

## #MeToo

With the advent of the #MeToo movement, I have been reflecting on my good fortune to have encountered only some of the good men who populate our profession. I have had male mentors my entire career, wonderful men who have supported me academically and professionally and who I do not believe would ever sexualize, demean, or harass their students. This is less a function of my people skills or my professionalism than of sheer luck. Too many of us live with the deeply ingrained sexist belief that if we present ourselves a certain way, speak a certain way, behave a certain way, we will insulate ourselves from sexual advances in the workplace. Too many of us, even those of us who fight victim-blaming attitudes and rape culture in our scholarship and our classrooms, are apt to default to self-blame when we find ourselves in uncomfortable or demeaning situations: if only I had not said—worn—laughed at—been alone with—etc. But, of course, none of us is ever truly safe, not in our private lives, where the majority of assaults are committed by people we know and trust, and not in the academy, where we believe that a general awareness of and interest in gender theory should make people more informed, more understanding, more “woke,” as my students would say.

When the Harvey Weinstein story first broke in the media, it felt, at least to me, like an inevitability, a confirmation of something I had already known. I am an academic living in Tulsa, Oklahoma; I have no contacts in Hollywood beyond one semester in 1999 when a college friend interned with a production company and sometimes brought back juicy tidbits of celebrity gossip. But even I had heard stories about Weinstein, stories that I, a feminist academic who literally wrote a book about rape, mentally dismissed as the casting couch, the price of doing business in Hollywood. I shake my head in retrospect; how could I have ever thought that sexual harassment was a normal part of the quest for fame? The greatest success of the #MeToo movement has been, in my opinion, the defamiliarization of such stories, the act of forcing us to confront and name as Not Okay experiences that we previously shrugged off as an inevitable part of being a woman. I am fortunate never to have encountered a Harvey Weinstein of my own, but I have been subject to lesser violations (here I was about to write that I have never been “seriously” assaulted, but what a problematic thing to say, how indicative of our cultural sickness that it is a relief to have been violated only a little bit): by the DMV employee who administered my driving test with his hand on my thigh when I was sixteen, the man who slapped my backside on the streets of Paris when I was seventeen,

the man who grabbed my crotch in a club when I was twenty-two, the man who gripped my arm in an elevator, laughed, and called me a bitch when I was a thirty-five-year-old tenured academic. I used to shrug off such experiences—“well, it could have been worse” or “at least it will make a good story later” or “I should have known better than to get on the elevator with him”—this from a woman who routinely teaches women’s and gender studies and knows more than most about cultural conceptions of rape. But #MeToo has burned away those dismissals, leaving behind, for me as for so many of us, a deep anger at the culture in which we live.

More recently, the #MeToo movement has hit home, transcending Hollywood and forcing us to look to our own academic backyard. In November 2017, Seo-Young Chu, now an Associate Professor at Queens College, CUNY, published a powerful, brave essay, “A Refuge for Jae-In Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major,” in which she detailed coercion, harassment, and rape at the hands of her advisor, the late Jay Fliegelman:

The story begins with my suicide attempt at age 21 and ends with Stanford’s own punishment of the professor in 2001: two years of suspension without pay. I describe the long horrible months of sexual harassment. I describe the rape—or the parts of it that I can bear to mention out loud.<sup>1</sup>

Harvey Weinstein is a distant figure, removed from my daily life, but Fliegelman is a part of my profession, even of my eighteenth-century sub-field. I never met the man although I knew of him through the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, where since 2009, his name had accompanied the Graduate Student Caucus’s Graduate Student Mentorship Award. Allegations have since emerged against both Franco Moretti, the well-known scholar of digital humanities, and Frances Ferguson, an eighteenth-century scholar whose work on sexual violence deeply influenced my own and who has been accused of protecting Moretti when she served as a Title IX officer at the University of California, Berkeley, in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> As in the case of Weinstein, these revelations were both shocking and somehow not. We tell ourselves that things have gotten better, that we are grateful to the older generation of female academics who years ago won these battles for us, but like most women, I have been a part of the whisper network at conferences that circulates stories of men to avoid. It should not be a surprise, then, that these things happen and that they happen disproportionately to female graduate students (and especially female graduate students of color), often the most vulnerable members of our institutions.

