

**COMP LIT 307 / PHIL 370**

Sumer 2023: July 17 — Aug 13 / MWF 2-4:30pm

# #MeToo Trials: Consent, Doubt and Punishment in Law, Literature ( & Cinema )

What does the law have to do, if anything, with justice and truth? Does its purpose lay in establishing true facts and punishing individuals accordingly (whatever that may mean), or in creating a more just society? And what about epistemic injustice —i.e. injustice committed against somebody precisely with regard to their capacity to say the truth?

In this seminar, we will situate these large questions by looking at a specific, if still precarious, canon: that of the literary occurrences of trials for sexual violence. As feminist legal scholar Aviva Orenstein argued, trials serve a pedagogical function: “part melodrama, part morality play, and, for the layperson, part inscrutable lawyer talk, recent rape trials have introduced serious questions into public discourse about the legal process, rape law, and ...how and when we know things to be true.” Now, in the aftermath of the #metoo and of its journalistic and literary reverberations, we come to raise some questions about the role that literature and cinema play in the mediation of the trial’s pedagogical function: do they teach us something about our collective relationship to consent and sexual violence, but also to accusations, testimonies, character evidence, reasonable doubt, prejudice and punishment?

By carefully reading theorists and philosophers alongside a selection of literary works and films, the class will explore four main theoretical knots: (1) the complicated relationship between law and justice, especially with regards to the question of intimate violations; (2) the problems of testimony, confession and prejudice; (3) the problem of epistemic partiality and loyalty towards our family and loved ones; (4) the interrelated problems of doubt and punishment, and truth and reconciliation.

Northwestern | Department of  
Philosophy

Northwestern | Program in  
Comparative Literary Studies  
WEINBERG COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

