University

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