The problem in academia—as in Hollywood, food service, retail, the hotel industry, the military, and the corporate world, literally every sector in which women work—is widespread.<sup>3</sup> In December 2017, Karen Kelsky of *The Professor is In* began a crowdsourced document in which people could anonymously report stories of harassment and assault in academia. She

wrote on her blog, “My goal is for the academy as a whole to begin to grasp the true scope and scale of this problem in academic settings.”<sup>4</sup> At the time of this writing, there are over twenty-four hundred entries on Kelsky’s list, detailing everything from microaggressions to assault, the majority perpetrated by male academics upon women at all levels of their scholarly careers. Our awareness of feminist theory clearly does not insulate or exempt us from a broader culture that normalizes harassment and assault.

Nor does it insulate us from a culture that devalues and stifles women’s voices. The story of sexual harassment and assault is, from its earliest conception, also the story of silencing. Three foundational myths of rape have shaped our cultural understandings of sexual violence in the West: the story of Verginia, whose father killed her rather than allow her to be raped; the story of Lucrece, who committed suicide to prove she did not consent and whose lifeless body was subsequently transformed into a symbol of monarchical overreach; and the story of Philomel, whose brother-in-law cut out her tongue to prevent her from naming him her rapist. In each of these cases, the woman’s voice is effaced, stolen. Verginia does not consent to her death. Her father’s actions reflect his culture’s belief that the act of rape is first and foremost an encroachment on male property rights; Verginia’s defilement would be her father’s shame. Lucrece, meanwhile, can only protect her reputation and punish her rapist through the act of suicide. She effects permanent political change, but at the expense of her own life, transforming herself into a political symbol by silencing herself permanently. And while Philomel does not die, she too loses her voice, first through mutilation and later when she is transformed into a nightingale. She achieves her revenge but will remain forever speechless.<sup>5</sup>

The story of western literature is also the story of rape victims silenced forever. From Shakespeare’s Lavinia to Richardson’s Clarissa to Hardy’s Tess Durbeyfield, the violated woman must be effaced from the text—lamented and pitied but ultimately suppressed. Periodically, dissenting voices appear: Aerope of John Crowne’s *Thyestes* (1681), who insists, “I have ever been your faithful Wife, / And ne’re deserv’d to lose that glorious Name,” despite a rape that rendered her supposedly unchaste; Marguerite of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), who survives gang rape at the hands of banditti but lives to protect her children; and Mary of Mary Hays’s *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), who, in an incredibly powerful passage, castigates a society that embraces her rapist while treating her as a villain: “surely, *I had a right to exist!*—For what crime was I driven from society?”<sup>6</sup> Yet of these women, only Marguerite survives, reembraced by a father who “considered her as a gift from Heaven.”<sup>7</sup> Aerope, like Lucrece, must embrace suicide to regain her husband’s esteem, while Mary is finally harassed to her death by men who will not allow a woman perceived as unchaste to find honest employment. In so much of literature, the only “safe” unchaste female body

is the deceased unchaste female body; only in the silence of the grave can the truth of rape be conclusively established.

Today, we no longer insist ideologically upon the deaths of sexually violated women, but we silence them nonetheless—through rape kits that go untested, assaults that go unreported, and nondisclosure agreements signed under duress.<sup>8</sup> We also silence them by the elevation of male voices over female, creating the widespread cultural belief that male voices are more trustworthy and more rational. In a discussion of gender bias in the *New York Times Review of Books*, where as recently as 2017, two-thirds of reviews were devoted to male-authored works, Judith Scholes writes, “We have an idea that men writing about factual information is going to be more valid or more legitimate than a woman’s take.”<sup>9</sup> It is here that I hope that *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* can make a difference. The backlash to #MeToo has begun in earnest, with accusations of witch hunts, overreactions, and the criminalization of male sexuality.<sup>10</sup> It is all the more important, then, that we promote women’s voices and that we take women seriously as narrators of their own experiences, work to which this journal is devoted.

It is also important that we take this opportunity for introspection about the state of the academy. I would therefore like to invite submissions of up to 1500 words for a special forum on “Academia in the Age of #MeToo,” which will be published as part of a future Academy section of the journal (see p. 235 of this issue for submission details). Pieces written for this forum may consider the ways in which the revelations of #MeToo have impacted the study of women’s literature or the experience of being a woman in the academy; disconnects between feminist theory and feminist practice within the academy; ways to make conferences safer; best practices for advising graduate students in the wake of recent revelations; and ways to confront rather than enable inappropriate behavior within our own departments. I hope this call will elicit submissions from male authors as well as female. Men are, of course, also victims of harassment and assault, and the good men of academia are powerful allies. Submissions might consider, then, how men can be better allies to women, especially women of color, in the academy. We cannot accept harassment as part of the cost of doing business while female. The moment of recognition has arrived, and it behooves us now to translate awareness into concrete action.

With this issue, I am extremely gratified to present our inaugural Academy piece, “Low-Spoon Teaching: Labor, Gender, and Self-Accommodation in Academia,” by Sara N. Beam and Holly Clay-Buck. Beam and Clay-Buck argue against a neoliberal ideology that demands

we work ever harder, pressing instead for an ethic of self-care that allows academics to be people as well as scholars and teachers. Drawing on the concept of Spoon Theory, a metaphor for the drain that chronic pain and disability place on an individual's energy resources, Beam and Clay-Buck insist that as academics, we must seek accommodations for ourselves with the same spirit of empathy that we routinely offer to our students. As the demands of caretaking and the insistence on working through pain tend to affect women disproportionately, an increased willingness to be kind to ourselves in our limitations will have, they argue, a profound impact on women across the academy. I am so pleased to be publishing this important piece.

With this issue, Amy Pezzelle is now executing the duties of Book Review Editor full-time, having taken over from Megan Gibson. I am deeply grateful for her skill at organization and cheerful presence around the office. I also want to express my thanks to Dayne Riley and Onyx Zhang, who remain in the roles of Publicity Manager and Subscriptions Manager, respectively. And of course, I am, as always, deeply indebted to our Managing Editor, Karen Dutoi, whose editorial skill and deft management make my job easy and all of our work possible. I am grateful, too, for her forbearance, when I run a full month late on deadlines!

This month, we say goodbye to three editorial board members whose terms have come to a conclusion: Madhu Dubey, Elizabeth Jackson, and Gabrielle McIntire. All three have been a delight to work with, and I thank them deeply for their service. In their place, I am happy to welcome the newest members of our board:

Madelyn Detloff is Professor and Acting Chair of English and Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in the Department of Global and Intercultural Studies at Miami University. She is the author of *The Persistence of Modernism: Loss and Mourning in the Twentieth Century* (2009) and *The Value of Virginia Woolf* (2016) and coeditor (with Brenda Helt) of *Queer Bloomsbury* (2016). A recipient of Miami University's Women Breaking Barriers Award and Faculty Diversity Award, she has just completed a five-year term on the executive committee of the Modern Language Association's Forum on Women's and Gender Studies in Language and Literature. She is former Vice President of the International Virginia Woolf Society and former Co-Chair of the H. D. International Society.

Ambreen Hai is Professor of English Language and Literature at Smith College, where she specializes in Anglophone postcolonial literature from South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean; nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature of the British empire; and contemporary literary theory.

She is the author of *Making Words Matter: The Agency of Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (2009) and has published articles on authors such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Jhumpa Lahiri, Thrity Umrigar, Zeenuth Futehally, Firoozeh Dumas, Mona Simpson, and Jean Rhys. She is currently at work on a book manuscript that examines how some contemporary postcolonial and South Asian transnational writers address gendered domestic servitude.

Koritha Mitchell is Associate Professor of English at Ohio State University, where she specializes in African American literature, racial violence in United States history and contemporary culture, and black drama and performance. She is the author of *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (2011), which won book awards from the American Theatre and Drama Society and the Society for the Study of American Women Writers. She is editor of the Broadview edition of Frances E. W. Harper's 1892 novel *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* and has published widely on authors such as Amiri Baraka and James Baldwin. She is active in public scholarship, contributing to venues such as the *Huffington Post*, *The Washington Post*, National Public Radio, and *Vox*. She is currently completing her second monograph, "From Slave Cabins to the White House: Homemade Citizenship in African American Culture."

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Seo-Young Chu, "A Refuge for Jae-In Doe: Fugues in the Key of English Major," *Entropy*, 3 November 2017, <https://entropymag.org/a-refuge-for-jae-in-doe-fugues-in-the-key-of-english-major>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Ruairi Arrieta-Kenna, "Recently Retired Professor Accused of Sexual Assault," *Stanford Politics*, 9 November 2017, <https://stanfordpolitics.org/2017/11/09/moretti-rape-accusation-with-updates>. Ferguson has disputed Kimberly Latta's account of events.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding sexual harassment in these fields, see, respectively, Dan Corey, "Since Weinstein, Here's a Growing List of Men Accused of Sexual Misconduct," *NBC News*, 10 January 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/sexual-misconduct/weinstein-here-s-growing-list-men-accused-sexual-misconduct-n816546>; Danielle Paquette, "Workers in Food Service, Retail at Higher Risk of Sexual Harassment, Research Says," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 November 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-sexual-harassment-industries-20171124-story.html>; Paquette, "The Industries with the Worst Sexual Harassment Problem," *The Washington Post*, 24 November 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/11/24/the-industries-with-the-worst-sexual-harassment-problem/?utm\\_term=.08e2a17263d2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/11/24/the-industries-with-the-worst-sexual-harassment-problem/?utm_term=.08e2a17263d2); Alexandra Topping, "Sexual Harassment Rampant in Hospitality Industry, Survey Finds," *The Guardian*, 24 January 2018, <https://>

www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/24/sexual-harassment-rampant-hospitality-industry-unite-survey-finds; Antonietta Rico, "Why Military Women are Missing from the #MeToo Moment," *Time*, 12 December 2017, <http://time.com/5060570/military-women-sexual-assault/>; and Jeffrey Tobias Halter, "Corporate America's Dirty Little Secret—Sexual Harassment," *Huffington Post*, 17 November 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/corporate-americas-dirty-little-secret-sexual-harassment\\_us\\_5a08be4fe4b0ee8ec36942c4](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/corporate-americas-dirty-little-secret-sexual-harassment_us_5a08be4fe4b0ee8ec36942c4).

<sup>4</sup> Karen Kelsky, "A Crowdsourced Survey of Sexual Harassment in the Academy," *The Professor Is In* (blog), 1 December 2017, <https://theprofessorisin.com/2017/12/01/a-crowdsourced-survey-of-sexual-harassment-in-the-academy>.

<sup>5</sup> I have written at length about myths of rape elsewhere; see Jennifer L. Airey, *The Politics of Rape: Sexual Atrocity, Propaganda Wars, and the Restoration Stage* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> John Crowne, *Thyestes: A Tragedy* (London: Bently and Magnes, 1681), 27; and Mary Hays, *The Victim of Prejudice*, ed. Eleanor Ty, 2nd ed. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1998), 141.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Christopher MacLachlan (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 111.

<sup>8</sup> See, respectively, Alanna Vaglanos, "Heartbreaking PSA Highlights the Massive Backlog of Untested Rape Kits," *Huffington Post*, 13 February 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/unttested-rape-kits-psa\\_us\\_5a835203e4b02b66c512ec56](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/unttested-rape-kits-psa_us_5a835203e4b02b66c512ec56); "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics," RAINN, <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>; and Daniel Hemel, "How Nondisclosure Agreements Protect Sexual Predators," *Vox*, 13 October 2017, <https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/10/9/16447118/confidentiality-agreement-weinstein-sexual-harassment-nda>.

<sup>9</sup> Jane C. Hu, "The Overwhelming Gender Bias in 'New York Times' Book Reviews," *Pacific Standard*, 28 August 2017, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/gender-bias-in-book-reviews>.

<sup>10</sup> See, respectively, Gwilym Mumford, "Michael Haneke: #MeToo Has Led to a Witch Hunt 'Coloured by a Hatred of Men,'" *The Guardian*, 12 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/feb/12/michael-haneke-metoo-witch-hunt-coloured-hatred-men>; Heather Wilhelm, "Where #MeToo Goes Off the Rails," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 October 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-me-too-sexual-assault-wilhelm-1023-story.html>; and Inez Feltscher Stepman, "#MeToo Has Descended into Criminalizing a Failure to Read Women's Minds," *The Federalist*, 17 January 2018, <http://thefederalist.com/2018/01/17/metoo-descended-criminalizing-failure-read-womens-minds>.

